



CRCOG Weekly Legislative Report

2020 Legislative Session

February 21, 2020

Weekly Legislative Feature Issues:

For the last year, the number one question at the State Capitol has been “Does the Senate and the House have the votes to pass tolls?” or “is there a vote on tolls coming up?” This past Wednesday, Governor Lamont provided some clarity on the matter during a press conference in which he announced that he was taking “a pause” on the legislative push to implement a trucks-only tolls proposal. At the press conference, Governor Lamont took the legislative Democrats to task for their unwillingness to set a session date to vote for a tolls bill that supporters argue will raise upwards of \$175 million a year.

The governor, who has changed positions several times on his tolls plan said to legislators in Hartford, “Don’t say, I can’t make up my mind, I need another week, I need another week, I need another week,” because he has heard this for a year and has lost patience.

The governor has now proposed borrowing \$200 million using General Obligation bonds as an alternative financing plan for shoring up badly needed maintenance to our state’s transportation infrastructure. Currently, the state uses the Special Transportation Fund to pay debt service for transportation projects and other related transportation expenses. This fund is projected to become insolvent in five years with no plan in place for future funding resources. The backlog of infrastructure upgrades and maintenance is not going away.

Meanwhile, House and Senate Democrats both claim they have the votes to pass a toll plan, but that has yet to be seen. Whether tolls are voted on or not, the state of Connecticut will need a transportation plan that is funded and provides necessary resources to maintain existing infrastructure for Connecticut’s future economic development. We will be sure to keep you apprised as this situation develops.

This past week has revealed new developments of particular interest to you:

State Legislators postpone tolls vote until at least next week

A 30-hour debate threatened by the Republican Minority and a Democratic Majority that lacks a game plan have led lawmakers to postpone plans for a Thursday vote on legislation that introduces truck only tolls on 12 bridges in Connecticut until at least next week. The lack of trust between House and Senate Democrats has resulted in both chambers refusing to go first in debating the bill that would authorize truck tolls. According to Senate President Pro Temp. Martin M. Looney of New Haven, the current proposed scenario for attempting to pass the bill is to split it in two, where each would authorize tolls on six bridges, while one begins in the house and the other in the Senate. Both bills would then be exchanged between the two and both chambers would have to pass both bills. Republican Minority leaders have stated that Republicans will not only debate the bills at length but withhold typical courtesies that lubricate the machinery of legislating. Senator Looney says the promise of a 30-hour filibuster will require preparation by both chambers, and Senate Democrats will caucus on Thursday to talk about what may come next. Originally Governor Lamont had proposed a system of tolls on cars and truck at more than 50 locations on Interstates 84, 91, and 94, which included Merritt and Wilbur Cross Parkways. The originally proposed legislation would raise \$800m annually, however when legislators refused to bring it to a vote, the Administration adjusted their proposal with a downsized version of tolls on cars and trucks on 13 bridges, which also failed to gather votes to pass. House Democrats proposed a compromise that both Lamont and Senate Democrats accepted, which would include truck only tolls at 12 bridges and would raise \$175M annually.

[State Legislators postpone tolls vote until next week](#)

Study: Investing in Hartford's Aging XL Center would Lift the Arena's Finances, but Not a Cure-All

According to a study requested by Gov. Lamont's Office and UConn, Hartford's XL Center's financial status would be improved with new and reconfigured seating. The study by Texas-based consultancy conventions, Sports & Leisure International (CSL) has recommended the addition of 1,000 "event level" and "concourse club" seats, 52 "loge" seats, and 42 small group boxes and luxury suites at the XL center. The implementation and reconfiguration of luxury seating at the XL center could generate an additional \$3.6 million in gross revenue for the arena. According to CSL's study the proposed renovation would encourage consumer and event growth, and take's the XL Center's annual operating losses from \$2M or \$3M down to an estimated \$482,000 by 2024. However, the improvements recommended by the study would only attract three new events a year to the arena and fails to attract private investors to the project. The study doesn't specify the cost of the proposed improvements, but legislators have been discussing a \$100 million investment into the arena. Lamont's revised fiscal year 2021 budget plan sets aside \$55 million in bond funding in the current fiscal year and the next with the purpose of renovating and improving the arena.

[Study: Investing in Hartford's aging XL Center would lift the arena's finances, but not a cure all.](#)

Lamont Pledges to Release Stalled Town Aid, Regardless of Whether Tolls are Approved

On Wednesday, Gov. Lamont pledged to support borrowing for overdue municipal aid, regardless of whether or not legislators reject his transportation bill. According to Lamont, he's trying to honor the commitment that previous governors have made, which is in reference to bonding for three municipal grant programs that collectively sent cities and towns \$150 million the last fiscal year. Lamont's decision to release town aid comes a day after the Democratic majority announced another delay in voting on the transportation proposal. A proposed release date for the aid hasn't been specific, however the Governor has said it won't take long for him and legislators to adopt a bill authorizing the funding and have the State Bond Commission endorse the borrowing.

[Lamont pledges to release stalled town aid, regardless of whether tolls are approved](#)

Tracked Bills:

Please see attached document.