



Senator Dawn Hill
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May 19, 2017

MaryBeth Richardson, Hearing Officer
Maine Department of Environmental Protection
312 Canco Road
Portland, Maine 04103

RE: York Toll Plaza Project

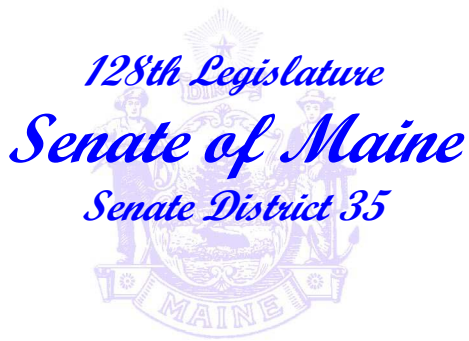
Dear Ms. Richardson,

Thank you very much for conducting a most appropriate and much needed Public Hearing on the matter of the "to be constructed" York Toll Plaza in York, Maine.

I am most familiar with this matter dating back to the formation of Think Again and its first challenge to the MTA's approach to replacement of the existing toll plaza approximately 10 years ago. I write today to both refresh your memories about the MTA's past and any challenge to them, as well as to highlight some important points on the matter before you.

First, I ask that you keep front and center the following important points and analyze them based on the evidence presented to date and at the Public Hearing:

- The delay in constructing a new tollbooth plaza has occurred due to a number of valid issues surrounding the MTA's proposals raised by York and the citizens group Think Again. All of MTA's proposals have failed to include an AET option and thus their final proposal outlines plans to construct an unnecessary massive toll complex. Think Again and the Town of York's query into an AET alternative resulted in the Army Corps of Engineers requirement that MTA consider this.
- The need to replace the aging York tollbooth is not being challenged. Rather the issue is what the best and most forward thinking replacement available is at this point. Trends and data indicate that ORT is out of date, and will lead to a need to increase tolls.
- MTA's facts and figures indicate that an ORT plaza will result in a \$24 million shortfall. This would not be the case with an AET plaza.
- Shortfalls will ultimately have to be made up with higher tolls. These are not in the best interests of Maine's people, most of whom need to use the Turnpike for personal and commercial use.
- Exaggerated surcharges and diversion claims by MTA are inaccurate because they are based on inflated data from 2014. These claims need to be reassessed utilizing the most current data.



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- EZ Pass usage is on the increase, thanks to MTA's promotion of such in Maine and expansion of EZ Pass in other states making AET a most viable choice.
- The question is not will we or won't we construct a new toll plaza — that issue has been settled. The question is what type of plaza we will build. Therefore the impact concerns voiced by the construction and transport industry are unfounded and demonstrate a lack of accurate information placed before them.

Second, let us not forget that there was a long period that lasted until about 6 years ago when there was little challenge, query or oversight of the MTA, its practices and projects. An investigation into MTA by the Office of Program Evaluation and Government Accountability (OPEGA), sparked by information gleaned from efforts to support Think Again's position, revealed that much was awry within the organization. Its executive director was imprisoned and the organization was somewhat overhauled. This misconduct would likely not have gone so far if those on the inside and outside who were charged with oversight had been more vigilant.

I do not suggest that there is anything afoul at MTA at this time; however, I believe it behooves all of us to remember why things at MTA went so very wrong over time. I point to the past because a course correction, such as has happened with the MTA structure and laws, does not give permission to have a relaxed attitude toward the MTA by those who are charged to watch, probe and lead. In addition to the Legislature and the MTA Board, citizens and municipalities also have both a right and a duty to take an active role in questioning MTA project plans. When citizens and municipalities find that the information being imposed upon them does not add up, kudos to them for having the courage and constitution to challenge the data and decision makers.

It is ever so disappointing to have state government officials belittle their efforts, their intelligence and their right to actively participate in such challenges. Large capital-intensive projects and higher tolls are not good for any of the people or businesses of Maine, plain and simple. The Town of York and the Think Again citizens' efforts recognize this for themselves and all of Maine. Their efforts should be welcomed and emulated.

Most importantly, the good work and analyses of the evidence in this matter by the DEP should not be impacted in any way by politics or politicians, and certainly not by industries that stand to directly gain. Please stay the course and keep the mission you were entrusted with by the people of Maine foremost in mind as you work your way through this very important matter.

Sincerely,

Senate District 35