

ADAM SMITH
9TH DISTRICT, WASHINGTON
2402 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515
(202) 225-8901
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES
RANKING MEMBER

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-4709

DISTRICT OFFICE:
2209 PACIFIC AVENUE
SUITE B
TACOMA, WA 98402
(253) 593-6600
TOLL FREE 1-888-SMITH09
<http://adamsmith.house.gov>
http://twitter.com/Rep_Adam_Smith

May 30, 2013

The Honorable Ray LaHood
Secretary
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, D.C. 20590

Dear Secretary LaHood:

I write regarding the Washington State Department of Transportation's application for authority to toll Interstate 90 (I-90) between Seattle and Bellevue under the Federal Highway Administration's Value Pricing Pilot Program (VPPP). Like many states attempting to address budget shortfalls, Washington has begun to explore options such as tolling to fund critical projects. However, WSDOT's plan to toll I-90 across Lake Washington will significantly burden many constituents in my district, particularly those living on one side of the lake and working on the other, who rely on I-90 as the only route between their homes, work, and other necessities. As the FHWA considers WSDOT's application, I ask that your Department ensure that the proposed tolling of I-90 will test innovative strategies for congestion mitigation as required by the VPPP, is within the Department's scope of legally permissible and appropriate activity under the federal VPPP, and that a comprehensive environmental study and opportunity for community input are provided.

WSDOT's proposal has raised concerns regarding its legality under the VPPP program. The VPPP program provides tolling authority for innovative ways to approach congestion management. WSDOT, however, has stated that the primary purpose for tolling I-90 is to provide additional revenue for the SR 520 replacement project, a separate route across Lake Washington on which tolling has already been implemented under the VPPP program. To date, my understanding is that no other tolling projects authorized under the VPPP have tolled one road for the primary purpose of making improvements to a separate road. As you consider this application, I respectfully request that you ensure the project meets all requirements for the VPPP and that tolling of I-90 under this authority will be legal.

While approval under the VPPP program requires projects to undergo environmental study – and while WSDOT will be required to complete a comprehensive Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) prior to any decision – it is important that the EIS is sufficiently broad and considers tolling and financing alternatives, as well as the whole range of impacts that will result from tolling. A comprehensive EIS will ensure that all impacts and options of tolling I-90 are

thoroughly considered, including diversion of traffic to other routes, air quality, public safety, greenhouse gas emissions, and socioeconomic impacts on affected communities. An EIS will also providing the greatest opportunity for public input. I have included for your consideration a letter from the Mayors of 12 cities affected by WSDOT's proposal that further details these concerns

WSDOT's proposal to toll I-90 has the potential to set a new precedent for tolling projects in Washington State and across the country. It also has the potential to disproportionately impact residents of Mercer Island, who have no alternative non-tolled direct routes of transportation between two major population centers. With this in mind, I hope that you will carefully consider all aspects of WSDOT's application to toll I-90, including whether it is a proper use of the VPPP. I look forward to your response, and thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Adam Smith". The signature is stylized with large, flowing loops.

Adam Smith
Member of Congress