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## Gov. Sticks to 2012 Deadline for Viaduct Replacement

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*The Bellingham Herald* – January 4, 2008

OLYMPIA, Wash. – Gov. Christine Gregoire is not backing down on the 2012 deadline for replacing Seattle's quake-damaged Alaskan Way Viaduct, despite the fact that local government officials have yet to decide how best to replace the key transportation fixture. "That's the timeline. I'm not going to fudge on it, and if we don't have some alternative by then, boy are we going to have a mess on our hands because it's coming down," Gregoire reported to the Seattle Post-Intelligencer.

Seattle Deputy Mayor Tim Ceis criticized the governor, saying the inflexible deadline is not realistic while city, county and state officials are still negotiating a replacement. "This is not just an issue for the city of Seattle to ensure that the system functions when it comes down, this is an issue for the entire state of Washington, because this is the economic center for the state," Ceis said.

The state has agreed to finance \$2.8 billion for the replacement of the 55-year-old elevated viaduct, which continues to carry about 100,000 cars per day after the Nisqually earthquake damaged it seven years ago in. King County Executive Ron Sims is behind Gregoire's 2012 deadline, and has proposed a street-level solution with a boost to public transit, which the governor says she may be willing to consider. Gov. Gregoire's commitment to the 2012 deadline is under the assumption she is re-elected this fall.

## NJ Gov. Calls for 50% Toll Hike

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*The Star-Ledger, NJ* – January 8, 2008; *The Philadelphia Inquirer* – January 9, 2008

TRENTON – Drivers in New Jersey could pay a 50-percent higher highway tolls beginning in 2010 under Gov. Jon Corzine's restructuring plan to raise up to \$38 billion to fix the state's transportation infrastructure and decrease debt. In his State of the State speech Jan. 8, Gov. Corzine proposed to bail the state out by increasing tolls on the Garden State Parkway, the New

Jersey Turnpike and Atlantic City Expressway.

Corzine's proposed toll hike would not be enacted until after the governor runs for re-election in 2010. He acknowledged the toll hike would be controversial and a form of "tough love." The plan was criticized by new GOP leader Sen. Thomas H. Kean Jr., who called it "the largest tax increase on the citizens of this state that they have ever seen to pay for a massive borrowing scheme."

However, as the former chairman of the Goldman Sachs investment house, Corzine said in his speech that "significant toll hikes" were his only alternative, and, with his financial expertise, said the \$38 billion could only otherwise be raised by a 20 percent hike in income tax, or a 50-cent gas tax hike, or a 30 percent hike in the sales tax. "The number-one issue facing our state is fixing our financial foundation," the Democratic governor said. "The crisis has morphed into a full-fledged financial emergency and poses a direct threat to New Jersey's quality of life."

The governor's aides told reporters that tolls on the Atlantic City Expressway and New Jersey Turnpike are half the national average, and Garden State Parkway tolls are just one-fifth. Gov. Corzine also emphasized that his plan would keep the state from leasing or selling the 368-miles of roadway involved.



*The story in New Jersey is playing out in nearly every state in the country. The easy solutions are gone. Everything that is left is "tough love" as Governor Corzine refers to it. Increasing debt to avoid raising taxes has worked for almost a decade now but even that strategy is unavailable to many states. Hard decisions face us all. TW*

## Keeping Track of Offenders: Tough Questions With No Answers

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*Chicago Daily Herald, IL - Jan 7, 2008*

*Illinois* - The Illinois tollway authority is being accused of not keeping track of how many drivers don't pay tolls, and how much these toll cheats owe the state tollway. Motorist advocates and several suburban lawmakers say this data is key to running the agency's budget and Open Road Tolling program, especially while toll cheats are being aggressively pursued.

"That goes right to the core of what they do," said state Rep. Elaine Nekritz, a Northbrook Democrat. "These are pretty significant issues that need to be addressed." Experts say these issues and other flaws in the system, such as an inability to accurately read license plates, reduce the authority's credibility after its hasty expansion of I-PASS and as officials look at a possible major expansion of toll roads throughout the area.

Some drivers owe on thousands of violations but have not paid up. The top 50 tollway violators owe a combined \$2.2 million by cheating a total of 31,428 tolls.

Tollway spokesperson Joelle McGinnis agreed the data could be helpful in budgeting and identifying where the highest rates of abuse were occurring. But the lack of data has not hindered key tollway operations, such as I-PASS management or the passage of the 2008 budget.

## \$1.4B Capital Beltway HOT Lanes Ready to Roll

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*Transurban Media Release - December 20, 2007*

*Alexandria, Va.* – Congestion relief on the Capital Beltway around Washington, D.C. is a step

closer today following financial agreement between the Commonwealth of Virginia, international toll road group Transurban and Fluor Enterprises. Under the plan, Transurban and Fluor will finance, design, construct, and operate High Occupancy Toll (HOT) lanes on a 14-mile section of the Capital Beltway, the ring around Washington, D.C.

In addition to adding two lanes in each direction between the Springfield interchange and the Dulles Toll Road in Fairfax County, Virginia, the contractor will replace aging bridges and overpasses throughout the Beltway corridor and provide opportunities for carpooling and express bus service for the first time.

The Beltway HOT lanes could cut congestion times in half for commuters in metropolitan Washington, D.C., one of the most congested areas in the U.S. Transurban and Fluor will invest \$350 million of private equity making the Capital Beltway Project the largest private sector investment in a greenfield (new build) toll road Public Private Partnership in the U.S. to date.

## Mass. Turnpike Head Looks at Savings

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*Houston Chronicle* – January 3, 2008

*Massachusetts* - Eliminating roadside assistance, outside consultants and overnight tolls are possibilities being considered by the new chief of the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority in an attempt to cut costs in the wake of a toll hike that went into effect this week. Alan LeBovidge told the Associated Press that although toll collectors' salaries are the agency's biggest expense, there are other viable options to trim costs.

"People focus on big, but a lot of the efficiencies come from small, and a lot of smalls add up to big," said LeBovidge. "It's a continuous search." After serving as the state's revenue commissioner for five years, Gov. Deval Patrick asked LeBovidge to be the executive Director of the Turnpike in November, with one of his key tasks being to save the agency money.

Despite the toll hikes, the turnpike will be forced to spend portions of its \$91 million savings account to cover a predicted \$30 million annual shortfall for the next two years. LeBovidge says the turnpike spends over \$1 million searching for disabled vehicles, which may be unnecessary now that cell phone use has become so widespread. The authority is considering discontinuing the collection of tolls on some western sections of the turnpike, because the few tolls collected don't amount to the cost of the toll collectors wages.

LeBovidge is reviewing these and other ideas to present to the board. More information is needed, along with an overall estimate for the potential savings before making recommendations, he said.

## ICC Challenge Takes A New Turn

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*Reuters* – January 7, 2008

*RICHMOND, Va.* – Environmental Defense today filed an appeal of a federal judge's ruling in favor of government agencies that approved the proposed Intercounty Connector. The Audubon Naturalist Society has decided not to file an additional appeal of the issues it had raised in the case, choosing to support the claims based on the state's failure to prevent the serious air quality and human health threats raised in the appeal by Environmental Defense, and a separate appeal by Sierra Club based on the National Environmental Policy Act.

The appeal seeks review in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit of the November 8 ruling by Judge Alexander Williams, Jr. of the U.S. District Court, claiming the agencies violated

the Clean Air Act and other federal laws when they approved the ICC. The Washington, D.C. – Maryland-Virginia area already violates the EPA’s air pollution standard, as well as the federal standard for ground-level ozone, a major component of smog.

“The court’s ruling falls woefully short of the bar and fails to address the serious health threat of air pollution generated by traffic on the ICC and other roads,” said Michael Replogle, a civil engineer, transportation director for Environmental Defense, and a former consultant for the Federal Highway Administration. “The court’s ruling gave unwarranted deference to government agencies to ignore what the law requires.”

Environmental Defense maintains that ICC approvals violated federal law because the agencies based their assessment of compliance with air quality standards on measurements made well beyond the zone of impact where highway emissions would violate the national standards. The ICC is a proposed six-lane, 19 mile toll highway connecting I-95 and US-1 in Prince George’s County with I-270/I-370 at Shady Grove in Montgomery County.

## **Tolls Reach \$1 a Mile on San Diego’s 91**

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*Los Angeles Times – December 28, 2007*

*California* - Friday-afternoon drivers are now paying \$1 a mile to use the eastbound 91 Express Lanes in the San Diego area between 3 and 4 p.m. Those trying to escape the never-ending congestion on the Riverside Freeway can choose to pay the new \$10 toll, which is among the highest in the country and came just nine months after the increase to \$9.25.

The Orange County Transportation Authority, which operates the lanes, says the toll lanes are too popular, making travel slower for paying customers. OCTA officials hope that by using congestion pricing, some commuters will be encouraged to travel during cheaper periods. “The purpose of the congestion pricing is to ensure the lanes are providing a free-flow and consistent ride for our customers,” said Joel Zlotnik, OCTA spokesman.

Some Orange County commuters argue that the growing population in the Inland Empire is adding to the daily commute, canceling any positive effects from the higher fees. Tolls on the 91 freeway, one of the most congested in Southern California, are increased nearly biannually. In addition to the Friday increase, the toll between 3 and 4 p.m. on Wednesdays has been increased from \$4.95 to \$5.95, and from \$4.95 to \$5.70 on Thursdays, said Zlotnik.

Congestion pricing is becoming a trend across the state of California. San Diego is using a similar, although less costly, pricing scheme on parts of I-15, and San Francisco has implemented congestion pricing on some roads, and is considering expanding the charge throughout downtown. And last month, the Metropolitan Transportation Agency suggested converting carpool lanes on three freeway in Los Angeles County into toll lanes.

## **L.A. County Tolls Lane Plans are in the Fast Lane**

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*Los Angeles Times – January 9, 2008*

*LOS ANGELES* – Rush hour toll lanes could be coming to several freeways in Los Angeles County by spring 2009 if the county is awarded a huge federal grant in the next few months, according to local transportation officials. Los Angeles missed out on possibly receiving a portion of \$1 billion in federal aid last year because officials were hesitant to move congestion pricing proposals past the drawing board.

Although Metropolitan Transit Authority and Caltrans officials acknowledge the controversial nature of toll lanes, they believe that if they can receive a share of this next round of federal assistance, congestion pricing could help relieve some of the worst congestion in the nation. "We have to do something," said Roger Snoble, chief executive of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority. "It's really pretty evident to us that things are getting worse. We've been stuck in the same old rut."

If the county is awarded the \$648 million needed to set up the toll lanes and fix other transportation issues, 85 miles of existing carpool lanes on multiple freeways would be converted into toll lanes. The MTA and Caltrans plan to spend a total of \$1.4 billion on various transportation improvements including the tolls lanes on the 10, 110, 210 and 60 freeways.

## **U.S. Panel to Recommend 40-Cent Gas Tax Hike**

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*Bloomberg* - January 9, 2008

*WASHINGTON* - Federal gasoline taxes could increase as much as 40 cents per gallon over five years, according to a recommendation to be made by a U.S. panel established to find ways to fund road construction, reported a person with direct knowledge of the plan. The group plans to recommend increasing the current 18.4-cent per gallon tax by 5 cents to 8 cents each year, then be indexed according to inflation after five years, said the person, who asked not to be named before the report is released. The last U.S. gas tax increase was in 1993, by 4.3 cents per gallon.

The panel, called the National Surface Transportation Policy and Revenue Study Commission, will present its findings and recommendations including the federal fuel-tax increase Jan. 15 in Washington. The commission, created by Congress in 2005, also plans to recommend a state fuel tax increase slightly higher than the federal increases, according to the person.

Janet Kavinsky, transportation director for the U.S. Chamber of Commerce said the recommendations may also include an increased use of public-private partnerships and tolls. U.S. Transportation Secretary Mary Peters and two other members of the panel are planning objections to the group's recommendations that fuel taxes be increased, according to Kavinsky.

Secretary Peters spokesman Brian Turmail said the tax hikes won't cut congestion and will send more money to Washington that will be misspent. "The last thing we need is more of the same kind of broken policies and ineffective tax hikes that have given commuters traffic to everywhere and bridges to nowhere," said Turmail.



*The commission's report will no doubt spark a lively debate throughout the country as to how best to solve the transportation crisis facing our nation. If the nation expects unanimity on this or any other transportation issue then it will be sorely disappointed. The days of unanimity are long past. Leadership, courage, and an aggressive plan is the only way to solve the problems we face. No matter what solutions are adopted, there will be those left unhappy. Let the discussion begin. TW*

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