

March 6, 2019

To the chairs and members of the Transportation Committee,

I write in support of H.B. No. 7280 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING SUPPORT FOR TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE AND THE CREATION OF THE CONNECTICUT TRANSPORTATION FINANCE AUTHORITY.

My name is Gannon Long. Born and raised in Hartford, where I lived most of my 20s, I spent about 8 years in Washington, DC and Boston - both cities with robust public transit systems, which prioritize green investments.

I moved back to CT almost a year ago. I am a Hartford resident, a millennial, a pedestrian, and an aunt to several nieces and nephews. Currently, I am pursuing an MBA at UConn. I coordinate a project at the Center for Latino Progress called Road to Zero, which is funded through the National Safety Council. In collaboration with youth from the Blue Hills Civic Association and the Hartford Police Explorers, we organize to reduce traffic fatalities in Hartford.

It is through these many lenses, and many others not represented here today, that I ask you to support thoughtful legislation to implement tolls in CT so that we can invest in sustainable transportation for the future of our state.

First of all, user fees that disincentivize the most environmentally destructive modes of travel are a critical as our state faces the ravages of climate change. Currently, almost 40% of greenhouse gas emissions in CT are transportation related. Single occupancy vehicle travel in here is prolific, and it's killing our environment. If you all want my nieces and nephews to be able to breathe air when they're your age just like you can today, it's time to act with urgency. We must quickly reduce the number of miles traveled by drivers in our state. Perhaps the fact that [legislators in this building pad their pension funds with reimbursement](#) money, earning more money the more miles they drive, is distracting attention from the urgency of climate change, and from the people who depend on all of you to act.

Over 80% commuters into my city every day drive to work by themselves, alone, both ways - causing wear and tear on our roads and pollution in our neighborhoods. We should raise the gas tax and implement tolls, not just to earn revenue we can invest in sustainable transportation opportunities, but to encourage residents to change their travel modes away from those that are destroying our planet. With the revenue generated, we must invest in multi modal transportation options in our state. Tolls are a user fee that change people's driving behavior. Implemented thoughtfully, tolls will more responsibly distribute the actual costs of all that single occupancy vehicle travel. If our state is to advance our economic opportunities and protect our environmental marvels, the people who use our roads the most should pay for them.

Of course, as with any raised bill, you all are responsible first and foremost for considering the most vulnerable people in our state, and legislating from their perspectives. So, please talk to and listen to lower and moderate income folks who might be negatively affected by this bill, which these folks likely will be in the short term. Please get creative with ways to mitigate this burden on families that are already stretched too thin by low wages and high cost of living in our state. There are many people who can't afford to live close to where they work, can barely afford a car, and stay in places with inadequate public transit options. In the long term, it's essential that our state begin generating toll revenue that can be invested in improving public transportation. For those of you focused on expanding economic mobility for the poor and working class folks in CT, thank you for your attention to these priorities. I hope you are able to consult a diverse number of people to inform a fair policy.

While we have to consider working class folks who need to drive for work, let's keep in mind that people who live in the most dire conditions of poverty will never pay this highway user fee. That's because the poorest people in our state don't own cars. Citywide, over 30% of households in Hartford report zero car ownership, and in almost half our neighborhoods, the rate is over 40%. Over 60% of residents of Hartford work outside the city. Instead of asking us to subsidize highways that split up our neighborhoods and pollute our air, why wouldn't we ask those who use these roads to pay for maintaining them?

In terms of racial and wealth disparities, Connecticut is one of the most unequal states in our country. Data from Hartford, Bridgeport, Waterbury, New Haven, and other CT cities reveal common patterns. High rates of traffic crashes, injuries, and deaths (In Hartford last year, we lost more people to car crashes than homicide); poor pedestrian, bike and bus infrastructure, despite low rates of car ownership; limited resources for the city to maintain roads, never mind design safer ones; low rates of traffic enforcement - despite recent gains in Hartford, our Traffic Dept still stops dangerous drivers at a rate half the state average; and lots of commuter traffic. As you all look for ways to use your power here to advance equity for all of CT's citizens, tolls are a tremendous opportunity to shift the burden of transportation costs away from those who are least able, and least responsible, for bearing them.

Given our perennial budget and transportation/ infrastructure deficits, the state of CT should jump in and take EZ pass revenue instead of surrendering it to neighboring states. Instead, Mass and NY are eating our lunch. When my CT based family without EZ passes would visit us in Boston, they'd become frustrated and disoriented every time they received a paper bill (for just a few dollars, what a waste of resources) that they'd incur by passing through the tolls. This mental barrier discourages people from CT for leaving our state, even just for a day trip. It'd good for everyone to broaden our horizons once in awhile.

There is LOTS of revenue to be gained here by out of state drivers. It's important to think beyond our experience here. Connecticut is, as many of us have heard over and over throughout our lives, right between Massachusetts and New York. As a consumer who spent about 3 years frequently traveling down 84 and 90 between Hartford and Boston, I can tell you it's remarkable how different it is to drive on the highway in the 2 states. For one, the rest area is closed in CT during the busiest travel times, in the evening. It is mind boggling that

the state of CT can't figure out how to make enough money to at least keep bathrooms open all day, when we literally own land on the side of the highway. Selling coffee and gas seem like tried and true strategies. Meanwhile, in Mass, there are great services on Route 90. Bathrooms are open all day and night. For folks who don't know, the tolls in MA don't require any slowing down at all. Connecticut is so behind, many people here are engaging in a debate about obsolete technology. It is important for you all to speak honestly, in this building and your districts, about what tolling will actually entail.

There are many categories, like education funding, and tolls, where almost all 50 states do one thing and CT does something else. As many of you know, this is often because we're "still studying the issue." In these situations, it's very rare that we are the forward thinking geniuses who have figured everything out. It's more likely that we can make improvements by building on what other states have already tested and learned. Making it physically less confusing for CT residents to leave our state, while helping the state get EZ pass registration revenue to invest in public and sustainable transportation, is a win win. Meanwhile, we get the further benefit of fairly charging the most prolific users of our roads for the costs they currently pass on to the rest of us. Let's make this trip a little smoother. This is much better than our current system, where we ask our state's most vulnerable travelers to subsidize their travel.

Thank you for your careful attention and consideration when crafting HB 7280.

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