

INQUIRY INTO ROAD TOLLING REGIMES

Organisation: Action for Public Transport (NSW) Inc

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Action for Public Transport (N.S.W.) Inc.

P O Box K606
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23 May 2021

Secretary
Portfolio Committee no. 6 - Transport and Customer Service
Legislative Council
Parliament House
Macquarie St
Sydney 2000

Dear Secretary,

PC6 Inquiry into Road Tolling Regimes

Submission

Action for Public Transport (NSW) Inc. is a transport advocacy group which has been active in Sydney since 1974. We promote the interests of beneficiaries of public transport - passengers and the wider community alike.

Our submission primarily relates to reference term (k): any other related matters.

Every opportunity should be taken, subject to social and environmental considerations, to make the transport and land-use system more efficient. Air pollution, chronic traffic congestion and parking shortages in many parts of Sydney show there is much to be gained. Although the present NSW Government professes to have policies in favour of efficiency, the actuality does not match the rhetoric. Tolls are a factor that affects efficiency.

Unfortunately some Sydney tollways are only there because it was realised that a profit could be made from operating the tollway. Invariably, unsolicited proposals for tollways have been waved through, starting with the Harbour Tunnel. Also invariably, there have been ancillary costs swept under the carpet. Toll rebates, under any name, are ancillary costs.

While tollways may have resulted from bad decisions, they are not wholly undesirable impositions on deserving motorists. Indeed, tollways have some positives. They represent significant progress towards a transport system that optimises the use of costly resources. Any transport system will have to be paid for. People who use more resources should pay more. Hence the suggestion by Hensher and others of a 5c/kilometre road usage charge at peak hours.

Electric vehicles are appearing on our roads and could be widespread within ten years. They do not pay the fuel excise that petrol and diesel vehicles do. Further, there are already thousands of hybrid vehicles with minimal fuel consumption. Hence collections via fuel excise are falling; the revenue shortfall will have to be made up somehow. The obvious way to collect more money from road travel is to impose more tolls. This has been recognised by the tollroad industry, by academics and in Canberra although nothing has happened to implement the suggestion. See attached 2016 articles by Hensher, Waterford and Gittins. We have a large collection of other articles advocating road user charges which we can produce if required.

We point out that tollways are invariably designed as high-speed roads and hence don't have entries or exits closer than 2km apart. Short trips therefore generally can't use tollways. The tollway helps the long-distance drive much more than a simple trip up to the shops. That is the reverse of what should be happening; the motor vehicle is handy for coverage of an area whereas public transport is feasible when many people are going along well-defined routes.

The NSW government should be discouraging over-reliance on the private car for longer trips. Available tactics include charging higher tolls at peak hours and imposing tolls on routes commonly used for longer trips.

The last suggestion is quite feasible for the older half of Sydney, roughly the part east of Lidcombe. The newest main roads are tolled already. Only a few roads cross waterways such as Middle Harbour, Lane Cove River, Parramatta River, Cooks River and Georges River. Without requiring all cars to be fitted with the GPS devices envisaged by Professor Hensher, the toll tags already fitted to most Sydney cars could be used to implement a comprehensive toll regime. The attached map shows how the eastern half of Sydney would require only 23 additional toll barriers to catch the majority of longer trips. These barriers would be programmed to charge higher tolls and peak hours and low or zero tolls overnight.

Jim Donovan
Secretary
Action for Public Transport (NSW) Inc.