

State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations

Report of the
GOVERNOR'S COMMITTEE TO STUDY TOLL ROADS
February 1953

The Honorable Dennis J. Roberts
Governor of the State of Rhode Island
State House
Providence, R. I.

Dear Governor Roberts:

I am pleased to submit herewith a report of your Committee to Study Toll Roads. Although the findings of the Committee at this time are in the main negative, we feel that it is essential to review the toll road possibilities in the State at frequent intervals in order to take into account the rapidly changing traffic conditions which may alter the situation on which our report is based.

The Committee wishes to take this opportunity to thank Public Works Director Mancini and his staff and Mr. Blair and other members of the staff of the Rhode Island Development Council for their excellent and efficient cooperation.

Sincerely,

Chairman

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Toll Roads are an acceptable method for supplementing the regular sources of funds for highway construction, under certain conditions.
2. At present, the particular conditions do not exist which would make a toll road on any logical route through Rhode Island self-supporting.
3. Toll operation is appropriate, however, for the major crossings of Narragansett Bay, and an arrangement should be worked out whereby the following three major facilities can be managed as a unit.
 - a. The Jamestown Bridge
 - b. The Jamestown Ferry, and any future Narragansett Bay Bridge
 - c. The Mount Hope Bridge
4. Joint operation of the above three facilities should result in lowered toll rates and make more readily possible the construction of the Narragansett Bay Bridge.
5. A master plan for highways or a Highway Guide Plan should be prepared by the appropriate State agencies assisted by a permanent advisory group and publicly presented to provide full knowledge and understanding of the overall highway needs of the entire state.
6. A long-range highway financing program should be worked out, based on the Guide Plan, to insure systematic execution of the various elements of that plan.
7. A realistic approach to future highway needs will call for a substantial increase in the level of state expenditures for highway improvement and a corresponding increase in taxes within a few years.

Governor's Committee to Study Toll Roads

Members of the Committee:

Edward Winsor, Chairman - Providence
Oresto DiSaia, Vice Chairman - Providence
N. R. Baris - Pawtucket
Nat Capalbo - Westerly
Kenneth B. Cook - Pawtucket (Resigned Jan. 12, 1953)
John W. Cunningham - Cranston
Frederick R. Hazard - Saunderstown
Thomas W. Lyons - Jamestown
Dwight T. Myers - Providence
M. Thomas Perrotti - Newport
Hugh E. Strain - Central Falls
Chester M. Spooner - Pawtucket (Appointed Jan. 13, 1953)

Participating Staff:

Philip S. Mancini, Director of Public Works
Frederick W. Hauck, Road Designing Engineer, Dept. of Public Works
Lester P. Manning, Highway Planning Manager, Dept. of Public Works
Lachlan F. Blair, Acting Chief, Planning Division, Development Council
Raymond A. McDonald, Planning Division, Development Council
John G. Coffin, Planning Division, Development Council.

A. Introduction

The immediate charge of this Committee was to review the feasibility of undertaking highway construction through financing methods other than State appropriations or general obligation bonds, chiefly through the device of toll roads. The problem of highway construction and financing is one of the most important now facing Rhode Island; and a sound solution must be found if we are to serve adequately the people of the State and put Rhode Island on a competitive basis with its neighboring states.

B. \$40,000,000 Program

The \$40,000,000 highway program approved in 1950 and scheduled for accomplishment over a seven year period uses \$2,000,000 each in Federal and State appropriations during each of these seven years, plus the proceeds from a \$12,000,000 bond issue. Yet this program provides financing for less than one-fourth of the overall highway needs of the State. It does, however, take care of the most highly urgent projects and should, therefore, be expeditiously carried out.

Some examples of evident highway needs not as yet programmed by the State include such routes as an extension to the west from the Olneyville Expressway, to relieve the growing congestion on Hartford Avenue; a new highway along the eastern side of the State to serve Barrington, Warren and Bristol, relocation of the Post Road to bypass Wakefield, and the major part of the Metropolitan Trafficway.

C. Advantages and Disadvantages

The Committee in its investigation reviewed published material from a wide range of sources, including reports from the several states currently investigating toll financing, and financial reports from a number of toll highway and toll bridge projects already in successful operation. Against this background certain advantages and disadvantages of toll roads are evident:

Advantages

1. Toll roads, which attract a sufficient volume of traffic, finance themselves, requiring no increase in public debt or taxes.
2. Financing of this sort allows large sums to be made available immediately and not piecemeal.
3. Development of toll roads can be accomplished much more quickly than development of free facilities.
4. The bondholder's interest in protecting his investment insures a high standard of financing, planning, and construction.
5. Adjacent free roads, a product of obsolete design standards, will benefit from reduced heavy traffic and, therefore, lower maintenance costs.
6. The tourist pays his share of the highway bill.
7. Only persons using a toll facility are required to pay the highway cost.
8. When the bonds are paid off the road becomes free except for maintenance costs.
9. Toll roads eliminate traffic problems that the state would otherwise have to solve with regular funds, thereby freeing those funds for use elsewhere.

Disadvantages

1. Tolls represent a form of double taxation.
2. Toll concessions such as gas station and restaurants represent monopolies.
3. Elimination of numerous points of access requires people to travel long distances before having access to the road.
4. Toll roads may suffer from free road competition.
5. Toll roads satisfy regional rather than local traffic needs.
6. Toll road financing, unless handled by general obligation bonds increasing the state debt, is more expensive than financing involving the direct credit of the State, both because a higher rate of interest is usually involved and because there is additional expense for the services of a trustee, for promotion and for consultants of various kinds.

In general, the Committee feels that toll roads under certain circumstances are an entirely appropriate means of supplementing the regularly financed highway construction program, making possible the rapid development of major routes. There are, however, some major disadvantages which indicate that a toll route, to be justified, should be fully self-supporting.

D. Routes Investigated

After a study of the present highway system of the State and of major highway proposals, the Committee reviewed numerous suggested routes for toll roads in Rhode Island. Three major lines, with some alternatives for each, were investigated in detail by the staff of the Department of Public Works and the Rhode Island Development Council. No route in Rhode Island was found to have sufficient probable traffic volume to make it self-supporting or fully justifiable as a toll road. The major routes studied are as follows:

Route C, comprising Rhode Island Route 3 from Connecticut Route 84, along the Nooseneck Hill Road and new right-of-way, including the proposed Division Street project in West Greenwich and Warwick, joining and incorporating the Metropolitan Trafficway from the Pawtuxet River to the Massachusetts line in South Attleboro. The Committee recognizes that many problems of legal status, refunding of federal monies, complex traffic patterns, and difficulty of toll collections in the heart of the metropolitan area would be involved in such a route, but these were considered secondary to the overall financial evaluation of this line as a toll road.

Route C Alternate, similar to Route C from Connecticut to the Pawtuxet River, excluding the Metropolitan Trafficway section through Cranston, Providence, and Pawtucket. This route would be much lower in construction cost per mile than the entire Route C, but unfortunately potential traffic volumes are much lower and a toll road would not be self-supporting.

Route D, or the Southern Rhode Island Parkway, including the existing Jamestown Bridge and the proposed Narragansett Bay Bridge. This route continues through Middletown and Portsmouth across the new Sakonnet River Bridge to connect with the Boston-Fall River Expressway at the Massachusetts

line. Several locations through Washington County were considered.

Route D Alternate similar to the above route with a connection across the Bulgarmarsh Road to Massachusetts Route 177 leading to Cape Cod.

Route W, a metropolitan circumferential line, starting at the Meshanticut Interchange servicing Routes 2 and 3, connecting through Oaklawn and Atwood Avenues, continuing north along Route 5 to the Putnam Pike, across to the Farnum Pke, and along the George Washington Highway to the Massachusetts line to connect there with a new Massachusetts road which would carry much of the present U. S. Route 44 traffic through Attleboro and Taunton connecting with the Cape Cod Routes at Middleboro. South of Fletcher Avenue, this route would be on existing roads which would remain free.

The Development Council and the Department of Public Works presented traffic, cost, and financial studies of the different routes under investigation with the idea that any toll route should be economically justified for the traffic it serves and be the most feasible for those intending to use it. It appeared that none of the suggested routes which were studied would prove financially feasible at this time. This lack of financial justification for any of the proposed for highways, demanded that the Committee look unfavorably upon toll financing highways in Rhode Island for the present time. The Committee files as an Appendix to this report a map showing the various routes studied and a summary of the estimated finances involved in each case.

Present conditions in Rhode Island do not indicate traffic volumes necessary to make any of the routes studied completely self-supporting. Reasons for this are numerous. There is a lack of heavy year-round out-of-state traffic volumes necessary to finance such a project. Rhode Island, unlike Connecticut and New Jersey, is not a corridor state with large volumes

of out-of-state traffic passing through. Nor does Rhode Island have several large built-up traffic generating areas at opposite ends of the State as have Pennsylvania, New York New Jersey, and Connecticut. Metropolitan Providence, itself, with its large surrounding urban area, does not present a practical site for any self-sufficient toll facility because of the numerous traffic interchanges and toll collection booths necessary for such a system.

E. Partial Toll Operation

Studies were also made on the use of partial free and toll roads such as Connecticut's Merritt Parkway, Wilbur Cross Highway, and Charter Oak Bridge System. One proposed route would have incorporated the free section of Route 3 with new toll sections plus the Metropolitan Trafficway. This scheme was found impractical under existing conditions.

Consideration was also given to erecting toll stations at several points along the proposed Metropolitan Trafficway such as at the Pawtuxet River and the Massachusetts line. Such toll stations would help in financing the Freeway although not pay the full cost. Such a scheme would speed up construction of this badly needed urban expressway. This arrangement is considered, however, to have such complications as to be impractical for current application.

F. Future Possibilities

Trends indicate, that toll facilities may prove workable in the future and the unfavorable report at this time should not imply that all future toll facilities in Rhode Island will be economically unfeasible. Bridges especially lend themselves to toll financing as they represent a rigid monopoly and their longer life enables them to be financed over a longer period than highways.

The future development of U. S. Route 1 along the Connecticut shore and the construction of the Boston-Fall River Expressway and the reconstruction of U. S. Route 6 from Fall River to Wareham in Massachusetts will almost certainly create traffic conditions that will fully justify Rhode Island's constructing the connecting link across the southern part of the State. Such a route would allow Cape traffic to completely bypass Fall River and Taunton in Massachusetts and Providence in Rhode Island.

Traffic congestion along Connecticut's Merritt and Wilbur Cross Parkways may also strengthen the competitive position of Rhode Island for a toll route, by forcing more traffic along the shoreline route.

G. Existing Toll Facilities

Many problems relating to existing facilities linking the different parts of the state were brought to the attention of the Committee during its study. It is obvious that development of some parts of the State has been hampered by the limitations of the present bay crossings and by high toll rates. The Committee urges that prompt and aggressive steps be taken to resolve the problems involved in the proposed Narragansett Bay Bridge and to expedite its construction, consistent with other highway needs of the state. Only after completion of such a bridge will it be possible to evaluate the full traffic potential of a route across Southern Rhode Island.

A suggestion for integrating the present toll facilities in the state under one management in an effort to reduce costs was given serious consideration by the Committee. Lower costs and the resulting lower tolls would attract more traffic to these facilities. The savings possible through integrated operation and elimination of federal income taxes on the privately operated Mount Hope Bridge indicate that one overall agency for the following three facilities is desirable.

1. The Jamestown Bridge
2. The Jamestown Ferry, and the Narragansett Bay Bridge
3. The Mount Hope Bridge

The Committee feels that the Mount Hope and Jamestown Bridges should continue as toll facilities after acquisition by the state until such time as the entire bridge system is completed and paid for, or at least until the finances of the state otherwise permit. The Committee recognizes that the creation of such an overall bay authority raises many legal and practical questions, to which it has not had the opportunity to give adequate consideration. Several alternative methods for merging and operating the three bridges under single management are possible. Among these may be mentioned an authority plan, without pledging the credit of the state; a lease and guarantee arrangement between the state and private owners to limit the initial investment cost; or outright purchase with general obligation bond financing. A study of these and similar methods is necessary before definite recommendations can be made for the best method to be employed.

H. Highway Planning

The studies made by the Committee pointed up sharply the need for a Master Plan for Highways, or a Highway Guide Plan. The Committee was favorably impressed with the wealth of study material and technical data available in the Department of Public Works on traffic and highway needs and plans for meeting those needs. It is necessary, however, to present the complete story on the highway situation to the people of the state. Publication of an analysis of the sufficiency of our present roads, a plan for our future highway system, and a program for completing that system is recommended. Such things should be worked out by the state agencies concerned with such problems, assisted by a permanent advisory group. If this is done, and kept up to date, the state would have an accurate measure of highway conditions

physically and financially. Long range planning could be accomplished tailored to the financial conditions of the state. Any future toll road development would be required to tie into the Master Plan.

Any large scale interstate highway planning by Rhode Island must be coordinated with that of her sister states. The future development of U. S. Route 1 in Connecticut and the Boston and Fall River Expressway and Route U. S. 6 in Massachusetts will have a definite influence on the highway traffic passing through Rhode Island. In this connection the Committee suggests that Rhode Island take the initiative in establishing an informal interstate committee to coordinate and expedite the development of a New England South Shore resort and tourist route from New Haven to Cape Cod.

It should be remembered that the problem of highway financing is an immediate one and demands further study. To quote U. S. Public Roads Commissioner, Thomas H. MacDonald, "We pay for roads whether we have them or not, and we pay more if we don't have them than if we do."

In concluding this report, the Committee feels that it would be remiss in its duty if it did not call attention to a very unpleasant fact. It is persuaded that a substantial increase in the amount of revenues allocated to new highway construction must be looked forward to as inevitable. Rhode Island has in the past twenty years spent a total sum on highways which constitutes the equivalent of a smaller proportion of the revenues collected from the motorist for gasoline taxes and registration than any other state. The Committee, with a full recognition of the fact that higher taxes in some form would be an inevitable result, nevertheless states its belief that there is a crying need for an increase of not less than \$5,000,000 a year in the appropriation for new highway construction, and that such additional amount will be required annually for many years. An

increase in this amount would still leave highway appropriations below motor vehicle revenues. In this connection, attention is called to the fact that in 24 states by constitutional provision all motor vehicle revenues are required to be segregated and devoted to the highway program.

Your Committee makes no recommendation for the adoption of such a rigid restriction in Rhode Island. It also makes no recommendation for appropriations beyond those in the budget this year. It believes that the long range planning program as here suggested should first be put into effect. The public should be supplied with a full and accurate report as to what we have, what we need, and what it will cost to fill the need. If prompt action is taken, a long range program should be ready to present to the General Assembly in 1954.

The Committee believes that before that time careful thought should be given to the revenue problem which will then have to be faced.

Appendix - Table 1

ESTIMATED HIGHWAY COSTS

<u>Route</u>	<u>Mileage</u>	<u>Total Cost</u>	<u>Cost per Mile</u>
C	43.0	\$107,800,000	\$2,500,000
C alt.	30.0	29,600,000	986,000
D	40.4	52,800,000	1,310,000
D alt.	41.3	53,400,000	1,290,000
W #3	17.7	12,300,000	694,000

Appendix - Table 2

ESTIMATED DAILY TRAFFIC

Route	<u>Estimated Average Daily Traffic</u>			<u>Daily Traffic Needed to Make Route Self-Supporting</u>				
	At point of lowest volume	Average over length of route	At point of highest volume	1¢ per mile	2¢ per mile	2.5¢ per mile	3¢ per mile	4¢ per mile
C	4500	9,900	60,000	50,000	25,000	20,000	16,600	12,500
C alt.	4500	6,600	18,000	24,000	12,000	9,500	8,000	6,000
D	1600	5,900	11,000	29,350	14,650	11,700	9,800	7,300
D alt.	2400	6,125	11,000	29,350	14,650	11,700	9,800	7,300
W #3	5000	6,000	9,800	19,000	9,500	7,600	6,300	4,700

Mass.

RHODE ISLAND

TOLL ROAD STUDY ROUTES

WITH TRAFFIC TABULATIONS*

adt = avg. daily traffic
osp = out-of-state cars
T = trucks

* Average daily 24 hr. traffic estimate

