



December 8, 2009

Mr. Bill Dodd, Chair  
Bay Area Toll Authority Oversight Committee  
101 Eighth Street  
Oakland, CA 94607

Dear Chairman Dodd and Committee Members,

The League of Women Voters of the Bay Area is pleased to have the opportunity to comment on the proposed options for increasing tolls on Bay Area bridges.

**We support the Bay Area Toll Authority's proposal to increase tolls** on the basis of our long-established League positions on government finance, which call for 1) revenues that are sufficient and flexible enough to meet changing needs for government services, and 2) a system of public finance that emphasizes equity and the fair sharing of tax and toll burdens. Moreover, one of the League's top priorities for action is to address problems of global climate change, and several of the options outlined in the proposal could be helpful in this effort.

**Among the three options proposed for the toll increases, we favor Option #3.**

- 1) **Bay Bridge tolls have for many years lagged behind transit fares**, as documented in the background materials for the toll proposals. The tolls that would be charged under Option #3, particularly the \$6.00 toll for peak periods, would help to level the playing field for transit and would also offer the best incentive to drivers to commute during less congested times of the day. These outcomes could help decrease greenhouse gas production in the region
- 2) **Congestion pricing, as proposed in Option #3, has worked in many other settings** in this country and around the world to reduce traffic congestion. Option #3 offers an opportunity to test this strategy that, if successful, would help reduce congestion-related pollution and it could serve as a model for congestion relief in other parts of the Bay Area.
- 3) **Option #3 fairly shares the burden of increased tolls among those who use the Bay Bridge**, including truckers and carpoolers. We understand that there is some reluctance to charge a toll on carpools, since this travel mode is intended to reduce the vehicle miles traveled on our freeways. As past studies of casual carpooling have shown, however, casual carpooling (which is a very popular travel alternative on the Bay Bridge), has actually added vehicles to the Bridge, to neighborhood streets, and to freeways during peak commute hours. Although this outcome seems counter-intuitive, it occurs because many casual carpool drivers and riders used transit before they carpooled, and many indicate that they would return to transit if carpooling were not available to them. For this reason, any policy that tends to discourage casual carpooling is likely to be a step toward reducing greenhouse gas emissions from commute vehicles.

**We also have some concerns in general about the proposals:**

**We are concerned about accountability to the public** for the spending of the toll revenues and for the effectiveness of the toll increase in meeting its goals. We ask that provision be made for annual reviews that would evaluate the impacts of the new tolls in terms of their adequacy to meet the revenue needs described in the proposal and their effectiveness in meeting goals such as shifting peak hour vehicles to off-peak hours and shifting drivers from their vehicles to transit.

**We urge that regular reports be made**, on at least an annual basis for at least the next five years, and in easily-understood format, showing the total amounts of revenue raised and their allocation to all purposes, including but not limited to, debt service for bridge retrofits, reduction of MTC's financing expenses, and compensation for reduced traffic on the bridges. The continuing need for each of these expense categories should be documented, as discussed below:

- 1) When the bridge retrofits have been completed and the debt retired, the funds targeted for this purpose will no longer be needed. The public should be informed if the funds are to be allocated to other uses and given opportunities to comment on any such shifting of funds. For example, if AB 744 passes, will toll revenues be used for regional express lane purposes?
- 2) The downward trend in the number of vehicles on Bay Area bridges may well be reversed if the projection (shown on the BATA website) of a 40% increase in transbay travel over the next two decades proves correct. If so, continuing higher tolls to make up for current shortfalls in revenue should no longer be needed, and the public should be involved in decisions about the tolls at that time
- 3) Similarly, the need for toll revenues to protect MTC from high borrowing costs may diminish with changes in market conditions in the future, and an adjustment in toll revenues may be needed. Again, this situation would call for a public discussion.
- 4) Of course, changed conditions in the future could require an increase in toll revenue, rather than a reduction, and a practice of regular reporting can help build a public consensus if this should occur.
- 5) Finally, annual reports on the efficacy of congestion pricing, if Option #3 is adopted, would indicate whether a re-thinking of this option is needed, and would be useful to other jurisdictions contemplating this kind of action or possible extension to other bridges in our region.

Thank you for your attention to our suggestions. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact the Bay Area League's Transportation Director, Mim Hawley, at 510-527-7727; mbhawley@earthlink.net.

Sincerely,

Marion Taylor  
Vice President, Program/Advocacy

Cc: Steve Heminger, Rod McMillan, Andrew Fremier