



## **Transpo Activists Resist Senate Toll Restrictions**

Chris Lisinski/SHNS July 21<sup>st</sup>, 2020

Prohibiting the use of toll hikes to help fund the biggest highway project in a generation would set a "perilous precedent" and would make it more difficult to accomplish varying roadway, rail and pedestrian improvements in a narrow stretch of Allston, transportation activists warned lawmakers in a new letter.

Leaders of the Transportation for Massachusetts coalition, TransitMatters, LivableStreets Alliance and the Metropolitan Area Planning Council urged legislative leaders to drop a provision in the Senate's roughly \$17 billion transportation bond that bans the Department of Transportation from increasing tolls on the Massachusetts Turnpike to help pay for what could be nearly a decade of work on the Allston Multimodal Project. Because the work would involve a major overhaul of the Turnpike, group leaders wrote in a [letter](#) that tolling should remain in consideration as a source of funding, describing roadway tolls as an example of the "benefit principle" in which "those who use a resource should be the ones who pay for it." "All options need to stay on the table if we are going to deliver a better transportation system for residents of the Commonwealth, and especially for users of the Massachusetts Turnpike corridor," the authors wrote. "A prohibition on the use of tolling for this project would set a perilous precedent and would be counterproductive to the goals we know you share."

Both the House and Senate bond bills (H 4547 / S 2813) include \$250 million for the project, but the Senate was alone in banning the use of toll increases to fund or support the work. Residents in turnpike dependent districts like the one Senate President Karen Spilka represents have long complained that it's not fair that the turnpike is tolled while other major highways in Massachusetts are not.

The advocacy group leaders called for lawmakers to implement a system of congestion pricing in Massachusetts, where tolls vary based on time of day. The bills both create a commission to study it. Planning is [still underway](#) for the project, which aims to thread the needle between replacing the structurally deficient viaduct on which a section of the Turnpike sits, straightening the road, constructing a West Station for the commuter rail, and making more space by the Charles River available to pedestrians.