



## Road tolls on the DVP may be inevitable

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Tues., Dec. 10, 2019

When Premier Doug Ford updates his Christmas wish list, it would be prudent if he wrote down “congestion management” and “resilient revenue tools” for 2020 and beyond.

Ontario must find new ways to finance vital infrastructure, including public transit and roads. We suggest our elected officials take a close look at dynamic road pricing for the province’s most urbanized centres, including the GTHA.

Efficiently set road prices offer distinct advantages and there are a variety of models employed around the world. For modern tolling, fees are often based on distance driven and peak travel time (higher charges during certain times of the day).

There are several reasons why our premier and municipal leaders in Ontario’s largest municipalities would be advised to consider road pricing:

- Queen’s Park coffers need to be replenished in the face of plummeting fuel tax revenue, which finances a wide range of local infrastructure;
- Clogged roads have reduced productivity for commuters and those involved in goods movement, ultimately impacting economic growth. Road pricing can reduce congestion by acting as a travel demand management tool;
- Managing congestion will reduce greenhouse gas emissions;
- With connected and autonomous vehicles on the horizon, road pricing is inevitable, especially with real-time data collection. Ontario can show leadership in promoting the innovation agenda.

[Despite efforts by the previous government to adopt a regional investment strategy](#), there have been bumps on the road to implementing these kinds of infrastructure-related charges.

In February 2017, a Toronto Star headline dramatically exclaimed that [Tolls are Dead but Ontario Cities’ Bills are Piling Up](#) after then-premier Kathleen Wynne blocked Toronto’s plans to place tolls on the DVP and the Gardiner Expressway. While Mississauga Mayor Bonnie

Crombie supported Toronto Mayor John Tory's "right to ask for that right to implement that tax," she also called for new taxation powers for local governments.

A recent study, "[Ontario's Downward Trend for Fuel Tax Revenue: Will Road Pricing Fill the Gap?](#)", commissioned by the Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario, focuses on a growing problem: behavioural and technological shifts will result in plummeting fuel tax revenues. On a per capita basis, demand for gasoline in Ontario is expected to drop by almost half from 1,054 litres in 2018 to 599 litres by 2040.

The purchase of more fuel-efficient, hybrid and electric vehicles has already led to significantly lower provincial fuel tax revenue without any perceptible reduction in highway usage. Frankly, electric vehicle drivers, who do not pay fuel taxes, get a free ride. While their carbon footprints are smaller, they are not financially contributing to our transportation infrastructure.

Meanwhile, new mobility services, including ride hailing or ride sharing and e-scooters, continue to transform the way people commute, but will intensify the trend to lower fuel demand. Ontario's ability to build new infrastructure via fuel taxes is clearly under threat.

Planning must begin immediately for some form of dynamic road pricing. Efficiently set prices are critical if this kind of service is to be fair and managed well.

A properly priced network on major arterial roads and highways can influence all aspects of travel choice: trip frequency, destination, mode, time of day or week, route and so on. Depending on the toll rate, hundreds of millions of dollars in revenue can be earmarked for both public transit and road maintenance, which would most likely enhance public acceptance.

The most likely pricing scheme for Ontario in the near future includes a network of High Occupancy Toll (HOT) lanes on major arterial roads and highways running into or through cities. As Tory suggested in 2017, start with the Gardiner and the DVP, but go beyond this with HOT lanes on our 400-series highways.

We ask Premier Doug Ford to remember the comment he made in 2012 as a Toronto councillor when he expressed support for a toll to rebuild the Gardiner Expressway: "I'd pay the \$5 to get downtown every day."

So would we. Here's hoping forward-looking, resilient revenue tools will be under the Queen's Park agenda tree this year.

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