

## **INQUIRY INTO ROAD TOLLING**

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I live in inner city Sydney, in Alexandria, and I work in Rhodes. I travel regularly for work, and I have lived and worked in Singapore, Taipei, Belgium and Finland, and others. I have visited many of the world's major cities. I do drive, but not often.

I am a supporter of tolls, but I feel that the toll regime in Sydney is both ineffective, and unfair.

In the main, tolls in Sydney are paid by those who have the least alternative, and to a certain extent, tolls are paid by those who can least afford it.

At the same time, tolls do not do as much as they could to encourage rational use of our finite transport infrastructure.

By charging flat rates, in the main, we inevitably get a toll rate that is too low to prevent congestion at peak hour, but high enough to push traffic onto local roads even when there is plenty of spare capacity on our toll roads.

Instead of a market mechanism that encourages the highest value use of roads, we share them by queuing. This is not necessarily a disbenefit to individual road users, many of whom value their money more than their time. But it is a disbenefit to the community as a whole, because time spent queuing is time wasted, but money spent on tolls can be recycled to the benefit of the community, either by being spent on transport infrastructure, or by being spent on other purposes, or by allowing the overall tax rate to be lower than it otherwise would be.

Further, because transport infrastructure is, mostly, provided at no cost, it is overused, when compared to the situation where cost is recovered from users. That encourages businesses to position themselves as centrally as possible, rather than to create jobs where people live.

Tolls, and petrol tax, do not make up for the direct and indirect costs that the automobile imposes, not just the creation and upkeep of roads, but also the opportunity cost of the land required, and of course, the multifarious health impacts that pollution inflicts both on road users and residents.

A fairer tolling regime would be more evenly shared - in proportion to time spent driving, for example, rather than on which roads are used. A more efficient tolling regime would charge more for driving on congested roads than on roads that are not congested. After all, roads are sized, as much as possible, for peak hour traffic; wider roads have no great benefit to those who travel at any other time.

I would propose a system where uncongested roads are not tolled, and congested roads are, as much as practical, tolled in proportion to the level of congestion. This would require a mechanism for charging 'micro tolls', perhaps 10 or 20 cents for a kilometre, or perhaps some number of cents for each traffic light passed.

It would not be popular, for many people value their money more than their time. But it would be accepted, so long as people saw that their toll money was being spent to benefit them, such as being spent on roads or other community infrastructure, rather than going towards boosting profits for private corporations.

And that means spending the toll money as well as possible - doing the business case before making the decision to proceed, and doing the business case properly, based on all available evidence, and on making all that evidence public, so that it can be independently verified.

In the next 20 years, the population of Sydney is forecast to grow by 30%. WestConnex will cost far more than the forecast \$16.8 billion, to move perhaps an extra fifty thousand people. When we are going to have an extra 1.5 million people to move, this is not an affordable approach.

We need to be smarter about how we raise money. We also need to be smarter about how we spend it.