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Mainers already pay higher gas taxes and tolls than the residents of any other state in New England (even in "Taxachusetts," the gas tax is 6 cents cheaper than Maine's, with fewer tolls).

And interstate highways are by far the biggest financial liabilities to MaineDOT's balance sheet. These highways have dozens of bridges and overpasses that were built half a century ago and are now at the end of their useful life. Each one of those overpasses costs the state \$20 to \$40 million to replace.

First, I want to dispel the notion that people in northern Maine don't pay Turnpike tolls.

The Maine Turnpike effectively has a monopoly on virtually all physical goods that are shipped into or out of Maine. Every truck that moves between Kittery and Augusta pays a \$30 toll (one-way), and that means that every product you buy, no matter where you are in Maine, costs more because of the Maine Turnpike Authority and its preference for extravagant capital projects instead of reducing transportation costs for all Mainers.

Let me give you a concrete example of that problem: back when the Turnpike Authority still wanted to build its Gorham Bypass, it acknowledged that the 10,000 people who regularly commute between western Cumberland County could not possibly pay the total costs of building and maintaining a new interstate highway to Gorham.

According to the project's 2022 cost projections, the Gorham Turnpike expansion would have added about \$50 million per year in combined debt service on the Turnpike's construction bonds and additional road maintenance costs. Dividing that cost by 10,000 potential users means that each user would have had to pay \$5,000 a year in tolls for it to break even.

Even the MTA acknowledged that that was not a realistic expectation: the agency was already planning substantial toll increases on the much busier mainline of the Turnpike – i.e., on everyone else in Maine – in order to help pay for this boondoggle.

According to existing state laws, the Turnpike Authority is supposed to turn over its "operating surplus" to help maintain the condition of all the infrastructure that connects to the Turnpike. In 2011, the Legislature's OPEGA committee audited the Turnpike Authority in part because it wasn't sharing any of its surplus revenues in the spirit of that statute (and also in part because the former Turnpike director was embezzling those funds).

And that problem continues to this day. While the MTA is sitting on hundreds of millions of dollars that it's hoarded for the defunct Gorham Turnpike project, MaineDOT is simultaneously planning to spend \$6.2 million to repave the Turnpike connector in Saco, and \$6.3 million on the Roue 703 Turnpike connector in South Portland – and to do so without any financial support from the Turnpike Authority.

The Turnpike Authority's refusal to contribute to the basic maintenance of connecting roadways is a major contributor to the shortage of capital funding for other road projects throughout the state.

As you're well aware, MaineDOT faces a growing capital shortfall: revenues from gas taxes are declining, Mainers are driving less, yet the deferred maintenance costs of an overbuilt, heavily subsidized 20th-century highway system continue to escalate.

Historically, Maine paid off its highway debts with dedicated gas tax revenues, without affecting the general fund's debt limits. But in the mid-2010s, as gas tax revenue growth began to stall, MaineDOT started borrowing from the general fund instead, thus reducing the state's ability to pay for other important investments like schools, health care, and tax relief.

The highway system's funding shortfall – and calls for increased drawdowns from the General Fund – both continue to grow to this day, as you know.

And the funding gap will continue to grow until both MaineDOT and the Maine Turnpike Authority recover from their nostalgia for highly-subsidized 20th century highway projects that we can no longer afford to maintain. We're not going to dig ourselves out of this hole by building even more highways we can't afford.

Thank you for your service.