



Staten Island pols say writing is on the wall for Port Authority toll increase

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STATEN ISLAND, N.Y. -- No one knows exactly how the Port Authority's board will vote when it meets tomorrow on planned toll hikes, but some kind of an increase appears to be inevitable.

Borough President James Molinaro is bracing for a toll hike: "But nowhere near what they're proposing."

The proposal calls for a 50 percent increase for E-ZPass users from \$8 to \$12, peak time and even higher tolls -- \$15 -- for cash customers of the agency's bridges and tunnels. Then in 2014 the PA will tack on an additional \$2 across the board.

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Jonathan Peters, a professor of finance at the College of Staten Island agreed with Molinaro's scenario that tolls will increase, but at a smaller percentage than what is currently proposed.

"That's what happened in the past," Peters said. "It really does smack of a disingenuous process." In 2001 when the PA proposed to raise tolls from \$4, its initial plan called for an outrageous increase to \$7 for peak-time travelers, but the agency settled with \$6, according to Advance reports.

Then again in 2007 there were unconfirmed reports that a \$3 hike was on the way, but when the official



Staten Island Advance/Hilton Flores

Members of Labor International Union North America turned out en masse at Tuesday's hearing to support the Port Authority's planned toll hikes.

announcement came out, the increase sought was today's current \$8 toll to cross the bridges and tunnels for peak-time travelers, according to Advance archives.

"Tolls have gone up radically faster than inflation," Peters said of the last 15 years. Peters and Molinaro disagreed with the PA's venture into real estate where the agency often loses money, such as with the near tripling of the original estimate to rebuild the World Trade Center the PA cited in its original press release officially announcing the toll hike.

"They may lead with this outrageous scenario as they have done today," Peters explained.



Advance file photo

Dr. Jonathan Peters, an Assistant Professor of Finance, at the College of Staten Island.

"Then the governors will make a half outrageous proposal, and somehow that's acceptable."

Molinaro supports the resident discount for Staten Islanders and feels that Island businesses reliant on trucks for shipping should be exempt from an increase to minimize the impact on local employers. "This would give us an opportunity to level the playing field," Molinaro said. "There's got to be some consideration for the New York side. They're (PA) destroying us."

City Councilmembers Vincent Ignizio (R-South Shore) and James Oddo (R-Mid-Island/Brooklyn) agree with the consensus that an increase will happen but the size and some other details will probably be different from what was originally proposed.

"I'll go with the conventional wisdom that the two governors will approve an increase," Oddo

said. "The \$4 may go to \$2."

Staten Island hearing on proposed Port Authority toll hikes

Dozens of speakers, including Staten Island resident Joe Valentin, spoke at a hearing about proposed Port Authority toll hikes. People at the 8 a.m. meeting were both both in favor of and in opposition to the increases.

Staten Islanders attend second toll hike hearing

The evening meeting, held at the Michael J. Petrides School, Sunnyside, could accommodate more than 900 people in the building's auditorium, and it was held after Borough President James Molinaro and other elected officials protested to the time and location of the morning meeting.

New Jersey Governor Chris Christie and New York Governor Andrew Cuomo will have final say. A veto on the toll hike from either governor effectively kills the increase.

"I think the governors will be engaged, and they will seek to lower or eliminate the increase," Ignizio said. "They have to work together because a veto stops this in its tracks."

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