

Subscribe Today - 2 weeks FREE

THE BUFFALO NEWS

Search | ARTICLES | ARCHIVE | PHOTOS | MORE

GO TO BUFFALO.COM
Wednesday, December 15, 2004



Flurries
26°F / -3°C

more weather>>

Marketplace | CARS | HOMES | JOBS | CLASSIFIEDS | SUBSCRIBE | PLACE AN AD

- News
- ▶ Front Page
- ▶ City & Region
- ▶ Sports
- ▶ Business Today
- ▼ National/World
- State
- National
- International
- Behind the Headlines
- ▶ Opinion
- ▶ Deaths
- ▶ Life & Arts
- ▶ Entertainment
- ▶ Special News Report

National/World

Front Page > National/World > State

Email this story
 Print this story
 Get Headlines by Email
 Most popular stories
 More by this author

Previous

- Weekly Features
- ▶ The Link (Mon.)
- ▶ NeXt (Wed.)
- ▶ Gusto (Fri.)
- ▶ TV Topics (Sun.)
- ▶ First Sunday

Next

Thruway to unveil 25% hike in tolls

- More from Buffalo.com
- - Dining
 - Art & Theater
 - Music
 - Movies & TV
 - Outdoor
 - Family/Community
- Features
- ▶ Complete AP News
- Directory Search

Moving Williamsville toll barrier part of plan

By TOM PRECIOUS
News Albany Bureau
12/15/2004

ALBANY - Motorists would see Thruway tolls rise by 25 percent to help pay for nearly \$2 billion in capital construction that would bring faster toll booth lanes, discounts for commuters heading to Buffalo and other cities and construction to ease the system's most congested areas, such as the Williamsville toll barrier

Tolls will rise 35 percent on commercial vehicles, officials said.

The increase, the first in 16 years, could get preliminary approval as early as Thursday when the state Thruway Authority board is expected to meet, several sources told The Buffalo News. If approved, it would go through several other steps, including public hearings, before final adoption.

Thruway spokesman Dan Gilbert declined to comment, except to confirm that the board will meet Thursday to consider a multiyear capital plan and a financing program.

A government source, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the plan calls for extensive construction along the system's entire 641-mile length.

In Western New York, the plan calls for moving the Williamsville toll barrier, a bottleneck that has long been a sore point for drivers, planners and area officials. Precisely how it would be done was not available Tuesday night

A series of traffic "congestion relief" steps also will be proposed between Exits 49 and 52-A, the source said, and between Exit 54 and the Lackawanna barrier. The work could include widening, adding or straightening lanes

Faster E-ZPass lanes

MAX SEARCH
Powered by The Talking Phone Book

Keyword

Yellow Page Categories:
A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P
Q R S T U V W X Y Z

People Search

Reverse Phone Lookup:

• Prei
 • Dav

Use our printed directory
View or Download



At least five toll booths in the area, as well as the Lackawanna toll barrier, would be reconstructed to ease traffic flow.

• FW:
• T-M
• Ada

Work on the Williamsville toll barrier would involve placement of fast lanes for E-ZPass drivers, allowing drivers to travel through the barrier at regular highway speeds to reduce congestion. In addition, E-ZPass drivers would be able to travel at speeds up to 35 mph through the Lackawanna and Ripley toll barriers

[Ads t](#)

Though the plan does not include the removal of controversial toll barriers coming into Buffalo, officials said commuters to downtown will get discounts.

[Buff
tick
Wid
ticke
man
fan
www](#)

A government source, without providing details, said commuters will be able to sign up for a discount plan. The discount would be part of the first systemwide toll reduction for regular commuters

Additionally, sources said the agency, in an effort to expand the E-ZPass system, will propose a 10 percent discount for drivers of passenger vehicles who sign up for the program.

[NFL
\\$25
Hug
grea
toda
NFL
www](#)

That would mean, officials said, that a current \$1 toll that would rise to \$1.25 under the 25 percent toll hike proposal would be discounted to \$1.13 for E-ZPass users. For commercial users, the E-ZPass discount would be 5 percent

2000 rate hike failed

Officials last tried to raise Thruway tolls in 2000, when a plan was offered to steadily raise tolls over several years. The agency, under political pressure in an election year, withdrew the idea. Critics at the time said the state, with a \$3 billion surplus, should not raise tolls. Today, though, the state faces a \$6 billion deficit

[The
Che
sche
ticke
Buff
gam
Ticke](#)

Gov. George E. Pataki insisted in 2000 he was unaware of the Thruway's plan to hike rates, even though his administration ostensibly controls the agency. Eventually, he publicly opposed the idea. On Tuesday, the governor's office did not dismiss the plan

"We'll review what the Thruway Authority proposes," said Todd Alhart, a Pataki spokesman.

[Buy
Gea
Free
Hug
Eas
orde
affili
www](#)

The last toll hike, a 30 percent increase in 1988, saw the state initiate a nine-year, \$1.7 billion capital plan for the highway system, which includes the 426-mile mainline stretch from Buffalo to New York City.

Officials representing various trucking companies, which would get the biggest toll hikes at a time of rising fuel prices, declined to comment

Sources said the agency had discussed some vague capital plans but did not discuss ways to pay for the construction program. Already, though, construction companies were jumping at the Thruway improvement plan.

Higher increase urged

A.J. Castelbuono, president of Associated General Contractors, which represents about 500 highway construction-related firms, said Tuesday night that the authority should push tolls higher than the 25 percent it is considering

"That's not enough," he said, to repair what he said is a once-envied highway system that has been left to deteriorate over the years.

Castelbuono said the state must turn to a more pay-as-you-go system to fund Thruway improvements and rely less on expensive borrowing or what he says will be a less generous federal government for financial help. "We're out of gimmicks," he said.

It was too soon Tuesday night to determine the State Legislature's reaction to the plan.

Assembly Majority Leader Paul Tokasz, D-Cheektowaga, said his house would examine the plan after it's unveiled Thursday. But he said he hoped the proposal would eliminate toll barriers and begin commuter discounts in the Buffalo area.

"That doesn't happen anywhere else in the state," he said of the toll barriers going into Buffalo.

e-mail: tprecious@buffnews.com

[PREVIOUS STORY](#) [TOP](#) [NEXT STORY](#)

[Click here for Gusto events!](#)



2 WEEKS OF THE BUFFALO NEWS
ABSOLUTELY FREE
Limited Time Offer

[FAQ](#) | [Help](#) | [Site Map](#) | [Subscribe to the News](#)
Copyright 1999 - 2004 - The Buffalo News