



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Catharine Young

Senator Young: Thruway's Plan "A Fiasco"

CATHARINE YOUNG September 25, 2007

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Senator Catharine Young (R,I,C-Olean) today blasted the Thruway Authority's proposal to hike tolls up to 20 percent over the next four years.

"This huge jump in tolls hurts tourism, consumers and the upstate economy. Our area depends on attracting visitors to our region. Many commuters need to drive the Thruway to get to their jobs. Retailers will pass along higher transportation costs to consumers. Businesses will suffer. It's a fiasco," Senator Young said.

"This idea is ill-conceived and doesn't make sense. Michael Fleischer, Thruway Authority executive director, tries to justify it by saying that the toll increase is needed because traffic volume is down on the Thruway due to high gas prices. If drivers can't afford gasoline, how can they afford big tolls? Usage will drop off even more. It is a slippery slope," Senator Young said.

"Unfortunately, the Senate legally does not have financial jurisdiction over the Thruway because they are operated under a separate authority and not the state budget. However, Governor Spitzer could use his influence to convince the Thruway Authority board to not take this counterproductive action," Senator Young said.

Senator Young said the Thruway Authority no longer should pay for operating the state's canal system. About \$80 million in tolls -- the same amount the Thruway Authority says they are short -- is diverted annually from Thruway revenue to fund the 524-mile canal system.

"When the state transferred the canal system over in 1992 it was a fiscal gimmick. It is time to end the shell game," Senator Young said.

"The Thruway Authority recently dramatically increased rates already. Did those hikes cause the decreased traffic? It's very likely. We can expect more of the same if tolls go up again," Senator Young said.

The agency raised tolls by 25 percent for passenger vehicles in 2005, with a 10 percent discount for E-ZPass customers and 35 percent for commercial drivers who received a 5 percent E-ZPass discount.

The new hikes would be phased in from 2008 to 2011.