



Testimony on House Bill 7202 and Governor's Bill 7280

Submitted by Carol Platt Liebau, President

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Good afternoon. I am Carol Platt Liebau, President of Yankee Institute, and this is Scott Shepard, Yankee's Policy Director. We are here to testify in Opposition to **House Bill 7202** and **Governor's Bill 7280**, because we object in the strongest terms to imposing tolls upon the people of Connecticut, for several reasons.

First, the tolls being contemplated aren't user fees, which in the right circumstances can make economic sense. Instead, these bills aim to toll our state's major highways simply to fund the transportation budget of the state generally. Adopting tolls as a general transportation-revenue source is unprecedented. And it leads me to our second objection.

State government should already have plenty of resources from which to fund its transportation needs. Connecticut's people pay the sixth highest gas taxes in the nation. Our problem, in many cases, is that the money is not being spent responsibly. Transportation projects here cost more than in 46 other states. Our administrative costs here are the highest in the country. And money has not been spent responsibly in the past – for example, using a billion dollars to construct the Hartford/Springfield line to carry 3500 people per day, rather than to maintain Metro-North, which carries 150,000 commuters each day.

Third, tolls are profoundly regressive. They are, in essence, a tax on driving to work. This burdens most heavily the working poor who – in order to find affordable housing – must often live far from where they work.

Finally, the people of Connecticut have been told that tolls are needed to plug a gaping hole in the transportation budget. But if car sales taxes continue to be transferred into the special transportation fund, as they currently are, the transportation fund will remain essentially fully funded.

We are often told that tolls are essential to create, maintain and repair infrastructure in order to attract new business to our state. With all due respect, those serious about enhancing Connecticut's image as a business-friendly state would be well-advised to think seriously about reducing spending and controlling long-term obligations, rather than slapping another tax on Connecticut's commuters – in addition to the host of other tax increases now being considered by this body.

A final word: Perhaps the most objectionable part of the legislation we discuss today is the "deemed approved" provision of **House Bill 7280** – which would let the General Assembly approve tolls established by the toll commission without even having to vote on them. That is taxation without representation, and it has no place in the Constitution State. Those who believe in tolls should have the courage of their convictions and be willing to vote for them.

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