



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

August 4, 2023

The Honorable Gavin
Newsom
Governor
State of California
1021 O Street, Suite 9000
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Toni Atkins
President pro Tempore
California State Senate
1021 O Street, Suite 8518
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Robert Rivas
Speaker
California State Assembly
State Capitol
P.O. Box 942849
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Governor Newsom, President pro Tempore Atkins, and Speaker Rivas:

We write to express our strong concerns about legislation currently being considered in the state legislature to raise bridge tolls in the San Francisco Bay Area. As proposed, these increases would have a disproportionate impact on low- and moderate-income residents in the Bay and would be borne most significantly by workers who have to commute for their work.

As you know, the Safe, Clean, and Reliable Bay Area Public Transportation Emergency Act (SB-532)¹ would temporarily raise bridge tolls by \$1.50 on state-owned bridges in the Bay Area from 2024 to 2028. This increase is on top of the \$1 increase already scheduled to take effect in January 2025, and would be the fourth increase of toll prices on these bridges in 6 years, if all planned increases are also implemented. The revenue from this raise would be transferred to the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) for allocation to transit operators that provide service within the Bay Area and are experiencing a financial shortfall.

We know that the COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted transit systems' finances nationally and in the Bay Area. There are also some Bay Area transit agencies that have safety, security, reliability, and cleanliness challenges. However, we're concerned that this legislation will disproportionately impact our constituents and low-income communities who depend on driving for their transportation to and from work, and ultimately does not provide long-term, sustainable solutions for some of the operating issues of the Bay Area public transit agencies.

Data from bridge toll transactions shows that 59% of toll payers on the Bay Area bridges come from just three East Bay counties: Alameda County (27.5%), Contra Costa County (19.7%), and Solano County (11.8%).² On the San Francisco Oakland Bay Bridge alone, where over 31 million toll transactions occurred in one year,³ 52% of the toll payers came from Alameda County and Contra Costa County.⁴ Further, the percentage of bridge drivers originating from

¹ Version as amended by the California Assembly as of June 29, 2023.

² Data from Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC)

³ These transactions occurred from May 1, 2022 to April 30, 2023.

⁴ MTC

Contra Costa County, San Mateo County, and Santa Clara County has increased since 2015, and now accounts for almost 31% of toll transactions.⁵

An analysis of toll fines shows that low-income communities across the Bay Area have much higher rates of unpaid tolls than wealthier zip codes, indicating the disproportionate impact an increase in tolls will continue to put on communities that are already financially strapped and have a tough time paying for them.⁶ Four of the five zip codes with the most unpaid toll violations are majority non-white, have higher rates of limited English speaking households, and have higher rates of poverty than the Bay Area as a whole, and four of them are located in Contra Costa and Solano Counties.⁷ Given the crossover between this data and the information on the geographic concentration of toll payers, we believe that the proposed toll increase would have a disproportionate impact on disadvantaged populations throughout the Bay Area.

There's a lack of publicly and readily available information or analysis on the distribution and usage of these proposed toll funds, and it's not clear to us how many of the constituents we represent will have to sustain the financial hit, and how they will benefit. We've also heard concerns about the bulk of the revenue from the tolls being directed to San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency's Muni and the Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) transit systems, given that these two systems put a heavy focus on people who live in and/or travel to San Francisco, and ignore much of the other travel routes and commutes taken by an average person living in the Bay Area.

As the federal representatives for California, this proposed toll increase and its implications impact our work in Congress. We all recently supported COVID relief packages and the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, which provided support for transit agencies and their operations. We're also all engaged in work at the federal level to reduce congestion and ease commutes, and we of course care deeply about the equity impacts of policy proposals.

Overall, we do not believe that SB-532 is in the best interest of Bay Area residents and do not think it has been properly evaluated. In that regard, we hope you consider providing the following information to us, prior to passage of this potential toll increase:

- Cost-benefit analysis of the impact of the proposed increase in bridge tolls on the average daily driver of these affected Bay Area bridges;
- Your plan for independent oversight of both the distribution of funds by MTC to the Bay Area transit agencies and the usage of funds by Bay Area transit agencies;
- Analysis of which transit agencies will receive support from these funds, and their areas of service, compared to the drivers that pay the tolls;
- Impact of this type of short-term funding source on finding sustainable long-term solutions, without substantial external aid/bailouts (including emergency federal aid), to support the operations of Bay Area transit agencies; and
- Impact analysis of low-income or car-dependent commuters.

⁵ MTC

⁶ SPUR, "Bridging the Gap: Addressing the inequitable impacts of bridge toll fines and fees on Bay Area drivers," November 2021. https://www.spur.org/sites/default/files/2021-12/SPUR_Bridging_the_Gap.pdf

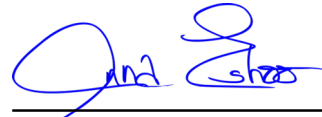
⁷ SPUR (2021)

We appreciate your full and fair consideration of our many concerns, consistent with applicable agency guidelines. The impacts on all constituents in the Bay Area must be considered. Many employees now have the advantage to do their work from home. There are others, the working people of the Bay Area, that don't share this advantage, and the proposed toll hike comes straight out of their wallets.

Sincerely,



Mark DeSaulnier
Member of Congress



Anna G. Eshoo
Member of Congress



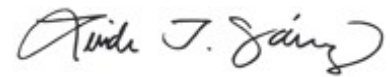
John Garamendi
Member of Congress



Eric Swalwell
Member of Congress



Barbara Lee
Member of Congress



Linda T. Sánchez
Member of Congress



Mike Thompson
Member of Congress