



WHITE PAPER VERSION 1.0

RE: HIGH SPEED TOLLS

1. ISSUE

High-speed tolling systems (tolls collected without separate registration or even slowdown) are increasingly common throughout New York State. The Grand Island Bridges, however, rely heavily on the oldest, dirtiest, and most economically inefficient types of tolls—collection by hand.

Given the costs of collection by hand, the dangers caused by this oldest of collection methods, and the availability of other forms of technology already in use elsewhere in New York State, shouldn't Grand Island immediately change to a high-speed tolling system?

2. BACKGROUND

Over 80 years ago, when the Grand Island tolls were originally installed, the New York State Legislature promised the tolls would disappear once the amount collected covered the initial construction costs. But as we know, that's the bait and switch that's often pulled. Once tolls go in, they almost never go away. It's just too easy to keep using that money.

The Grand Island tolls have paid for far more than the bridges, including a highway system, the canals (responsibility for canals however recently transferred to the Power Authority), and even bridges elsewhere across the State. Sadly, every time the tolls have been set to disappear, some form of legislative gymnastics is used to make sure they stay. For more detailed information on the history of the Grand Island tolls see teardownthegrandislandtolls.com.

The continued presence of the tolls cause 3 major problems:

1. Dangerous levels of pollution;
2. Traffic congestion and damage to the bridges; and
3. Economic burden that overwhelms the revenue the tolls produce

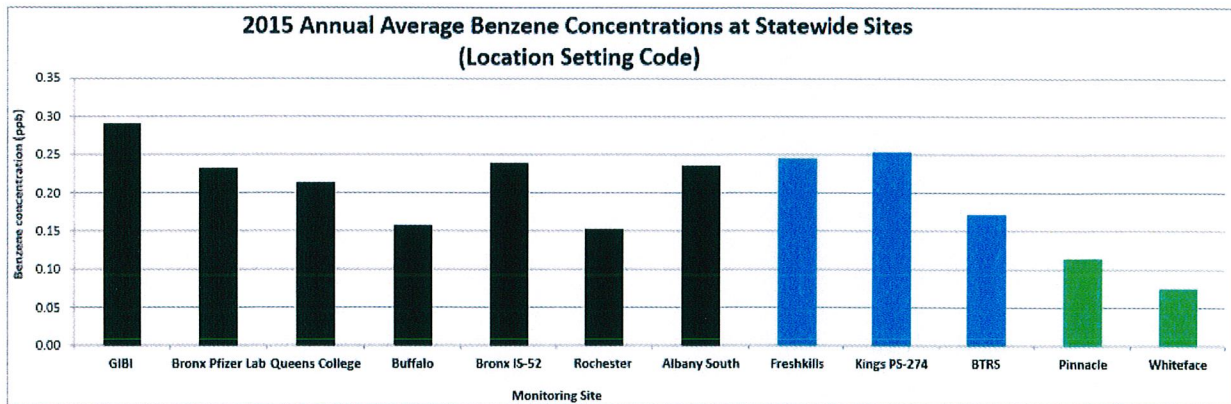
Given the lack of transparency, finding hard data on the tolls, e.g. wait times, pollution statistics, is difficult. But all the evidence we do have (both quantitative and qualitative) indicates that the tolls harm both our health and our economy.

3. THE TOLLS HARM OUR HEALTH

A. We have higher and more dangerous levels of Benzene at the Grand Island tolls than anywhere else in New York State.

In an update published December, 2016 by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation in the Tonawanda Community Air Quality Study, findings reveal Grand Island is exposed to a significantly higher amount of Benzene than comparable communities statewide. In 2015, Grand Island recorded an annual average of .29 (PPB) of Benzene. This was over 31% higher than statewide average of .19 (PPB). The tolls (as explained below) are undoubtedly a significant contributor to this Benzene concentration.

Incredibly, one of the locations with readings relatively close to those found on Grand Island is Fresh Kills on Staten Island. A green, tree-covered place (like Grand Island) should not be subject to the type of pollution (or in our case, much worse pollution) than a place with an infamous 2,200-acre landfill and all manner of heavy industry. Please see the graph below where Grand Island is represented as “GIBI.”



Note: The NYS monitoring sites are organized according to their location setting codes with the various colors representing the following: BLACK = URBAN, BLUE = SUBURBAN, and GREEN = RURAL.

B. Our stop-and-go tolls create great clouds of pollution.

The pollution problem on Grand Island is made exponentially worse because the type of tolls we have create the greatest amount of pollution. On Grand Island, vehicles must join a standing queue and often come to a complete stop—routinely a series of stop-and-go cycles. Even E-ZPass (where there is still a slowdown) creates a great deal of unnecessary emissions. This was shown in a study titled “Measuring and Modeling Emission Effects for Toll Facilities” by Margarida Coelho, Tiago Farias, and Nagui Roupail.

Below are two charts from that study. The first shows the effects of E-ZPass on emissions and pollution. The second shows the effects of a traditional stop toll (i.e., a congestion toll, where someone collects the money by hand) on emissions and pollution. As you can see, the stop-and-go process is responsible for 39% of CO₂ emissions, 35% of HC emissions, and 24% of NO emissions. Also note, the stop-and-go process is actually responsible for more than 99% of the CO emissions at conventional toll booths.

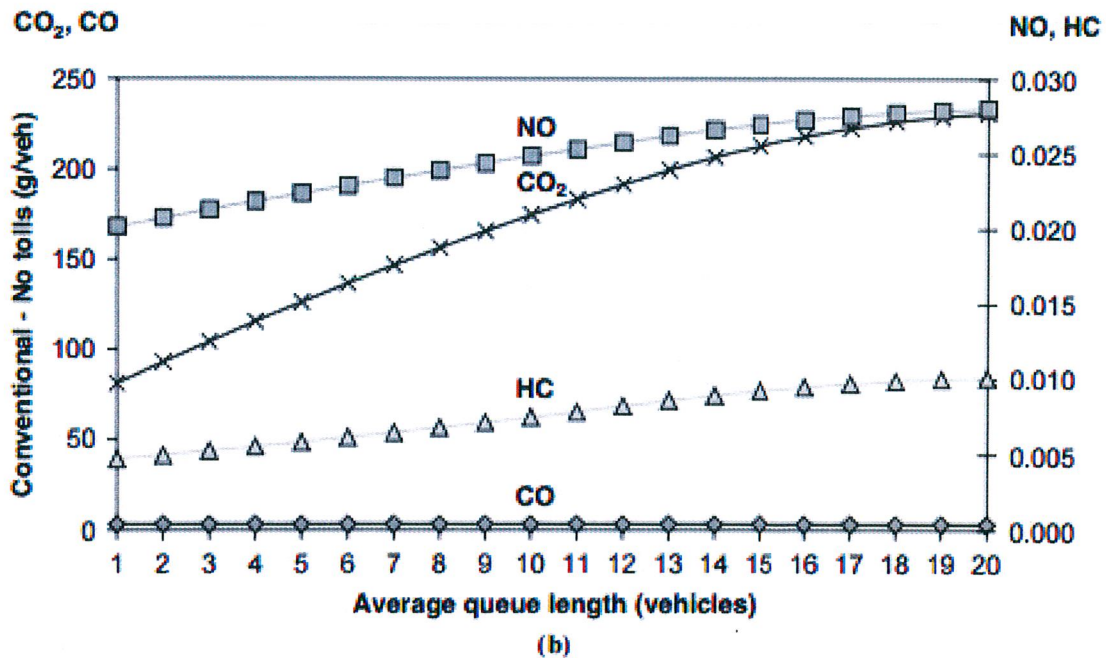
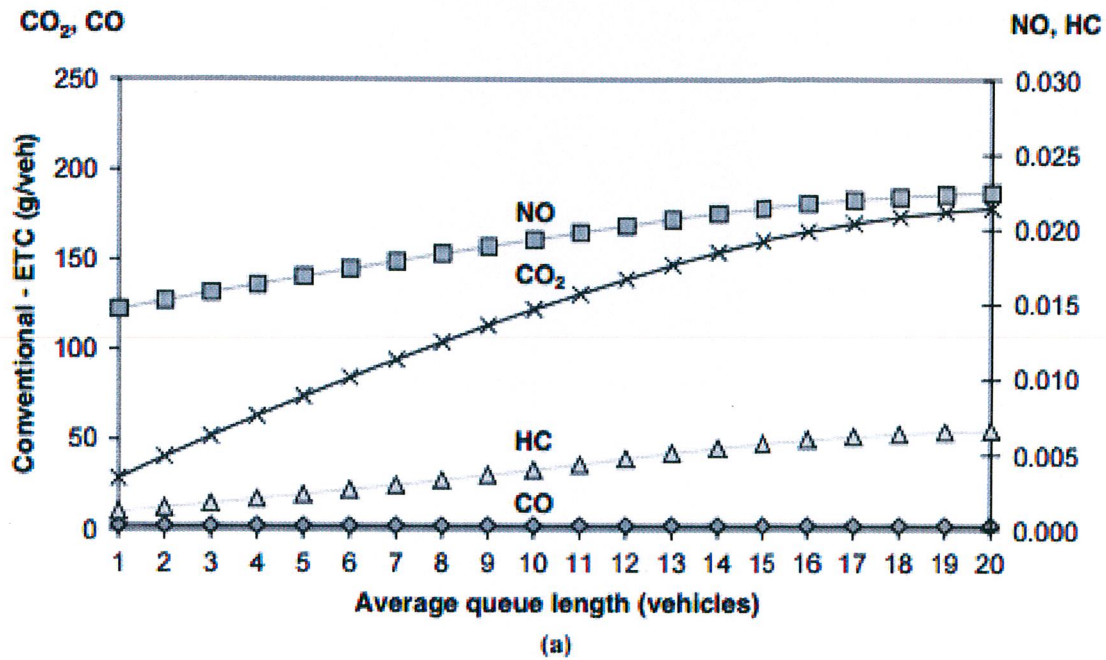


FIGURE 4 Increase in emissions (g/veh) versus average queue length for (a) conventional tolls versus ETC systems and (b) conventional tolls versus no tolls.

4. THE TOLLS HURT OUR ECONOMY

- A. We all know it instinctively, but studies prove that drivers will go to great lengths to avoid tolls.

Because of the aggravation and wait, research shows that drivers will go to great lengths to avoid tolls. Even obstacles such as paid parking have less of an effect on drivers' travel habits. Specifically,

a study published in Transport Policy titled “Congestion tolls and parking fees: A comparison of the potential effect on travel behavior” by Gila Albert and David Mahalel showed that “congestion tolls” (like we have on Grand Island) create a high level of demand elasticity (-1.8 for congestion tolls and -1.2 for parking fees were found). Or put differently, drivers prefer just about anything to going through a toll where someone collects the toll money by hand.

But we don’t need research to prove what most people in Western New York already know. Recently, the *Buffalo News* printed a picture of the looming Grand Island bridges with a comment reflecting on the “dread” people feel when they see them. That dread is not caused by the dollar. It’s caused by the impending wait.

On any given night or day (with concerts in Lewiston, Sabres games, Bills games, and now happenings at Canal Side in Buffalo) the wait can be especially long. Sadly, given modern technology, there is no reason for us to continue congesting this main route connecting the upper Niagara to the lower Niagara and our region’s greatest and emerging attractions.

B. High-speed tolls are not cutting edge; collection by hand is just incredibly outdated and economically inefficient.

KPMG completed a study called “The Evolution of Tolling.” That study is based on an in-depth survey collected from more than 40 tolling companies and agencies worldwide. The study concludes that high speed tolling options are not exactly cutting edge, but increasingly common.

91% of all respondents to the study said that they now offer some form of electronic tolling or video tolling, including 43% saying they already use “open road tolls” (i.e., “ORT” or high speed tolls). More than half (53%) said that they had upgraded their tolling system within the last five years and a further 18% said they are now upgrading their tolling technology. Yes, as stated, New York is also upgrading the technology it uses at many tolling locations. On Grand Island, however, we have been stuck with the same technology (someone collecting by hand) for more than 80 years with no concrete plan for change.

What is most notable about KPMG’s findings is the apparent lack of efficiency related to the type of tolls we have on Grand Island. There are significant variations regarding the cost to collect tolls. On average, the industry spends US\$0.43 per transaction, while the more inefficient operators report costs of more than US\$0.59 per transaction. We can only guess what the tolls cost on Grand Island given labor demands, etc. But even presuming it is near the industry average, the mere 50 cents made on each toll collected is unlikely worth the aggravation, pollution, and broader negative economic impact that the tolls create.

C. The tolls hurt of the Grand Island’s economy.

Long ago, when the tolls came in, Grand Island lost a great deal. As the host community for the bridges, the tolls, and other state lands, Grand Island forfeited more than 15% of its taxable land. Further, it’s a disheartening reality for every business on Grand Island. Off-island customers do not come to Grand Island—because of the tolls. And everything we do on Grand Island (from road work to shipping deliveries) is taxed. Many businesses have tried incentives, like giving the dollar back to their customers. But no gimmick can overcome the challenge the tolls present.

Our location is right in the center of Western New York at the heart of the Niagara River. With this Island setting and prime real estate, we should be an important hub. But there are many stories

about businesses leaving Grand Island out of desperation because of the tolls. For example, a resident-owned and operated fuel trucking company had to move off of Grand Island solely because of the tolls. The owner, a well-respected local leader, built his company from the ground up. But eventually he moved his entire operation off the Island (all 50 plus trucks) because he was paying thousands a month just in tolls. Sadly, this sort of account is not unique.

We've argued in the past that a portion of the approximate 20 million dollars in annual toll revenue should remain in Grand Island to offset the negative impact the tolls have on the Grand Island economy. As maybe the only municipality of its kind—completely locked in by tolls without any form of bypass—it's a discussion we should continue to have.

5. PUBLIC OPINION INDICATES STRONG OPPOSITION

Even a glancing analysis points to the growing public discontent over the Grand Island tolls. This discontent intensifies after every announcement of high-speed tolling advancements downstate. Over the last year, literally thousands of signatures have been collected, public forums held, and feedback received. Below are a few visual representations of recent casual polls taken by my office and local media.

A. WIVB News Twitter Poll

After only 15 hours on Twitter, the WIVB poll showed an overwhelming 90% of voters think the Grand Island Bridge tolls should be eliminated.



B. WKBW Twitter Poll

A separate Twitter Poll posted by WKBW-TV also found equally strong support for removing the tolls.



C. Supervisor Poll

Finally (in addition to other polls), a survey conducted on natemcmurray.com also showed a strong preference for change on the Grand Island Bridges.

5. What is your opinion on the Grand Island Bridge tolls?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Leave the system as it is	8.9%	80
Replace existing toll plazas with overhead electronic toll collectors	18.0%	162
Relocate toll collection to one central location on the Island	4.1%	37
Eliminate tolls entirely	61.0%	548
Other (please specify)	7.9%	71

D. Bipartisan local leadership has asked for high-speed tolls.

After my office spoke out in 2016, a bipartisan coalition of like-minded leaders has stepped forward demanding change, including Congressman Brian Higgins (Democrat), Mayor Rick Davis of Tonawanda (Democrat), Supervisor Joe Emminger of the Town of Tonawanda (Democrat), Senator Chris Jacobs (Republican), and many others.

Please note the following comments:

“The tolls make no sense. Unless someone has to come here, they don’t. And it’s not about the dollar. It’s about the wait. Change is long overdue.”

—*Eric Fiebelkorn, President, Grand Island Chamber of Commerce*

“The tolls have been killing the growth and development of the industries we need on the Island, like eco-tourism. We are so excited about the Welcome Center. But let’s make it even more welcoming by getting rid of the traffic jams and especially the pollution. Something has to change.”

—*Councilwoman Beverly Kinney, Grand Island, and long-time member (now liaison) to the Grand Island Economic Advisory Board.*

“We need to figure out a way to better connect Buffalo to Niagara Falls. We can’t keep this road blocked up with people collecting dollar bills. It just slows everything down. We need high speed tolls”

—*Patrick Whalen, President, Niagara Global Tourism Institute*

“After 80 years, we need change now. Give us what others take for granted. Give us high speed tolls!”

—*Brian R. Michel, WNY for Grand Island Barrier Removal*

E. OUR HUMBLE REQUEST: HIGH-SPEED TOLLS NOW

A. Albany is not the source of all of our problems; but Albany can help us find a solution.

Among Western New York politicians there is an overused narrative that Albany is a mess and that downstate is the source of all of our problems. We don't believe that. It's too easy to push all the blame to Albany.

From the new medical campus in Buffalo, to the efforts to enhance and improve tourism options, to the "Buffalo Billions," we believe the Governor, in particular, has been a friend of Western New York. We, on Grand Island, are especially pleased with the selection of our fair Town for the new Western New York Welcome Center. The Governor's actions are a great recognition of what we have to offer, and we thank his administration for believing in and working with us.

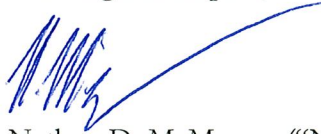
Further, we are reasonable people. And while we wish for greater transparency regarding the toll funds, we recognize the challenges involved. Yes, the tolls are reasonably priced and undoubtedly some of the toll money has been reinvested in the bridges. Grand Island is a semi-rural place, and there is no bypass for any form of traffic, including commercial deliveries. Further, bridge inspections produce perennially bad results. But rather than argue endlessly about the economic impact and inherent unfairness of locking in our small community in tolls, we instead wish to answer the question first asked above.

Given the costs of collection by hand, the dangers caused by this oldest of collection methods, and the availability of other forms of technology already in use elsewhere in New York State, should Grand Island immediately change to a high-speed tolling system? The answer is YES!

B. Our humble request:

The immediate creation of a plan for the replacement of the Grand Island tolls for a high-speed tolling system to reduce dangerous pollution and unnecessary traffic congestion and increase economic efficiency.

With highest respect,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "N. McMurray", with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Nathan D. McMurray ("Nate")
Grand Island, Town Supervisor