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VALLEE FILES BILL TO FREEZE METROWEST TOLL HIKE

MetroWest legislators call for special commission to review Turnpike decision

Boston, Mass.— Representative James E. Vallee (*D – Franklin*) today announced he has filed a bill that will freeze the recent toll hike implemented by the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority Board.

Vallee, a consistent opponent of toll increases, has filed similar legislation in the past to alleviate travel costs for MetroWest commuters and served on a 15-member commission in 2003 charged by then-Governor Mitt Romney with reviewing the equity of Massachusetts Turnpike tolls

The Turnpike Authority voted last Monday to increase tolls by 25 cents at the Allston and Rte. 128-Weston tolls and 50 cents at the one-way Sumner and Ted Williams tunnel tolls, affecting MetroWest and North Shore commuters.

At the board's meeting, members acknowledged that the issue of toll inequities needs further study and decided to assemble a working group which will report findings by April. The legislators behind the bill believe that the decision to raise tolls prior to reviewing the findings of the working group is premature and inappropriate.

The bill, supported by several North Shore and MetroWest legislators, freezes the toll increase and establishes a special legislative commission to review the findings of the Turnpike Authority's working group. The commission will consist of three Governor-appointed members, the Secretary of Transportation or his appointee, three Senate members and three House members, and the Senate and House chairs of the Joint Committee on Transportation.

The commission would be required to submit their report to the Joint Committee on Transportation no later than 90 days from the date of release of the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority's working group on toll inequities findings. If the report from the working group is released in April as planned, a report from the commission would be submitted early next summer.

“Freezing all toll increases allows us necessary time to come up with a solution that serves all residents well and does not unfairly burden our MetroWest families,” said Vallee, a co-sponsor of the bill. “Transportation funding is a critical issue here in Massachusetts, and I believe the establishment of a commission will allow us to work out some of the inequity we currently face.”

The bill is about fairness to all commuters, according to Vallee. “We need to understand exactly how inequitable tolls are and what other options may be available before blindly agreeing to raise tolls again,” said Vallee.

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