NEGATIVE: Toll Roads - bad

By “Coach Vance” Trefethen

Affirmative plan has the federal government tell the states that they have to increase the use of toll roads in order to reduce traffic congestion and/or to raise more revenue for road maintenance.

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Negative: Toll Roads - bad

INHERENCY

1. No barrier. Status Quo already increasing toll roads

Toll roads are already trending up on big highways and more to come

David Schaper 2017 (journalist) National Public Radio 12 Dec 2017 " Are $40 Toll Roads The Future?" <https://www.npr.org/2017/12/12/570248568/are-40-toll-roads-the-future>

"You definitely are going to see much more tolling both for general purposes, and you're going to see tolling like the price-managed lanes on I-66 to alleviate congestion," says Pat Jones, executive director of the International Bridge, Tunnel and Turnpike Association, which represents toll facility owners and operators. Jones says there are already 40 toll facilities in 11 states, including California, Texas and Washington, using dynamic pricing, and many more under consideration across the country. Most tollways with dynamic pricing don't have a cap or a maximum price, but they sometimes have a minimum price and averages. On Southern California's I-91, in Orange and Riverside counties, the tolls can reach as high as $25.05.

2. Tolls not needed

Tolls not needed, plenty of funding available elsewhere

James Ridgeway and Daniel Schulman 2007 (journalists) " The Highwaymen" Jan/Feb 2007 MOTHER JONES magazine <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2007/01/highwaymen/>

More and more, the argument over private roads comes down simply to the bottom line. Dennis Enright, the infrastructure expert at NW Financial, says the most common argument for privatization deals—that government simply can’t come up with the kind of big money private companies can mobilize—is a myth: “If the public sector wants to raise $1.8 billion or $3.8 billion, they can do it themselves” with standard financing techniques.

HARMS / SIGNIFICANCE

1. Urban road needs declining

Urban road needs are declining: Usage peaked in 2008, since then fewer people are driving

Alissa Walker 2015 (former urbanism journalist at Gizmodo.) 4 Dec 2015 [The US Is About to Waste $305 Billion On Roads We Don't Need](https://gizmodo.com/the-us-is-about-to-waste-305-billion-on-roads-we-dont-1746068082) <https://gizmodo.com/the-us-is-about-to-waste-305-billion-on-roads-we-dont-1746068082>

The US reached “[peak car](http://www.umtri.umich.edu/our-results/publications/has-motorization-us-peaked)” in 2008. The absolute number of vehicles on US streets has slowly gone down in the last seven years. And whatever you believe about millennials choosing not to drive as part of their personal ethos, or because they can’t afford car payments, one fact is irrefutably true: Right now, the largest generation in the country is driving a lot less than any other generation before it. Then consider the [growing improvements to transit, walking, and biking infrastructure](http://gizmodo.com/4-charts-that-prove-more-americans-are-biking-and-walki-1563814042), which gets even more cars off the streets. When you toss self-driving vehicles into the mix, you can see just how drastically the urban landscape will change.

2.  Congestion impacts exaggerated

Projected increase in travel time is insignificant

Todd Litman 2014 (founder and executive director of Victoria Transport Policy Institute) 14 Oct 2014  How Not To Measure Traffic Congestion—Hold the Hyperbole, Please! <https://www.planetizen.com/node/71689>

The very large numbers cited in the report are virtually meaningless. For economic analysis it is usually best to convert impacts into annual costs per capita - let's see what that means for these congestion impacts. According to the graph on study's page 40, an average automobile commuter's annual hours of congestion delays are projected to increase from 22.0 current to 23.4 in 2030, a gain of 1.4 hours per year or 42 seconds for 200 commute days. Since adults devote about 90 daily minutes to travel, current 22 annual hours of congestion delays add about 4% to total travel time, and the projected increases this to 4.3%. These are tiny overall impacts.

INRIX congestion studies flawed

Joe Cortright 2017 (master in Public Policy, expert in regional economic analysis and development ) 28 FEB 2017 Yet Another Flawed Congestion Report From Inrix <https://usa.streetsblog.org/2017/02/28/yet-another-flawed-congestion-report-from-inrix/>

Cue the telephoto lens compVressed photo of freeway traffic; it’s time for yet another report painting a picture of the horrors inflicted on modern society by traffic congestion. This latest installment comes from traffic data firm Inrix, which uses cell phone, vehicle tracking and GPS data to estimate the speed at which traffic moves in cities around the world. Two words summarize our reaction to the new Inrix report: tantalizing and aggravating. The tantalizing part is the amazing data here: Inrix has astonishingly copious and detailed information about how fast traffic is moving, almost everywhere. The aggravating part:  its essentially just being used to generate scary–and inflated–statistics about traffic that shed precious little light on what we might do to actually solve real transportation problems. Its main purpose seems to be to generate press headlines: “Los Angeles Tops Inrix Global Congestion Rankings,” “Atlanta Traffic Among Worst in the World, Study Finds,” and other scary stories. One one level, its a truly impressive display of big data. Inrix has compiled 500 terabytes of data, for hundreds of thousands of roadway segments, from hundreds of millions of sources on more than a thousand cities around the globe. That’s a real wealth of information. [Inrix](http://inrix.com/blog/2017/02/inrix-2016-traffic-scorecard-new-methodology-allows-deeper-insight-into-congestion-in-the-u-s/) casually slips in the factoid that average speeds on New York streets are 8.23 mph, versus 11.07 mph and 11.54 mph in L.A. and San Francisco respectively. But unfortunately, in this particular report, it has chosen to process, filter and present this data in a way that chiefly serves to generate heat, rather than shed any light on the nature, causes and solutions to urban traffic problems. If “big data” and “smart cities” are really going to amount to anything substantial, it has to be more than just generating high tech scare stories. We’ve read through the report, examining its key findings and comparing it to previous work by others. We think there are four fundamental problems that readers should be aware of: the report has a new methodology, which while more detailed than previous reports, is neither comparable to them, nor a major improvement. Like other reports, the definition of congestion is unrealistic, and its cost estimates are exaggerated (with no acknowledgement that building enough capacity to reduce congestion would be even more expensive, and likely be ineffective). Most importantly, like all travel time index measures, the Inrix methodology ignores differences between average travel distances in cities, which effectively penalizes denser, more compact cities. Its disappointing to see so much data providing so little insight into what we might do to understand and solve these problems.

Evidence challenge for Affirmative “urban traffic congestion” harms : It has to meet a list of criteria in order to be credible

Todd Litman 2017 (founder and executive director of the Victoria Transport Policy Institute, an independent research organization dedicated to developing innovative solutions to transport problems.) Smart Congestion Relief  Comprehensive Evaluation Of Traffic Congestion Costs                  and Congestion Reduction Strategies, July 2017 <http://vtpi.org/cong_relief.pdf>

Various methodological factors affect congestion evaluation, including the selection of baseline speeds (the traffic speeds below which delay costs are calculated), travel time unit costs (dollars per hour assigned to congestion delay), assumptions about how speed affects vehicle fuel consumption and emission rates, consideration of generated and induced vehicle travel, and the scope of indirect impacts considered when evaluating potential congestion reduction strategies. Experts recommend the following for accurate and comprehensive congestion evaluation:  Evaluate transport system performance based on overall accessibility (people’s overall ability to reach desired services and activities) rather than just mobility (travel speed).    Measure congestion costs rather than intensity. Intensity indicators, such as roadway level-of-service and the travel time index, do not account for congestion exposure (the amount residents must drive during peak periods).   Measure delays to all travelers, not just to motorists. For example, account for pedestrian and cycling delays caused by wider roads and increased vehicle traffic (called the barrier effect), and congestion avoided if travelers shift to grade-separated transit.  Calculate the marginal congestion costs imposed by road users, rather than just the costs they bear, when calculating efficient road prices or comparing the congestion costs of different modes. Use efficiency-optimizing baseline speeds, such as Level-Of-Service C, rather than freeflow speeds, since moderate traffic speeds maximize roadway throughput and fuel economy, and so tend to be most efficient overall. Acknowledge that freeflow speeds often exceed legal speed limits, and much of estimates congestion “costs” often consist simply of speed limit compliance.  Use travel time values that reflect users’ willingness-to-pay for incremental speed gains. This is typically 30-50% of average wages for personal travel, and total wage, benefits, equipment and product time costs for commercial travel. For value-priced lanes use willingness-to-pay by those who choose that option.  Recognize variations in travel time values, and therefore the efficiency gains provided by policies that favor higher value trips over lower-value trips. This tends to increase the value of priced, freight and high-occupant vehicle priority strategies.  Use accurate fuel efficiency functions. Vehicle fuel efficiency generally peaks at 40-50 miles per hour so reducing moderate congestion (from LOS C to B or A) tends to increase fuel consumption and emissions.   Recognize that congestion tends to maintain self-limiting equilibrium: it increases to the point that delays limit further peak-period vehicle travel. As a result, traffic volumes and congestion costs seldom increase as much as predicted by extrapolating past trends.

SOLVENCY

1. More roads won’t solve urban congestion

Adding new road capacity fails to solve congestion because of "induced demand." More cars are attracted, driving goes up, and the new congestion is as bad as before

Dr. Susan Handy 2015. (PhD; professor in Dept of Environmental Science & Policy, Univ. of California-Davis) Increasing Highway Capacity Unlikely to Relieve Traffic Congestion, Oct 2015 <http://www.dot.ca.gov/research/researchreports/reports/2015/10-12-2015-NCST_Brief_InducedTravel_CS6_v3.pdf>

Traffic congestion has traditionally been addressed by adding additional roadway capacity via constructing entirely new roadways, adding additional lanes to existing roadways, or upgrading existing highways to controlled-access freeways. Numerous studies have examined the effectiveness of this approach and consistently show that adding capacity to roadways fails to alleviate congestion for long because it actually increases vehicle miles traveled (VMT). An increase in VMT attributable to increases in roadway capacity where congestion is present is called “induced travel”. The basic economic principles of supply and demand explain this phenomenon: adding capacity decreases travel time, in effect lowering the “price” of driving; and when prices go down, the quantity of driving goes up.

Additional freeway capacity CANNOT solve urban traffic congestion

Norm Marshall 2017 (Master of Science in Engineering Sciences Dartmouth College; founder & president of Smart Mobility Inc., a transportation and land use planning firm; has managed projects in Chicago, Austin, Baltimore, Washington DC, and Louisville) 3 Aug 2017 "Why urban freeway expansion is futile" <https://www.cnu.org/publicsquare/2017/08/03/why-urban-freeway-expansion-futile>

In fact, additional freeway capacity *cannot* solve traffic congestion. In 1992 Anthony Downs coined the term *triple convergence* in his book *Stuck in Traffic: Coping with Peak-Hour Traffic Congestion*. *Triple convergence* describes how peak period traffic congestion is inevitable because drivers will compensate for capacity increases by (a) shifting routes, (b) shifting time of travel, and (c) shifting travel mode. After capacity expansion, the new equilibrium will be just as congested as the old equilibrium. Downs writes that drivers will choose “limited-access roads that are faster than local streets if they are not congested,” but the attractiveness of such routes will cause them to become congested “to the point where they have no advantage over the alternate routes.” This means that freeways posted at 55 mph or higher will instead operate at the same average speeds as local streets during peak travel periods. We call many of these roads “Interstate Highways” but very little peak period traffic on these roads is long-distance travel. Most of the traffic is from residents making routine daily trips. Adding freeway capacity sucks more of these local travelers onto the freeways. It does not reduce congestion.

SOLVENCY

1. No reduction in congestion

HOT (High Occupancy Toll – a high occupancy lane that a single driver can use if he pays a toll) lanes don't reduce congestion because of "induced demand." Space freed up is quickly filled by new traffic

Kevin Posey 2016 (serves on the Capitol Trails Coalition and on the board of the Virginia Bicycling Federation. Previously, he served as chairman of the Alexandria Transportation Commission) "The Mythology of HOT Lanes" 27 Sept 2016 <https://usa.streetsblog.org/2016/09/27/the-mythology-of-hot-lanes/> (brackets added)

The primary focus of the highway improvements will be an extension of the HOT (high occupancy toll) lanes on I-95 and I-395. The only other speaker after the governor was a representative from Transurban, the [controversial company](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/dr-gridlock/wp/2016/03/28/hot-lanes-operator-reaches-deal-in-tolling-lawsuit-that-alleged-predatory-practices/) that will operate the extended toll lanes. Is [Virginia Governer Terry] McAuliffe right to be so confident in the ability of HOT lanes to eradicate congestion? Let’s look at three key arguments often heard in favor of HOT lanes. **Argument 1: Adding HOT lanes reduces congestion in general lanes along the same route.** According to the Federal Highway Administration, HOT lanes — sometimes branded as “express” or “managed” lanes — pull users from the general lanes because they stay uncongested. As usage of the HOT lanes increases, the toll increases. That keeps those who don’t want to pay the higher toll from entering. If enough drivers leave the general lanes for the toll lanes, the general lanes will move more freely. This argument overlooks the phenomena of induced demand: as capacity increases, traffic also increases, as measured by vehicle miles traveled. The California Department of Transportation, Caltrans, acknowledged this effect could [neutralize](http://www.dot.ca.gov/research/researchreports/reports/2015/10-12-2015-NCST_Brief_InducedTravel_CS6_v3.pdf) capacity expansions within five years.

2. Don't solve bottlenecks

Toll lanes don't solve bottlenecks because you have to merge back into traffic sooner or later

Kevin Posey 2016 (serves on the Capitol Trails Coalition and on the board of the Virginia Bicycling Federation. Previously, he served as chairman of the Alexandria Transportation Commission) "The Mythology of HOT Lanes" 27 Sept 2016 <https://usa.streetsblog.org/2016/09/27/the-mythology-of-hot-lanes/> (brackets added)

Though HOT [High Occupancy Toll] lanes don’t prevent [bottlenecks](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/dr-gridlock/wp/2016/06/29/mcauliffe-hoping-to-lock-in-federal-grant-for-big-road-rail-projects/) from occurring at toll lane exits, lane extensions are usually justified as an effort to eliminate them — just as [highway expansions are typically justified](http://wtop.com/sprawl-crawl/2016/05/ranking-marylands-30-worst-bottlenecks/). But no expressway or HOT lane can deliver drivers directly to their destination, and at some point there will be a bottleneck. This is the [scenario](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/trafficandcommuting/theres-one-place-where-hot-lanes-arent-working/2015/08/27/61d205ae-41ef-11e5-8e7d-9c033e6745d8_story.html) now playing out in northern Virginia, just as it has after every previous expansion of I-95.

3. Failed in California

California I-680 converted to a High Occupancy Toll (HOT) lane, at a cost of $195 million and traffic SLOWED down

Kevin Posey 2016 (serves on the Capitol Trails Coalition and on the board of the Virginia Bicycling Federation. Previously, he served as chairman of the Alexandria Transportation Commission) "The Mythology of HOT Lanes" 27 Sept 2016 <https://usa.streetsblog.org/2016/09/27/the-mythology-of-hot-lanes/> (brackets added)

Citing short-term studies from the 20th century may bias the modeling to yield favorable results. More recent in-depth studies show that traffic does, in fact, slow in reserved lanes after conversion. On California’s I-680 in the southbound reserved lanes, travel speeds dropped significantly after the conversion to HOT lanes in 2010. The cost to local, state, and federal taxpayers for this project was $195 million.

4. Relocates the congestion (doesn’t solve)

Toll roads move the congestion to other roads because people can't or won't pay the tolls

James Ridgeway and Daniel Schulman 2007 (journalists) "The Highwaymen" Jan/Feb 2007 MOTHER JONES magazine <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2007/01/highwaymen/> (first brackets added, second brackets in original)

The problem with public-private deals, [Infrastructure expert at NW Financial, Dennis] Enright argues, is that the companies will cherry-pick the most profitable roads and leave much of the public stuck in the slow lane. He offers this hypothetical: “If you want to go on the Chicago Skyway during rush hour, they can charge you a much higher price because it’s premium travel time. Now what does that do to the rest of the transportation system? It puts all of those people who can’t use the Skyway onto the adjacent roads. Now the adjacent roads are backed up further. Now [the Skyway] can charge even more because they have more of a time advantage.”

5. Not a "market" solution

Toll roads are not a "market" solution because there is no market and no way to correctly price road usage

James Baxter 2002 (founder, National Motorists Association) Ethical disclosure about the date: Article is undated but references materials published in 2002. Why Toll Roads Are A Bad Idea <https://www.motorists.org/issues/tolls/bad-idea/>

A real market-based system has willing sellers, willing buyers, and reasonably unfettered competition. Any highway of consequence falls flat from the get-go, when it comes to market principles. First, highway corridors are not assembled by willing buyers in competition with other willing buyers. The state identifies the corridor it wants, establishes what it considers to be a politically and judicially acceptable price, and condemns the land of those sellers who disagree. This is market principles at the end of a gun barrel. Toll road advocates argue that those who use the system the most will pay the most. Fair enough, but who determines what the buyers should pay? It isn’t competing sellers of similar services. Highway users do not have viable alternatives to buy highway services from other sources. For all practical purposes, there are no other sellers competing for the motorists’ business and realistic alternatives don’t exist.

6. Money diverted or wasted

History proves: Toll money will be diverted or wasted, not used for road improvements

James Baxter 2002 (founder, National Motorists Association) Ethical disclosure about the date: Article is undated but references materials published in 2002. Why Toll Roads Are A Bad Idea <https://www.motorists.org/issues/tolls/bad-idea/>

Toll road proponents are fond of referring to the “new money” that will flow to highway projects. That new money comes from the same tired old wallets that pay existing highway-user fees. The difference is the highway users will pay twice; once in taxes and again in tolls. There are billions of gas-tax dollars being siphoned off for non-highway purposes, or covering government deficits. Anyone who thinks tolls will be any less likely to be usurped for non-highway purposes is not a student of history.

DISADVANTAGES

1. Public rip-off / private enrichment

Indiana example: The state sold off the right to build a road and charge tolls, losing taxpayers huge amounts of money, for massive private profit

James Ridgeway and Daniel Schulman 2007 (journalists) "The Highwaymen" Jan/Feb 2007 MOTHER JONES magazine <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2007/01/highwaymen> (ellipses in original)

Roger Skurski, a professor emeritus of economics at Notre Dame, analyzed the deal extensively on behalf of an Indiana law firm that brought suit to block the transaction. (The lawsuit ultimately failed.) It was Skurski who found that the value of the road, over a 75-year term, could be as much as $11.38 billion; in a letter to Rep. Thomas Petri, the Wisconsin Republican who chaired the U.S. House Subcommittee on Highways, Transit, and Pipelines, the economist wrote that “based on the State of Indiana’s own studies and figures…it seems that the conclusion changes from ‘deal’ to ‘no deal.'” “The public was ignored on this; public opinion was ignored on this,” says Dave Menzer, an organizer at Citizens Action Coalition, an Indianapolis-based advocacy group that also joined the anti-privatization suit. “I think that increasingly the public feels like what’s driving politics, what’s driving these decisions, is multinational corporations and deal-makers like Goldman Sachs, Merrill Lynch, and Morgan Stanley. They’re the ones making tens of millions of dollars ultimately at the public’s expense.”

2. Harms Turn: Toll roads create incentive for more congestion

California example proves: Toll roads are only profitable if other roads are congested, so government has incentive to let congestion get worse

James Baxter 2002 (founder, National Motorists Association) Ethical disclosure about the date: Article is undated but references materials published in 2002. Why Toll Roads Are A Bad Idea <https://www.motorists.org/issues/tolls/bad-idea/>

Think about it, toll roads can’t compete without the presence of congestion and motorist inconvenience on the public highway system. Are congestion problems going to be corrected if they threaten the income of the toll road? Not in our lifetimes! Motorists found this out the hard way in Orange County, California, when a clause in the model contract for the 91 Freeway Express Lanes prevented expansion of the freeway’s regular lanes. As a result, congestion got so bad that in April 2002 the Orange County Transportation Authority paid $207.5 million to buy out the toll lanes that originally cost just $139 million to build.

3. Harmful side-effects

Toll Roads = Human carnage, property damage, air pollution and inconvenience

James Baxter 2002 (founder, National Motorists Association) Ethical disclosure about the date: Article is undated but references materials published in 2002. Why Toll Roads Are A Bad Idea <https://www.motorists.org/issues/tolls/bad-idea/>

A major retardant to the expansion of toll roads, besides arbitrary tolls, has been the inconvenience of the toll-paying systems. Little is ever mentioned of the human carnage, property damage, air pollution, and inconvenience attributable to toll-booth systems. Government spokesmen always tell us that “safety is our first priority,” except where it interferes with revenue generation.

4. Unfair double-taxation

New tolls on highways = paying for the same road twice

Miles Morin 2014 (*spokesman for the*[Alliance for Toll-Free Interstates](http://www.tollfreeinterstates.com/)*.* ) 10 June 2014 Interstate Tolling Proposal is a Bad Idea <https://www.motorists.org/blog/interstate-tolling-proposal-bad-idea/>

Beyond this shuffling of funds, tolling an existing interstate for any reason is difficult to justify on principle. Interstate construction and maintenance has been funded through fuel taxes since the system’s inception in 1956. Requiring drivers to pay a new toll in addition to a gas tax is paying for the same road twice.

5. Increased traffic accidents

Tolls divert traffic to other roads, so now those get congested instead. And they're not designed for the traffic, so accidents go up

Miles Morin 2014 (*spokesman for the*[Alliance for Toll-Free Interstates](http://www.tollfreeinterstates.com/)*.* ) 10 June 2014 Interstate Tolling Proposal is a Bad Idea <https://www.motorists.org/blog/interstate-tolling-proposal-bad-idea/>

Moreover, tolls cause traffic diversion that creates congestion on local and secondary roads near toll facilities. The congestion delays response times for emergency personnel who rely on these secondary routes. A recent study on the effects of tolls in North Carolina predicted that tolls would divert more than one-third of traffic to alternate routes, contributing to delays, traffic accidents and wear and tear on secondary roads not built to handle high traffic.

6. Hurts the economy

Tolls increase cost of shipping goods and take away workers' pay

Miles Morin 2014 (*spokesman for the*[Alliance for Toll-Free Interstates](http://www.tollfreeinterstates.com/)*.* ) 10 June 2014 Interstate Tolling Proposal is a Bad Idea <https://www.motorists.org/blog/interstate-tolling-proposal-bad-idea/>

Tolls on existing interstates are bad for the economy. Tolls increase the costs of shipping goods and services and make more expensive the price we all pay at the grocery store and at the mall. Daily commute tolls take a bite out of a worker’s take home pay. And, tolls are particularly unfair to low-income and elderly Americans living on fixed incomes who must pay a higher percentage of their income to access tolled interstates.

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