

News Release



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COST-RECOVERY EFFORTS APPROVED FOR MARYLAND'S TOLL FACILITIES

*Toll rates change May 1 for large trucks and other multi-axle vehicles;
E-ZPass[®] service charges effective July 1*

*Standard (two-axle) and commuter toll rates to remain the same;
New vehicle class for motorcyclists effective May 1*

BALTIMORE, MD – Today, the Chairman and eight Members of the Maryland Transportation Authority (MDTA) approved a cost-recovery initiative expected to generate approximately \$60 million annually for the self-supported agency that owns, operates and maintains Maryland's seven toll facilities. The approved plan increases toll rates for large trucks and other multi-axle vehicles and implements *E-ZPass* service charges. **Standard (two-axle) and commuter toll rates will remain the same.**

“Our action today offsets the costs of operating the *E-ZPass* system and helps ensure that trucks and similar heavy vehicles bear their share of the costs for Maryland's toll facilities,” said Authority Chairman and Transportation Secretary John D. Porcari. “We received and responded to nearly 2,900 public comments, met with elected officials and affected groups and heard public testimony at today's meeting. The Members and I are keenly aware of the impact today's approval has on individual customers, and we directed staff to examine suggestions offered during this public process. Ultimately, cost recovery is necessary so we can ensure preservation, safety and customer-service projects are fully funded, while supporting capital projects Statewide.”

Today's action comes after the Authority has controlled expenses, contained costs and deferred \$200 million in capital projects. The agency's total revenue is down 6% from July to November 2008, reflecting national trends in declining toll revenue at a time when costs for commodities, system preservation and safety are up. Within the past year, toll authorities in the region have either raised or announced plans to raise tolls.

With today's approved toll-rate changes and *E-ZPass* service charges, Maryland still offers some of the most generous commuter discounts in the country, with truck toll rates comparable to – and generally lower than – others in the region. Post-usage discounts will still be available for truckers using Maryland toll facilities. In addition, the Authority will create a supplemental rebate program offering a 10% discount for multi-axle vehicles making more than 100 trips per month through its facilities.

“We know the timing is difficult, but we held off as long as we could in taking this step. Our customers should know that we are not making money with this plan, rather attempting to recover operating costs,” said Authority Executive Secretary Ronald L. Freeland. “I'm pleased the Members created a separate vehicle class for tolling motorcyclists based on public comment. This allows motorcycles with trailers or side-cars to pay the two-axle rate. Because of marked weight differences, three-axle motorcycles provide significantly less wear and tear on roadways than three-axle trucks.”

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ADD ONE: COST-RECOVERY EFFORTS APPROVED FOR STATE TOLL FACILITIES

The Authority's financial self-sufficiency allows its costs to be shared directly among the users of its toll facilities and spares taxpayers overall. System-wide, vehicles with three-plus axles provide 32% of the revenue at Authority facilities, but contribute 36% of the costs. The approved toll increase will bring revenues from these vehicles more in line with their costs to the facilities. Regarding *E-ZPass* service charges, monthly costs for each account must still be paid by the Authority to the contractor who administers the *E-ZPass* system, whether or not the account holder makes any trips. The approved \$1.50 monthly account charge will aid in offsetting those costs.

Toll revenues fund a \$3.8 billion six-year capital program that includes multiple system preservation, safety, customer service and improvement projects Statewide. Projects currently under construction include the Intercounty Connector and the expansion of I-95 with the I-95 Express Toll Lanes ProjectSM. These two facilities will ease some of the largest bottlenecks in the State. Significant preservation projects currently underway include re-decking projects at the William Preston Lane Jr. Memorial (Bay) and Thomas J. Hatem Memorial bridges and toll-plaza improvements at the Governor Harry W. Nice Memorial Bridge. Additional improvements include upgraded lighting in the Baltimore Harbor Tunnel, higher-speed *E-ZPass* lanes, a comfort station for truckers at the I-95 Perryville inspection complex and open-road tolling studies, among others.

The approved cost-recovery plan includes:

- Effective March 1, 2009, ending the sale of commuter ticket books and transitioning customers to *E-ZPass*.
- Effective May 1, adjusting toll rates for multi-axle vehicles, including trucks with three or more axles and vehicles towing trailers, to help ensure that costs to preserve Authority roadways are allocated proportionately; eliminating the Class 7 toll-rate schedule for unusual or permit vehicles; and, in its place, implementing an overweight/oversize permit charge to use Authority facilities. The cost for A-series commercial tickets at the Hatem Bridge will also increase proportionately.
- Effective May 1, charging \$10 for an Automatic Vehicle Identification decal for the Hatem Bridge and placing a one-year expiration on light-trailer tickets.
- Effective May 1, creating a supplemental rebate program offering a 10% discount for a vehicle with three or more axles making more than 100 trips per month through Authority facilities.
- Effective May 1, creating a separate vehicle class for motorcycles. Motorcyclists will pay the two-axle toll rate even when using a side-car or towing a light trailer (in such instances, the motorcyclist must use a "cash" toll lane).
- Effective July 1, implementing service charges to help recover *E-ZPass* processing costs, including a \$1.50 monthly maintenance charge **per account**; charging for the cost of new and replacement transponders (\$21 standard, \$33 exterior, \$40 fusion); instituting a \$3 Notice of Toll Due charge; and increasing toll violation charges from \$15 to \$25.
- Effective July 1, changing the duration of *E-ZPass* commuter plans from 60 days to 45 days.
- Effective July 1, ending the sale of Bay Bridge Shoppers and Travelers tickets. The Authority will create a Shoppers Plan for *E-ZPass* to offer the same percentage discount as existing tickets.

When Maryland's toll-rate schedule was last adjusted in 2003, toll rates doubled for all vehicles at Baltimore toll facilities and rose by 25% for all vehicles at the Kennedy Highway and Hatem Bridge.

The Maryland Transportation Authority is an independent State agency that finances, owns and operates the State's seven toll facilities. The Authority's eight Members, appointed by the Governor with consent of the State Senate, serve as the agency's policy-setting and governing body. Maryland's Secretary of Transportation serves as Authority Chairman.

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