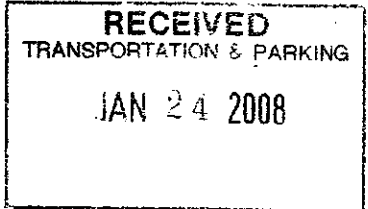


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CITY OF ST. PETERSBURG



CITY OF ST. PETERSBURG
Office of the Mayor

Rick Baker, Mayor

January 22, 2008

Mr. Don Skelton, Secretary
Florida Department of Transportation
District 7
11201 North McKinley Drive
Tampa, FL 33612-6456

RE: Pinellas Bayway System Tolls

Dear Don,

I appreciated receiving your letter of November 5, 2007 and your meeting with us on December 18th concerning FDOT's plans for modification of the tolls to the Pinellas Bayway.

As you are aware, the City has worked actively with the Pinellas Bayway residents and FDOT to help facilitate the replacement of the Pinellas Bayway Bridge, SR 682, with a new four-lane divided span. FDOT has decided to not only replace the east/west bridge, SR 682, but also the north/south bridge, SR 679, for a combined cost of \$180 million. This cost far exceeds the amount of funds that have been set aside in the Bayway Toll Account and FDOT is proposing substantial increases to the tolls and pass program to pay for these improvements.

FDOT's proposal is to increase the SR 682 east/west plaza toll from \$.50 to \$1.25 immediately and to \$3.50 by the end of the bond issue and the south toll plaza, SR 679, from \$.35 today to \$2.50 immediately and to \$7.25 by the end of the bond issue. The south toll plaza increase is particularly substantial and only affects those using Ft. De Soto Park. We believe this cost will far exceed the Park's users ability to pay for using the Park and as a result will have a significant impact on the average resident's utilization of Ft. De Soto Park beaches. It does not appear fair that the costs of this bridge replacement, SR 679, should be borne disproportionately by those users.

It is also disturbing that the Bayway Toll Account was used to construct non-Bayway projects through legislative act Chapter 95 to 382 which had the net affect of removing in 1995 \$18.8 million from the Bayway Toll Account to fund the Blind Pass road

improvement. If those funds were generated by the users of the Pinellas Bayway, they rightfully should be used for the Pinellas Bayway improvements. As such, the FDOT should reinstate the present value of that \$18.8 million dollars into the toll account to help pay for the Bayway projects. Based upon the City's investment rate for 1995 until today, the \$18.8 million in 1995 would be over \$35.6 million today. (FDOT has noted that the present value of these funds if left in the Bayway Toll Account would be only \$25.5 million). Also, I would request consideration of alternative funding sources for the project similar to that provided to eliminate the Treasure Isle toll. As we have discussed, Pinellas received only a very small portion of the \$1 billion mobility funds expended by the DOT in our area.

Finally, we believe that FDOT should look at other toll options including what would be the required toll rate if only the east/east toll was increased and the south toll eliminated or left unchanged. We believe this option to be a potential alternative that should be considered. We request that FDOT:

- return the \$35.6 million to the Bayway Toll Account
- determine the toll rate and resulting pass rates if only the SR 682 tolls were increased, and
- provide the City with the traffic volumes on the Pinellas Bayway today and in the future to help us explain FDOT's proposal to our residents.

I appreciate the opportunity to comment, and to state my opposition concerning the toll rate increases as presented by FDOT. Thank you for consideration of our request and providing us with the above requested information.

Sincerely,



Rick Baker
Mayor
City of St. Petersburg

RB/cm

cc: Governor Charles Crist
Stephanie Kopelousos, Secretary, FDOT
Pinellas County MPO Members
Members of the Pinellas County Board of Commissioners
St. Petersburg City Council Chairman and City Council Members
Pinellas Legislative Delegation