

Lamont Plan Calls For 53 Toll Gantries And ‘Graduated Reduction’ in the Gas Tax

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|Gov. Ned Lamont

HARTFORD, CT (UPDATED 8:30 p.m.) — The plan for tolling all vehicles that Gov. Ned Lamont mapped out Wednesday would include 53 gantries and limit the tolling to Interstates 84, 91, 95 and Route 15.

The plan is a 35-percent reduction in proposed gantries — down from the 82 gantry model proposed in a [2018 study](#) from the state Department of Transportation (DOT). This new report said the reduction in gantries won't result in a significant revenue drop since the toll plan includes highways that are heavily traveled.

The report further proposes charging a reduced rate, of at least 30 percent, to Connecticut EZPass owners.

“I know this idea of tolling just sounds like one more damn tax,” Lamont said. “And I cannot fix this state unless I fix this transportation system.”

Lamont, in his budget plan, said he directed the DOT to “find ways to reduce the scope without impairing the state’s ability to make the necessary investments in its transportation infrastructure.”

The plan would start initial toll operations in fiscal year 2023 with full implementation by 2025.

According to the governor’s office, “When fully implemented, this new plan will generate an estimated \$800 million annually.

“It will more equitably allocate the financial burden of our highways as out-of-state drivers and heavy trucks will finally pay their fair share to travel on Connecticut’s highways. Importantly, it provides the necessary revenue for the Special Transportation Fund (STF) to remain a viable fund well into the future, fully able to invest in priority infrastructure,” the proposal states.

However, Lamont added: “This must also be paired with a graduated reduction in the gas tax to facilitate tolling becoming a replacement for the volatile and unreliable gas tax revenue.”

The proposal, according to the governor’s office, would “shift a larger share of the burden to out-of-state drivers who are currently not paying their fair share for using our state’s highways.”

DOT estimates that the amount of out-of- state revenue could increase to almost 50 percent.

Interstates 95, 84, and 91 all carry a higher proportion of out-of-state traffic than other state routes, the report states. “This higher percentage combined with some increases in Connecticut resident discounts and adjustments to the toll rate structure could get close to the 50 percent goal.”

Lamont plans to spend about \$790 million in 2020, and \$780 million in 2021 in state funds on Connecticut’s transportation infrastructure. He also plans on freezing the new car sales tax transfer to the Special Transportation Fund, which was the way lawmakers propped up the fund in the last two-year budget with a pair of \$250 million allocations.

Still, the reality is that the fund will become insolvent by 2022, with operating deficits beginning in 2020, and even Democratic lawmakers expressed concerns after Lamont’s speech about what this means for transportation projects currently approved.

“We did ask him for more information about that,” House Majority Leader Matt Ritter, D-Hartford, said referring to the decision to freeze the new car sales tax transfer.

Lamont said he didn’t want to increase the gas tax or move general obligation bonds over to the Special Transportation Fund, calling those ideas “disastrous.”

The speech came on the heels of a reversal by the governor. On the campaign trail he maintained he would implement truck-only tolls, however, in an editorial over the weekend he said it wouldn’t get Connecticut the revenue it needs to improve its infrastructure.

The budget proposal also clarifies the state’s options with respect to Lamont’s original idea for tolling only trucks. The document says “under this model, a state can place a toll on any bridge it reconstructs, the revenues of which would support financing a bridge reconstruction program. Bridge tolling comes with federal restrictions that affect the amount of revenue that can be raised and the time it takes to reach full revenue potential. Toll gantries must be located adjacent to the deficient bridge they are financing, and toll collection cannot start until the reconstruction of the bridge begins.”

As such, revenue would be tied to the schedule of a “10 to 20-year bridge reconstruction program” and “meaningful implementation of a truck-only model could therefore take decades” while only raising about \$200 million.