

Dear Senator _____:

During consideration of the surface transportation reauthorization bill (S. 732), you will be asked to consider a bipartisan amendment sponsored by Senators Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-TX) and Ben Nelson (D-NE), to prevent tolls from being imposed on existing Interstate highways.

We, the undersigned organizations, respectfully urge you to vote YES on the Hutchison-Nelson amendment.

The amendment simply eliminates a pilot program, created in 1998, that allows up to three states to toll existing Interstate highways. Since its inclusion in TEA-21, the program has yet to be utilized by any state. However, it is also important to note that this amendment will not affect states' ability to convert HOV lanes to High-Occupancy Toll (HOT) Lanes or to add new, *voluntary use* toll lanes to Interstates.

There are many reasons to oppose the imposition of tolls on existing lanes of the Interstate Highway System. Tolls represent double taxation. Highway users currently pay more than \$35 billion annually in federal fuel taxes and other fees to support highway maintenance and construction. In addition, motorists contribute more than \$50 billion each year in state and local highway user fees. Imposing tolls on existing Interstate highway lanes on top of these fees would be unfair and inequitable, and would prove to be a very difficult burden at a time of record high fuel prices.

Mandatory tolls have other detrimental effects. They cause diversion of traffic to other, often less safe roads. For example, the State of Ohio significantly reduced tolls on the Ohio Turnpike this year after finding that large percentages of trucks were using alternate non-tolled routes. One such alternate route has a fatal accident rate that is 17 times higher than the Turnpike's rate. Diversion of traffic will also affect the financial stability of companies that depend on Interstate highway travel, such as truck stops, motels, restaurants or gas stations. Furthermore, tolls will increase costs to businesses and employees if they are located in the vicinity of an Interstate highway that imposes mandatory tolls.

The public, by a wide margin, opposes tolls on the existing Interstate system. In a national survey commissioned recently by ABC/Time/Washington Post, 88% of respondents opposed a toll to drive into city centers, and 68% opposed using tolls to control congestion. Another national survey found that 66% of likely voters opposed Congress granting states the authority to toll existing Interstates.

Finally, both the Senate and House highway reauthorization bills call for the establishment of a national commission to study how federal-aid highways, including the Interstate System, should be funded in the years ahead. The commission will investigate alternatives to the fuel tax as the principal source of revenue to support the Highway Trust Fund, including tolls and other funding options. It would be premature to include provisions in this current highway reauthorization bill that permits the tolling of the Interstate System until the commission completes its report and makes recommendations to Congress on the appropriateness of tolls and other funding mechanisms.

We would very much appreciate your support on this issue and we urge you to vote for the Hutchison-Nelson amendment.