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Congress of the United States House of Representatives

December 21, 2021

John R. Serian
County Manager
PennDOT District 10
Attn: I-80 North Fork Bridges Project
2550 Oakland Avenue
Indiana, PA 15701-3388

Dear Mr. Serian:

I write to express my strong opposition to the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation's (PennDOT) Major Bridge Public-Private Partnership (P3) Initiative, which would establish tolls along nine bridges across the Commonwealth. This proposal includes the North Fork Bridges in Brookville Borough and Pink Creek Township, Jefferson County, both located in Pennsylvania's 15th Congressional District.

As you are aware, the Public-Private Transportation Partnership Board approved the Major Bridge P3 Initiative on November 12, 2020. Counter to the legislative intent of the P3 model as authorized, there continues to be an unwavering march toward levying taxes upon the traveling public in the form of tolls, despite the unpopularity of the tolling proposal from the general public, stakeholders, and elected officials. The legality of such a move is also quite questionable.

A decade ago, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) rejected Pennsylvania's attempts to convert Interstate 80 to a tolled facility. Having fought and won these battles, I was disheartened to find out PennDOT, through the Public-Private Transportation Partnership Board, was heading in this direction yet again. To make the public aware of the proposal, I have hosted a field hearing, telephone townhalls, and conducted surveys to solicit feedback from the public. According to my most recent survey, which was sent to more than 16,000 constituents in Jefferson County, nearly 90 percent of those who responded opposed tolling along the North Fork Bridges. Furthermore, in November 2020, PennDOT sought initial input on alternative funding options for Pennsylvania to fix its dilapidated infrastructure. Nearly 6,000 individuals participated in this opportunity and 375 comments were received by PennDOT. The overarching sentiment remains; Pennsylvanians oppose tolling on interstates.

My concerns remain that PennDOT has reached the foregone conclusion that tolls are required, despite not having conducted studies on safety, traffic diversion, local impacts, anticipated revenue or duration of tolling contracts, environmental impacts, or a host of other necessary items to make such a major policy decision. Coupled with the fact that the General Assembly has now passed legislation disapproving of the tolling plan, PennDOT should jettison the tolling plan.

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I recently met with the FHWA to further voice my concerns over PennDOT's attempt to tolls bridges in Pennsylvania. It was revealed during the meeting that PennDOT has been in consultation with FHWA for more than a year, prior to even being authorized to explore tolling. I also learned PennDOT recently filed paperwork expressing its interest in receiving more than \$5 billion in federal financing for the projects, before all public comment periods have concluded.

According to a report published by the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, the Pennsylvania Turnpike has already been commissioned to install gantries to collect tolls for PennDOT along the nine candidate bridges. Given previous performance issues, it is my concern that the Turnpike does not have the capacity to collect these funds, especially given media reports that the agency failed to collect more than \$104 million in tolls during calendar year 2020.

While there is no doubt that Pennsylvania requires a reliable funding mechanism to maintain and replace existing infrastructure, the Commonwealth collected more than \$6.6 billion in revenue in November 2021, which is 3.4 percent higher than anticipated, leaving a \$1 billion budget surplus. Pennsylvania is expected to receive more than \$18 billion from the recent federal infrastructure package, including \$1.6 billion for bridge replacements. With these windfalls, PennDOT should exhaust all funding options prior to further exploring tolls.

I remain deeply concerned that these shortsighted proposals will leave lasting negative impacts on the residents who live near these bridges, endanger the local community with truck diversion, cause greater maintenance costs on local roads, and be mismanaged by the Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission, which has a notoriously spotty track record.

It is my sincere hope PennDOT reconsiders these haphazard proposals and provides commonsense alternatives to address Pennsylvania's aging infrastructure. I stand ready to work with all willing partners to achieve these goals.

Sincerely,



Glenn "GT" Thompson
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

cc: Yassmin Gramian, Secretary, Pennsylvania Department of Transportation
Aaron Emhoff, Jefferson County Manager, PennDOT District 10