

Truck toll hike opposition cites harm to state recovery

By [Justin Mason](#) September 6, 2012



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A Price Chopper tractor-trailer passes through Exit 25A of the New York State Thruway in Rotterdam on Wednesday morning.

Nearly 60 percent of the supplies used at Dimension Fabricators come via the state Thruway.

Company CEO Scott Stevens said his trucks hauling steel into the Glenville plant and rebar out to customers typically spend about \$62,000 in tolls along the 570-mile system over the course of a year. And that cost could increase by roughly \$28,000 if a proposed 45 percent toll increase for trucks is implemented by the Thruway Authority

“If it doesn’t come in a rail car, it has to come on the Thruway for a significant part of the ride,” he said.

The hike probably wouldn’t imperil the growing company of 60-plus workers, but it certainly wouldn’t make doing business any easier. Stevens said the proposed toll hike would be yet another dig into his bottom line as he already contends with rising costs.

“It’s sort of like death from a thousand cuts,” he said.

This sentiment was shared by David Golub, senior vice president of administration for the Schenectady-based Golub Corp. He said the proposed hike will cost about \$250,000 extra per year for Price Chopper’s fleet of trucks alone and send a ripple of cost increases that will ultimately reach consumers.

For instance, about 71 percent of the shipping companies hauling products into the grocer’s five distribution facilities in Rotterdam and Guilderland use the Thruway. He said the combined cost of the proposed increase will translate into a higher cost for goods at a time when the economy is already weak.

“It will serve as a tax on businesses and consumers,” he said. “It’s going to hit everybody.”

Golub and Stevens were among about two dozen business owners and trade association members railing against the proposed hike during a public hearing Wednesday, hosted by five Republican state assemblymen. Assemblymen James Tedisco and Steve McLaughlin arranged the forum at the Alfred E. Smith Building after the Thruway Authority solicited comments about the hike in Newburgh, Syracuse and Buffalo, but failed to host a public hearing in the Albany area.

Tedisco, R-Glenville, blasted the authority for proposing another toll hike after imposing four since 2005. He questioned why the authority would boost tolls at a time when the state is struggling to rebound economically.

“Everyone knows that when the cost of goods and services goes up, businesses either cut back their workforce reduce their economic footing or pass the costs on to the consumer,” he said. “In many cases, it’s all three.”

The toll hike was proposed for trucks with three axles or larger and was proposed in May as a way to put the authority on sound financial footing.

The authority could approve the increase later this month, meaning the new toll could take effect starting in October. Executive Director Thomas Madison said the increase is aimed at ensuring the authority has the capital available to keep the highway safe, since it receives no tax money for repairs.

“The proposed toll increase is targeted to address the inequality that exists between cars and large commercial trucks, which put thousands of times more wear and tear on the road but are charged only five times as much as passenger vehicles,” he said in a statement released Wednesday.

But business leaders and legislators attending the hearing weren’t convinced. Many questioned why such an increase is being considered at a time when the state is desperately trying to foster a more positive climate for business.

“This is like one step forward and two steps back,” said McLaughlin, R-Melrose. “This really sets us back on the progress of economic development.”

Some suggested the authority finally shed the Canal Corporation, which also operates the Erie Canal. Others called for the authority itself to be dissolved so that the Thruway could come under the control of the state Department of Transportation, which is funded through the state’s general fund.

“Heck, Massachusetts did it,” said Stevens, referring to the Bay State’s creation of an over-arching agency to oversee the Massachusetts Turnpike in 2009.

Julie Suarez, a spokeswoman for the New York Farm Bureau, said the hike will place even more of a burden on the state’s agricultural businesses. She said farmers struggling with increased fuel costs and poor weather conditions — ranging from floods to draughts — are ill-prepared to cope with the added cost.

“Farmers now are already in a very difficult economic position,” she said.

Minden Supervisor Tom Quackenbush said the hike could also have the effect of driving big rigs onto non-toll road that aren’t designed to hold such a weight capacity. He characterized the hike as a way to pass on the Thruway Authority’s deficit onto businesses and consumers.

“It’s another tax,” he said. “There’s no way around that.”