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December 9, 2011

The Honorable Sean Connaughton
Secretary
Virginia Department of Transportation
1111 E Broad St Rm 3054
Richmond VA 23219

Dear Sean:

Northern Virginia drivers are about to face another toll increase on the Dulles Greenway. As you know, the State Corporation Commission (SCC) was obliged under state law to approve a toll schedule that will increase the maximum base toll from $3.70 to $4 and the peak toll on weekdays from $4.50 to $4.80 starting on January 1, 2012.

I am concerned that commuters are not aware of this scheduled increase and was hopeful that the Dulles Greenway Advisory Committee could have been the avenue to provide commuters with up-to-date information. So you can imagine my frustration with the actions of Greenway officials when my staff attended the November 18 meeting of the committee. The purpose of the committee is to make the road more user-friendly, but I believe the Greenway is actively trying to prevent even the most basic improvements to the road.

While I understand the need to include Greenway employees on the committee, it appears that they have de-facto veto power over even the most basic decisions, including the design and location of signs informing users of the Greenway what the toll rate will be prior to entering the road. Why should a user have to visit a Web site to find out what the toll rate will be? This is simply unacceptable. I was even more disturbed to learn that Greenway officials emphatically refused to pay for any of the signs proposed by the committee. I am at a loss to understand why a private company owned by an Australian firm should have any say over placement and content of the signs if they are refusing to shoulder the financial burden and the signs will not be placed on property it owns. Does this protect the Greenway or northern Virginia residents?

I think many in northern Virginia would agree that the Greenway and its parent company, the Macquarie Group, are not good corporate citizens. Garrett Moore and the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) staff hosting the committee have tried to put forward workable solutions based on the guidelines that you set for the committee, so it vexes me that Greenway officials are being allowed to drive the process.

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For example, my staff informed me that Greenway officials continue to refuse to conduct a distance-based pricing study. It is my understanding that the company's bond insurer won't permit expenditures that will not increase revenues. How then is the Greenway able to make contributions to political campaigns? The Greenway even pays former VDOT secretary Whit Clement to lobby members of the General Assembly. Company officials asserted at the last meeting that spending on lobbyists was needed because the company was, "under constant attack." Just who in Richmond does the company claim is attacking it? The complaints I receive are from northern Virginia residents affected by the Greenway. It is clear that the Greenway employs lobbyists to protect the company from common sense reforms that would benefit customers.

I have written you many times in regard to the state law permitting a private company to operate the Greenway. It would appear that the Greenway is in a separate category from other Virginia toll roads. The SCC has essentially said that its hands are tied by statute from preventing more toll increases. Why is this company allowed to operate a road in a manner that provides almost no consumer protections? Commuters can write the SCC, but the letter of the law provides no way to prevent toll increases.

I urge you to consider the effect that the Greenway tolls have on area residents. Under the current and future tolls I discussed above, a daily commuter could spend the equivalent of a car payment to use the Greenway each month. I have spoken to Loudoun residents who say that they won't even take the commuter buses because they cannot afford the Greenway tolls to access the commuter bus lots. I implore you to think about the effect this has on families taking their children to soccer practice, a piano lesson, or a doctor's appointment. They are faced with the choice of providing less for their children or spending untold hours in congestion on surrounding roads. This is no choice at all.

In addition, I have heard from realtors in Loudoun County who are concerned that escalating tolls on the Greenway will depress housing sales and the economic growth that comes with it. A private toll road that drastically increases transportation costs with the only alternative being the misery of non-stop gridlock and interminable commutes will certainly effect whether new residents move to Loudoun County. Luck Stone is a supplier of rock products and has a large facility off Belmont Ridge Road in Loudoun County a short distance from the Greenway. When I asked the company if it recommends to its private haulers using the Greenway or local roads, I was told the company intentionally avoids recommending use of the Dulles Greenway. The feedback Luck Stone gets from haulers and customers is that they will bypass the Greenway because of the expense, using Route 7, Route 50, or Waxpool Rd and get on the Dulles Toll Road after Route 28 or just stay on those initial primary roads. This leads to several predictable consequences. First, large trucks will divert onto secondary roads, including residential areas, creating a safety hazard. Would you feel safe with your children playing on a street that saw traffic from trucks carrying large loads of gravel and

aggregate? Secondly, the weight of these trucks increases the amount and frequency of road repairs, funded by Virginia taxpayers.

The people of Loudoun County and northern Virginia deserve to have their voices heard and I believe the state has a duty and an obligation to advocate for these residents. Short of changing the 1988 law that governs the road, I see no alternate means of relief for my constituents who use the Greenway and the countless others who waste time on roads handling the commuters who refuse to be gauged by a private company.

Best wishes.

Sincerely,

Frank R. Wolf
Member of Congress

FRW:cw

This is VERY IMPORTANT.
You need to protect the citizens of Virginia.