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Lashway, Lisa

From: NJLM - Municipal Clerks [njlm-clerks@cityconnections.com]
Sent: Monday, October 13, 2008 2:23 PM
To: Lashway, Lisa
Subject: Municipal Clerks from NJLM

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LEAGUE ALERT

Municipal Clerk: Please forward to Mayor and Governing Body.

October 13, 2008

Re: Turnpike/Parkway Toll Increases

Dear Mayor:

On Friday, October 10, 2008, the Turnpike Authority approved the Transportation Commissioner's revised toll increase plan. Details are available on the Turnpike Authority's website at <http://www.state.nj.us/turnpike/>

Our Heavy Truck Task Force has met with Commissioner Kris Kolluri of the New Jersey Department of Transportation to discuss the Turnpike Authority proposal for the first toll increase in twenty years. These monies will be dedicated solely to the following purposes: **1)** raising sufficient money to meet the Authority's debt service obligations in 2009 (the source of this revenue must be certified by December 1 of this year); **2)** funding the ten year safety and congestion relief capital program; and **3)** providing \$1.25 billion dollars for the ARC (Access to the Region's Core) mass transit tunnel between New York and New Jersey.

The League has long recognized the need for substantial investment in our Transportation Infrastructure. In the current economic climate, it is especially important to maximize the benefits to be gained by such capital investments. Those benefits include the direct creation of jobs, in the work of modernizing

our transportation infrastructure and the indirect creation of jobs by the positive impact that those improvements will have on commerce and industry in our Garden State.

In the current economic climate, it is also important to limit the negative impact of public policies on individual citizens and families. Accordingly, and absent any serious alternatives, we need to cautiously consider all the ramifications of the Turnpike Authority's toll increase proposal.

Especially now, as our Nation's financial services industry finds itself in disarray and seeks massive public sector support, it is imperative that our State meet its debt service obligations in a responsible and sustainable manner. And the Commissioner's plan will do so, this year and into the future.

The funds for the mass transit tunnel are also important to our members. Our municipalities have a great stake in building the ARC Rail Tunnel, as our town centers, local roads, and overall economy is directly linked to increased mobility, public transit, and the attractiveness of living in New Jersey. And our citizens, throughout the State, will benefit for years to come from a cleaner environment and a reduced dependence on imported energy. Accordingly, we enthusiastically support this aspect of the plan, as well.

The expenditures for the infrastructure repairs and improvements on the Turnpike and Parkway are necessary for public safety. However, the League remains concerned that the increase in tolls will divert truck traffic to local roads. And a close look at the projects that will be funded by this proposal raises similar concerns, as well. Some of these projects will also increase the use of local roads, raising public safety and roadway maintenance concerns, which will need to be addressed by local officials, reliant on the property tax for increased funding.

We have expressed these concerns to the Commissioner. And we are grateful for his efforts to address some of them in the revised proposal, which would scale back the proposed Turnpike increases and provide a non-peak hour discount for truckers. We support the reduction and the proposed discounts.

We, however, must, respectfully, insist on statutory and regulatory assurances that the planning and funding of those toll road improvements, which will have an impact on local roads, must be coordinated with local officials.

Finally, this proposal offers no solution for the future of the Transportation Trust Fund, and we remain concerned about this issue as well. So, while the purposes to which this newly generated funding will be dedicated must be met, all involved must recognize that much, much more needs to be done. The traffic diversion issue could easily impose new burdens on our local infrastructure and new costs on our property taxpayers. And the Trust Fund issue will never be satisfactorily resolved without a serious commitment by officials at all levels of government to put aside partisan and parochial considerations and to work together in the public's best long-term interest.

For more information on this, you can contact Jon Moran at 609-695-3481, ext. 121.

Very truly yours,

William G. Dressel, Jr.
Executive Director

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