

Virginia Trucking Association member Charlie McDaniel submitted this letter to the Fredericksburg Free Lance-Star in response to a Sept. 14 op-ed titled "Toll booth on I-95: No panacea, but a start" by Cord Sterling, a Stafford Supervisor who serves on the Commonwealth Transportation Board, Fredericksburg District.

Dear Editor,

I agree with three-fourths of Cord Sterling's recent op-ed in the *Free Lance-Star* on September 12 entitled, "Toll booth on I-95: No panacea, but a start" in which he clearly outlines Virginia's growing transportation crisis. For Virginia to maintain its reputation as one of the best states to do business, it must make funding improvements to its transportation infrastructure a top priority. Mr. Sterling willingly outlines the problem. However, he only offers tolls on I-95 as a "start" and fails to provide ideas for a comprehensive solution to actually fix the problem.

The trucking industry does not object to the use of tolls to finance construction of new highways. However, we are strongly opposed to tolling of existing highways,

Asserting that tolling I-95 is a good idea because the tolls will be paid mostly by vehicles travelling through Virginia is not supported by the facts. According to VDOT, 70 to 80 percent of the vehicles that will be subject to the toll are out of state travelers. But VDOT also says that only 5 to 7 percent of the vehicles that will be subject to the toll travel the whole length of I-95 through Virginia. The vast majority of people who will have to pay the toll are either Virginia citizens or people from out-of-state travelling to a Virginia destination to work, to go to school, to visit tourist attractions, to shop or to conduct some other business – economic activities that benefit the whole state.

Tolling I-95 may help generate money from this small percentage of through traffic, but tolls will also discourage citizens of other states from visiting Virginia and spending money during their stay. Imposing a border tax on I-95 will put Virginia's business-friendly reputation at risk and be a red flag for any company looking to expand or relocate here. It will also make it more difficult for Virginia businesses to compete with businesses in other states that won't have to pay a toll tax on their shipments. I don't think Virginia can afford to discourage consumer spending and business expansion.

The trucking industry was one of the first groups to express opposition to the Governor's proposal. It has been joined by thousands of Southside Virginians, twenty local governments, five economic and transportation planning organizations, business associations, individual businesses and current and former elected leaders who have also taken a position against tolling I-95. They are concerned over the negative economic impact on their local citizens and businesses. Imposing an \$8 tax on the residents of economically depressed Southside Virginia who rely on I-95 to go to work, school, shopping or for medical care is fundamentally unfair.

The people of Southside Virginia are also concerned over the consequences of traffic diversion onto local roads in their communities. VDOT's own analysis states that 35 - 40% of I-95 drivers will divert

around the toll and onto secondary roads that are ill-equipped to handle the increased traffic. This will cause maintenance issues and public safety hazards for the people of Southside Virginia.

It is no wonder that the people of Southside Virginia feel that they are being unfairly targeted by VDOT's "reverse Robin Hood" scheme of imposing tolls in one of the most economically distressed areas of the Commonwealth to fund highway projects in one of the state's most affluent areas.

For Mr. Sterling to claim that, "charging a toll at a point 120 miles away...sounds like a good and fair deal for all involved" is a slap in the face of residents of Southside Virginia who could pay over \$2,000 a year to commute to work. He seems all too willing to pass the burden to someone else and reap the benefits of others economic pain. I wonder if Mr. Sterling would be such a willing champion of tolling I-95 if the facility was going to be placed in Stafford County.

Supporters of VDOT's tolling plan don't talk about how the plan wastes taxpayer's money. During the first 6 years of the plan, 38 cents of every dollar paid in tolls will be kept by VDOT to build, operate and maintain the toll collection system – leaving only 62 cents to spend on improvements. That is an incredible waste of taxpayer dollars that could be better spent on fixing our transportation problems rather than creating more big government bureaucracy.

I and many other businesses that operate trucks agree with the editorial positions of the Richmond Times-Dispatch and the Free Lance-Star that an increase in the fuels tax is the most efficient and fairest method currently available to generate new revenue for highway improvements. When a driver pays \$1 in Virginia fuels tax, government keeps less than 1 cent to pay for collection and enforcement – the remaining 99 cents is used to build and maintain roads. Increasing the fuels tax is a vastly more efficient use of taxpayer dollars than the I-95 toll plan.

Tolls are taxes, plain and simple. But, unlike the fuels tax, tolls waste too much of taxpayer's dollars on unneeded government bureaucracy and unnecessary expenses. VDOT says its plan is a first step and that it intends to collect tolls on I-95 in perpetuity. I believe they intend to expand tolling all along I-95 and Virginia's other interstate highways. I also believe that transforming Virginia from "The Old Dominion" to "The Tolled Dominion" is bad public policy that will be bad for business and bad for the citizens of the Commonwealth.

Sincerely,

Charlie McDaniel