





 print story 
 back 

Boost in tolls, but many miles to go

Despite rise in revenue, Thruway says fare hikes needed to pay for projects

By CATHY WOODRUFF, Staff writer

First published: Friday, March 4, 2005

ALBANY -- Motorists drove more miles than ever on the Thruway last year, paying \$12.4 million more in tolls than the year before for their trips.

But while the nearly 3 percent growth in tolls made it a good year compared with others this decade, Thruway Authority officials say a toll hike planned to go into effect in mid-May still is necessary to fund a six-year road and canal reconstruction plan.

"We cannot fund a \$2.6 billion capital program with a 3 percent increase in traffic and revenue. We would estimate that the increase in traffic and revenue would have to be closer to 20 or 30 percent a year" to cover needed construction and repairs without a toll increase, said Thruway Authority spokesman Daniel Gilbert.

The Thruway Authority is proposing to hike tolls 25 percent for most passenger cars and 35 percent for trucks.

As part of the "toll adjustment" package, the authority also plans to introduce new discounts for drivers who pay tolls electronically through E-ZPass accounts. Word of the discounts comes even as the authority introduces new measures to try to collect an estimated \$3.4 million in delinquent tolls from motorists and \$19.9 million in related fees.

The authority's consultant, Vollmer Associates, estimates that the changes will bring in an additional \$104 million this year and \$147 million more in 2006, the first full year of implementation.

The bulk of the money from the toll increase would be used to pay for extensive reconstruction of the 50-year-old concrete road surface, bridge replacements and repairs, new parking spaces for trucks, noise-reduction walls and higher-speed and highway-speed E-ZPass lanes.


A \$206 million portion would pay for construction on the state canal system, and \$330 million would go for equipment purchases and building repairs.

The 283.6 million trips taken on the Thruway last year were up 3.6 percent from the year before, and 8.5 percent since 2001.

The 2.9 percent increase in toll revenue in 2004 was the best the Thruway has seen in recent years. Toll collections were nearly stagnant in 2003, growing less than 0.15 percent as the number of trips rose by just 1.8 percent.

Last year's growth in tolls and other sources, such as restaurant and gasoline concessions, was slightly better than projected in the authority budget for the year, and authority officials say it may reflect a period of relative stability in gasoline prices.


"People tend to take family trips more regularly and more frequently when gas prices are more predictable," Gilbert said. Also, he said, "I think our customers recognize the convenience and the safety of our system."



TIMES UNION
E-EDITION

An EXACT digital copy of the print edition is available online

CLICK HERE FOR A FREE SAMPLE



timesunion.com

Traffic volumes on the Thruway have continued to grow every year this decade, despite intensified congestion, especially at busy locations such as Albany's Exit 24 and the Tappan Zee Bridge between Rockland and Westchester counties.

Hearings for the public to weigh in on the proposed toll hike and six-year reconstruction plan are scheduled to take place around the state next month.

Locally, the meeting will be held from 4 to 7 p.m. on April 6 in the Marcelle Athletic Complex at Siena College in Loudonville. A sign-in period will begin 15 minutes before the start of the hearing for those who wish to speak.

The Thruway Authority also is accepting comments via e-mail at PublicInfo@thruway.state.ny.us.

The Thruway's three-member Board of Directors is scheduled to vote on the toll increase at its April 25 meeting.

All Times Union materials copyright 1996-2005, Capital Newspapers Division of The Hearst Corporation, Albany, N Y

[CONTACT US](#) | [HOW TO ADVERTISE](#) | [YOUR PRIVACY RIGHTS](#) | [FULL COPYRIGHT](#) | [CLASSROOM ENRICHMENT](#)