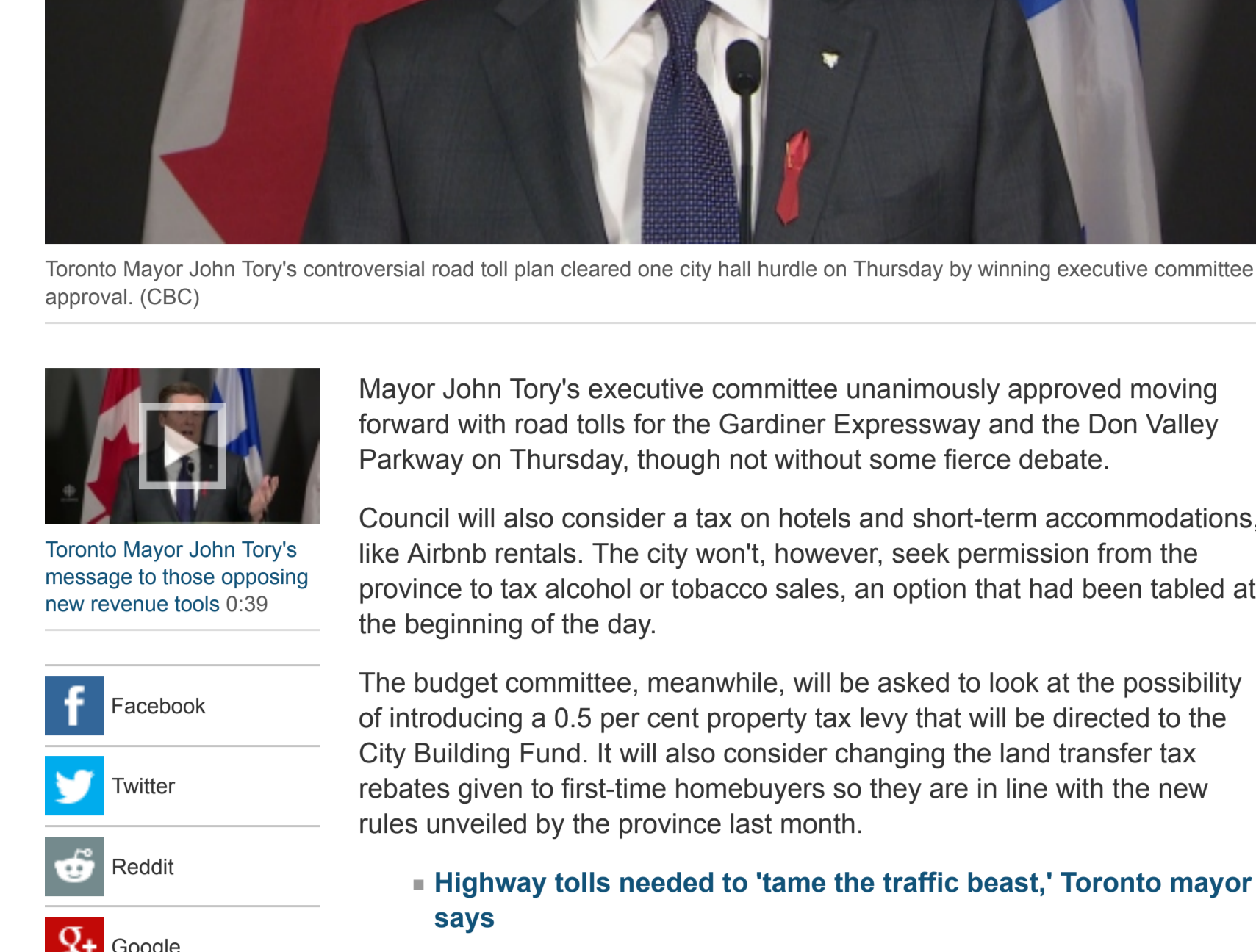


Toronto road tolls, championed by Mayor John Tory, OK'd at executive committee

Hotel and short-term accommodation tax also clears major city hall hurdle after debate

By Lauren Peley, CBC Posted: Dec 01, 2016 5:50 PM ET | Last Updated: Dec 01, 2016 9:42 PM ET



Toronto Mayor John Tory's controversial road toll plan cleared one city hall hurdle on Thursday by winning executive committee approval. (CBC)

Mayor John Tory's executive committee unanimously approved moving forward with road tolls for the Gardiner Expressway and the Don Valley Parkway on Thursday, though not without some fierce debate.

Council will also consider a tax on hotels and short-term accommodations, like Airbnb rentals. The city won't, however, seek permission from the province to tax alcohol or tobacco sales, an option that had been tabled at the beginning of the day.

The budget committee, meanwhile, will be asked to look at the possibility of introducing a 0.5 per cent property tax levy that will be directed to the City Building Fund. It will also consider changing the land transfer tax rebates given to first-time homebuyers so they are in line with the new rules unveiled by the province last month.

- Highway tolls needed to 'tame the traffic beast,' Toronto mayor says
- Toronto Mayor John Tory's road toll proposal unique in Canada
- Could road tolls boost Toronto transit ridership?

The city is grappling with how to pay for \$33 billion worth of major transit and infrastructure projects.

Tory's motion to implement the road tolls — which could cost around \$2 per trip — was approved, although with some amendments introduced by other councillors, including a potential yearly cap on how much commuters will pay in tolls.

City council would still have to approve road tolls before they come into effect. The city would also need approval from Queen's Park to put the tolls in.

Deputy Mayor Denzil Minnan-Wong, who represents Ward 34, Don Valley East, introduced the motion calling on city council to cap the amount Torontonians will pay on tolls per year, though he declined to set a specific amount.

"My residents are affected more than any other community in the city," he said.

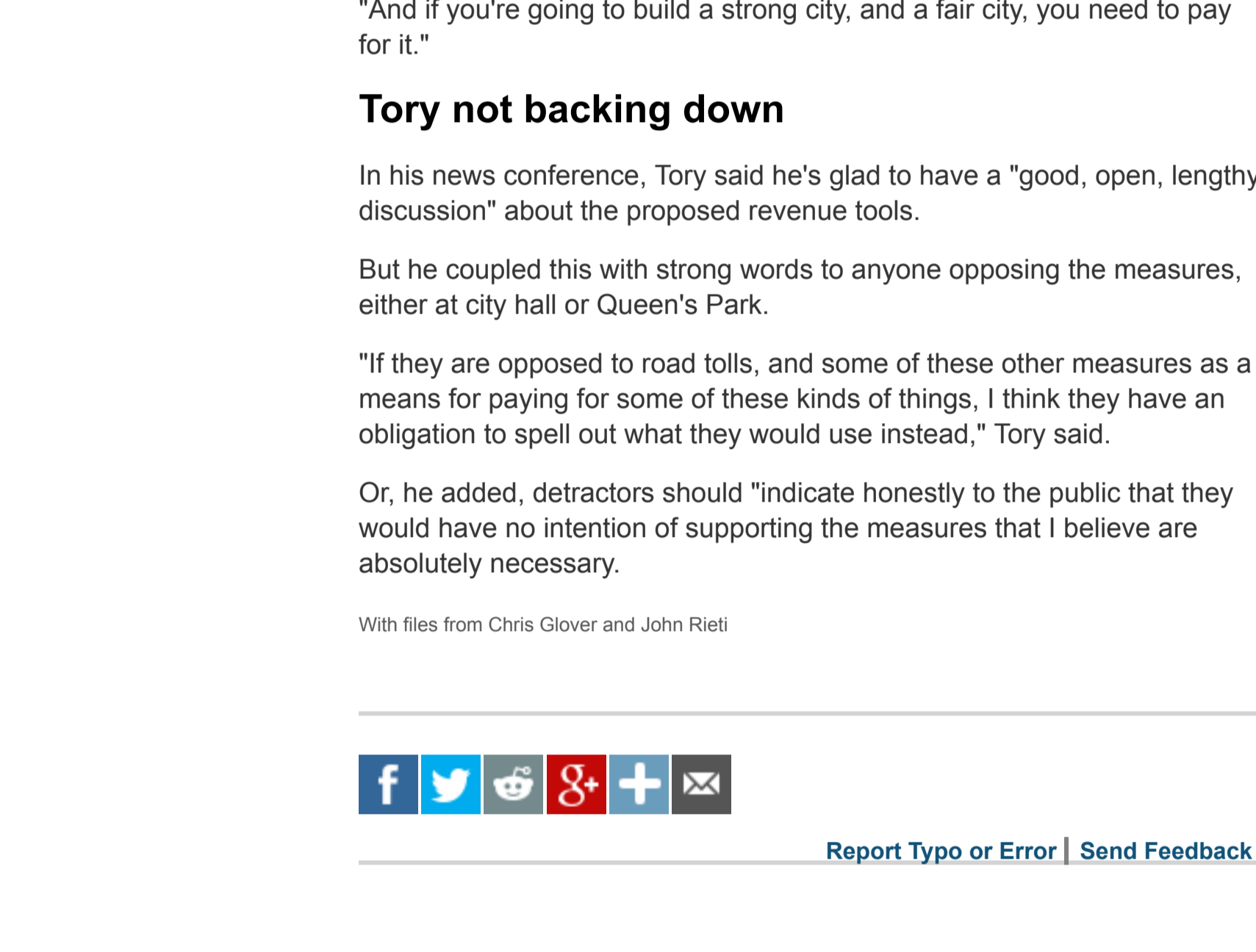
"You have to spread the pain of these revenue tools."

Minnan-Wong's motion also suggested looking at how the tolls will be collected, suggesting a dynamic pricing model could be put in place.

The executive committee also unanimously approved a motion by Coun. David Shiner that recommends asking the province to exempt any road tolls from the Harmonized Sales Tax.

Drivers may not like paying the tolls, Shiner said, but they'd hate "paying a tax on a tax."

Budget Chief Gary Crawford, meanwhile, defended dropping the potential alcohol and tobacco taxes, saying the revenue tools the executive committee did approve were the fairest, most affordable and most transparent.



Tory wants to impose a toll of roughly \$2 on the two major highways leading to Toronto's downtown core. (Nathan Denette/Canadian Press)

Some fighting back against taxes

Councillor Giorgio Mammoliti, who showed up to the meeting with a pair of boxing gloves, told CBC Toronto he is going to fight "every tax and every fee."

"In a flash, we've approved an unprecedented amount of taxes and fees to be looked at without consulting the rest of Toronto," he said.

Sean Meagher, executive director of the non-profit social justice organization Social Planning Toronto, expressed concern that road tolls would affect the budget years from now, but are not an immediate fix.

"The city manager's named a bunch of very useful tools — things like harmonizing the land transfer tax, closing some tax loopholes for corporations," he said.

"Those are things we can have in the immediate term."

'A step in the right direction'

Potential road toll revenue is earmarked for transit and infrastructure projects. With this plan, city council is "finally beginning to take action on fighting congestion and building more transit," Tory said during a midday news conference.

But Tory has previously said that, while road tolls will raise about \$200 million annually, the potential revenue would still fall short of addressing all the city's transit needs.

"It's a really good start but it's not going to be sufficient," said City Manager Peter Wallace during the morning meeting session.

Speaking to CBC Toronto, Coun. Joe Cressy, who represents Ward 20, Trinity-Spadina, said the proposed tolls and taxes are a "a step in the right direction."

"The city of Toronto doesn't have the money today to maintain the city we have, let alone the money to build the city we want," he said.

"And if you're going to build a strong city, and a fair city, you need to pay for it."

Tory not backing down

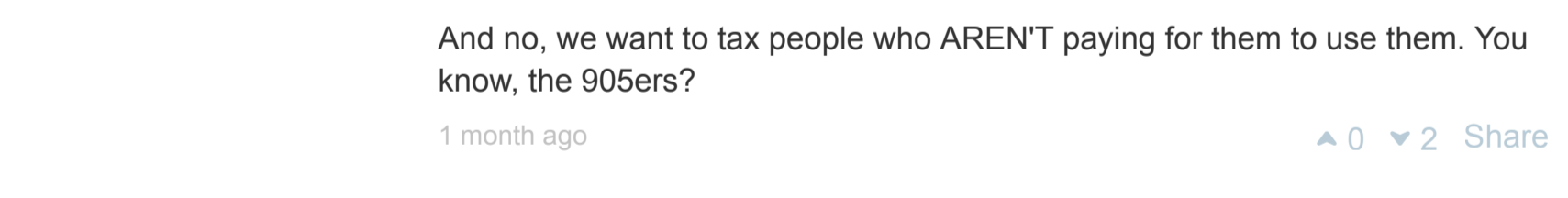
In his news conference, Tory said he's glad to have a "good, open, lengthy discussion" about the proposed revenue tools.

But he coupled this with strong words to anyone opposing the measures, either at city hall or Queen's Park.

"If they are opposed to road tolls, and some of these other measures as a means for paying for some of these kinds of things, I think they have an obligation to spell out what they would use instead," Tory said.

Or, he added, detractors should "indicate honestly to the public that they would have no intention of supporting the measures that I believe are absolutely necessary."

With files from Chris Glover and John Rietl



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Rusty Kern This is the Neo Liberal tax and spend mentality 1. You were taxed to build the roads 2. You are taxed to maintain them (property taxes) 3. You pay taxes to drive, get a license, gas tax, disposal fees etc 4. You are taxed on the carbon they produce Now they want to tax you again for driving on the roads you are already taxed to build and maintain... 1 month ago 9 3 Share

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Winston Smith @Rusty Kern But why should tax payers pay to maintain them? Shouldn't the people using them be the ones who pay to maintain them? Why should property tax go towards policing the roads? Again, something the road users should pay for. And no, we want to tax people who AREN'T paying for them to use them. You know, the 905ers? 1 month ago 0 2 Share

Winston Smith @JOHN MCTAGGART Yes, we all pay for the 400 series of highways that go into their areas, even if we don't live there or use them. 1 month ago 0 1 Share

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Rick Durst Does anyone know what the cost of the infrastructure and billing expenses will be for tolls. My guess based on the City of Toronto's track record - no one. Currently a tax structure exists to tax parking. Increase the tax on downtown parking (maybe just during business hours) The same drivers get taxed with no new costs to the city. But John Tory likes his circuses. 1 month ago 8 0 Share

Bobby Pires @Rick Durst do you know what the cost is per year for road maintenance, repairs, paying to police roads, paying for emergency services, snow removal and the overall cost to society for fatalities from cars? I will let you in on a secret...the privatized car doesn't pay nearly enough for their use of these roads. everyone wants nice things but refuse to sacrifice. maybe you should start by looking at yourself rather than trying to blame Tory for this. 1 month ago 0 2 Share

Dan Nowak Canada's greatest city is admitting it is failing. It can not afford to maintain the infrastructure previous generations built. The City of Toronto does not have the money. In a time where wealth has never been greater and the stock markets have never been higher we need to ask why. Where is the disconnect between all this wealth and tax revenues for Countries, Provinces and Cities? 1 month ago 8 2 Share

Pete Schiff So, if we are paying for it now do we also have his assurance that BLM won't be allowed to block the Gardiner and DVP? Or is that just part of the fun? 1 month ago 8 2 Share

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