

Questions and Answers

Removal of tolls from Port Mann Bridge & Golden Ears Bridge

Updated August 24, 2017

Top Questions

1. **Why are you removing tolls from the Port Mann Bridge and Golden Ears Bridges? - Premier**

- Our government is committed to making life more affordable and getting people moving.
- Right now, people who live near the Fraser are forced to pay tolls travelling to and from work while others in the region are not.
- The current system is unfair, it slows down traffic, and it makes life less affordable.

2. **Without tolls, how much public money is needed to eliminate tolls on the Port Mann, and the Golden Ears? - Minister**

- For both bridges the impact of removing the tolls will be approximately \$132 million for 2017/18 -- \$94 million for the Port Mann and \$38 million for Golden Ears.
- For the next few years, the impact of removing the tolls on the Port Mann Bridge will be approximately \$135 million annually.
- For the Golden Ears Bridge, the province is negotiating a long term agreement with TransLink, which owns and operates the bridge.

3. **How much is owed in overdue accounts on both bridges? - Minister**

- The vast majority of drivers pay their tolling debts immediately or within the first three months of their crossing.
- Only about 3% of accounts result in a refuse to issue being registered with ICBC and most are collected when the owner renews insurance.
- On the Port Mann Bridge, TI Corp says there is approximately \$45-million on outstanding debts owing.
- On the Golden Ears, TransLink says there is currently an estimated \$28-million owed on overdue accounts.
- Outstanding tolls will still be collected after September 1, 2017.

4. Shouldn't the annual cost for the Port Mann Bridge be closer to \$225M? - Minister

- No. Since the bridge was open, the province has had to account for the Port Mann Bridge's annual operating loss of \$80-90 million.
- We would have had to cover the \$80-90 million deficit this year, and in future years, regardless of whether we removed the tolls.
- The total additional cost to the province for this decision –is essentially what we would have collected in tolls - approximately \$132 million a year.

5. How will you pay for the bridges? Will you increase income tax? - Premier

- Our government is committed to making life more affordable for British Columbians in Metro Vancouver and across the province.
- We realize that the tolls have created a burden for those that have to commute across these bridges on a daily basis. That is unfair, period.
- These bridges are no different than other major capital projects like highways, schools and hospitals.
- We will pay for the bridges in the same way we pay for other major projects- through general revenue.

6. Do you need to pass or bring in legislation for this? – Minister

- There will be a minor administrative change in the Budget Measures and Implementation Act to move TI Corp within the ministry.

7. Will you be using money in the Prosperity Fund? - Premier

- We will pay for the bridges through general revenue, and account for these costs in our fiscal plan.
- We do not need the Prosperity Fund to pay for this decision.

8. Why don't you wait until the Mayors' Council releases the results of its independent commission on road pricing to remove tolls? - Premier

- We are committed to making life fairer and more affordable for families right now.
- That's why we have removed tolls for the tens of thousands of drivers who cross these bridges every day.
- We look forward to hearing about the work the Independent Commission is undertaking.
- However, families couldn't afford to wait for relief.

9. Critics have said that removing tolls would end the self-sustaining nature of the bridges, thereby affecting the Province's credit ratings.

Do you agree? - Premier

- We are committed to building and strengthening the Province's economy, and this point weighed into our decision to end the tolls.
- We realized that in order to move forward in the most sensible way for B.C.'s economy, and to make life more affordable for people who live and work in Metro Vancouver, this was the right thing to do.
- We will continue to work to keep B.C.'s credit rating strong.

10. How does this decision affect Pattullo, as their business case has assumed tolling would pay for the municipal share? How will TransLink fund their share of this huge project now? - Minister

- We agree that replacing the Pattullo Bridge is a major priority, and we are working towards this with the Mayors' Council and TransLink.
- This government supports the Mayors' Council 10-Year Vision for Metro Vancouver Transportation and is committed to fund 40% of the capital costs of every phase of the plan, including the Pattullo Bridge replacement.
- The Province will soon be receiving the business case for the Pattullo Bridge and will carefully review it.
- We expect to have more news on this in the near future.

11. How will you pay for the Massey Tunnel without tolls? - Minister

- Our first priority has been to make life fairer and more affordable for Lower Mainland commuters by removing these unfair tolls.

- It is clear we need a solution to congestion in the George Massey corridor.
- However, we have heard the criticism from Metro Vancouver that the 10-lane bridge may not be the best option.
- And we committed to undertake further review and engage the metro Vancouver mayors to ensure all options are explored.
- We are taking time to assess the options available to us. We will have more information on this work in the coming weeks.

12. How will this decision impact traffic volume on these bridges and around the region? - Minister

- We expect to see traffic volume increase on the Port Mann Bridge, as we know many commuters chose the Alex Fraser and the Pattullo Bridges to avoid the tolls on the Port Mann.
- Once the tolls are removed, drivers will be able to choose the most appropriate bridge which will minimize their travel distance and time.
- With the removal of tolls on the Port Mann and Golden Ears Bridges, we expect that traffic in the region will be more evenly distributed and less congested for the hundreds of thousands of drivers who cross these bridges every day.
- Ministry officials will closely monitor traffic volumes on all corridors as drivers get used to the changing traffic patterns, and we will carefully look for ways to improve traffic flow moving north and south of the Fraser River, as a result of these changes.

Questions - Finances

How much debt is owed on the Port Mann & on the Golden Ears Bridges? Will this be transferred to the BC Government now? - Minister

- The total outstanding debt for the two bridges is close to \$4.7 billion.
- TI Corp currently has a debt of \$3.6 billion for the Port Mann which will be reported as taxpayer-supported debt in government's books.
- TransLink's debt for the Golden Ears Bridge is approximately \$1.1 billion.
- Options to manage future costs will be negotiated as part of a longer term agreement with TransLink.

Why don't you take on the debt of the Golden Ears Bridge? - Minister

- We wanted to remove the tolls as quickly as possible, so we have put an agreement in place with TransLink to cover their costs this year.
- Options to manage future costs will be negotiated as part of a longer term agreement with TransLink.

Does the Province now assume ownership and maintenance of the Golden Ears Bridge, and how much public money will be needed each year to maintain it? - Minister

- TransLink continues to own, operate and maintain the Golden Ears Bridge.
- The Ministry of Transportation & Infrastructure and TransLink have put a short term agreement in place to cover forgone toll revenue and costs for toll cessation on the Golden Ears Bridge over the next year.
- The government will pay TransLink \$38 million for the remainder of the fiscal year.
- Options to manage future costs will be negotiated as part of a longer term agreement with TransLink.
- The Province and TransLink have committed to work together to look at all strategies and options for the long term future of the bridge.

Does providing funding for Golden Ears to TransLink mean the Province will reduce its commitment to Mayors' Council priorities by a similar amount? - Minister

- No, this decision does not impact Government's commitment to the Mayors' Council and their 10-Year Vision.
- The B.C. Government remains committed to the 10-year Vision for Metro Vancouver by funding 40% of the capital costs of the plan, in partnership with all levels of government.

Where will the debt for both bridges be recorded? - Minister

- The B.C. government will treat the debt for the Port Mann Bridge as taxpayer-supported debt, which is what the Office of the Auditor General has recommended.
- The Province and TransLink are still working through the final arrangements for the Golden Ears Bridge.
- It's important to note that both the Port Mann Bridge and Golden Ears Bridge have lost money since they opened in 2012 and 2009 respectively. Neither bridge was projected to be paid off until 2050.
- So, not only is the toll system unfair for families— it isn't even paying off the crossings in a timely way.
- Eliminating tolls will help our economy by getting people and goods moving, and make life more affordable for people who live and work in Metro Vancouver.

What will it cost government to cancel contracts with the tolling operators, and what notice is necessary? - Minister

- It is estimated to cost \$12 million to wind down tolling operations with service providers.
- However, we will save approximately \$25 million every year by no longer having to administer the tolls for these bridges.
- TI Corp has the contract with the Port Mann service provider (TC Flow), and TI Corp will be responsible for ending this contract. I understand 120 days' notice is required.
- TransLink has its own tolling service provider (Vflow), and will be responsible for winding down that contract.

The debt burden for these projects has been shifted from bridge users, to all British Columbians. How do you justify that to people in the Interior or on the Island? - Premier

- This is the way we pay for schools, hospitals and transportation infrastructure across the province.
- The previous government forced some families to pay extra for infrastructure, while everyone else had a free ride. That's unfair.
- We're going to deliver on the investments needed to serve families and grow our economy, across B.C. - in a way that is fair for all families.

Will this toll removal impact other projects in other parts of the province such as the 4-laning of the Trans Canada from Kamloops to Alberta? - Premier

- This change will not impact other projects going on across the Province.
- We remain firmly committed to improving transportation infrastructure right across B.C.
- This includes big projects such as the Trans Canada 4-laning from Kamloops to Alberta, the Cariboo Connector, the McKenzie Interchange and the Malahat improvements on Vancouver Island.
- These projects remain important and will go ahead.

How much public money will be spent each year to maintain the Port Mann and operate the cable collar system? - Minister

- TI Corp costs for operations and maintenance are forecast to be about \$16 million per year.
- The Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure will assume responsibility for the existing operations and maintenance contract which expires in March 2019.
- The ministry will be looking at whether cost efficiencies can be found in the longer term, post 2019.

Metro Vancouver Question

Does removal of tolls have the support of the Mayors' Council? What

about Surrey Mayor Linda Hepner and Vancouver Mayor Gregor Robertson? - Minister

- In order to enable to government to remove the tolls on Golden Ears, the Mayors' Council had to support the TransLink Board to enact a new bylaw.
- We have spent much time negotiating with TransLink on this plan, and we have spent time engaging with key stakeholders on this plan, including the Mayors' Council.

Operational Questions

Will drivers who have unpaid tolls or crossed in August be required to pay? - Minister

- Yes, drivers who cross these bridges before September 1, 2017 will have to pay their tolls.
- Both the province and TransLink will continue to actively collect unpaid tolling debts.

What happens to those who have overdue tolling bills? - Minister

- Most drivers pay their tolls on time, but for others, there is a process to make sure drivers with overdue and outstanding accounts pay their fair share.
- ICBC will put a hold on a driver's licence or insurance and prevent them from renewing if they have outstanding tolls overdue by 90 days.
- Drivers with overdue accounts are charged interest and will be charged a \$20 fee for putting a hold on their license or insurance.
- The number of vehicles with an insurance hold varies from day to day as new outstanding accounts are assessed and others are cleared.

When will the tolling end? - Premier

- The tolling for both bridges will stop at midnight on August 31, 2017.
- Starting September 1, all drivers that cross over the Port Mann and the Golden Ears Bridges will no longer have to pay a toll.

Won't this just encourage more people to drive their cars and no longer take transit in Metro Vancouver? – Premier

- This is part of a broader strategy to make all modes of transportation more convenient and affordable for people in the region.
- We have committed to funding 40% of the Mayors' Council 10 year vision. This includes significant improvements to regional transit.
- We are committed to making it easier for people to take transit or car pool, cycle, or walk when they can.
- However, the system of tolling is unfair, particularly to those who live south of the Fraser, and that's why we are eliminating the tolls.
- Our commitment will help to improve people's commutes, make life more affordable for citizens.

Who will maintain the Port Mann Bridge? - Minister

- The Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure and TI Corp have had a long-standing relationship on ensuring the operation, maintenance and rehabilitation of the Port Mann Bridge fits within the ministry's overall network operations.
- This includes close communications on operational activities such as snow and ice removal.
- The Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure will take over the existing maintenance contract and incorporate the Port Mann Bridge into the ministry's overall rehabilitation and capital planning.
- This will include yearly maintenance to the bridge in all weather conditions.

How does the switch physically happen? Will this be a change to the bridge infrastructure? Or is it just "shutting off" of the system? How long does it take to implement? - Minister

- To begin, the tolling system will be turned off, meaning that starting September 1st, drivers that cross over either bridge will not be tolled.
- We will ensure that our signage reflects this positive change.
- The removal of the tolling equipment will take some time but will not affect or be noticed by drivers.

What about drivers who receive bills in the mail for tolls in the lead-up to Sept 1st? - Minister

- Bills for tolls up to and including August 31, 2017 will still need to be paid.
- The process for bill payment and collection will remain in place during the transition.
- The tolling for both bridges will officially stop at midnight on August 31, 2017.

Questions – Staff lay-offs

How many people will lose their jobs because of this decision? - Minister

- I want to be sensitive to this question.
- While the decision to eliminate tolls is overwhelmingly good news, there are many people that have worked very hard for a number of years and do an excellent job managing the tolling operations on both bridges.
- There are also around 40 employees who work directly with TI Corp to operate the bridge. A number of them will continue to be employed to wrap up tolling operations and transition operations over at least the next six months.
- The Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure is looking at the affected employees at TI Corp for possible relocation into vacancies in government. Other employees will receive severance according to the terms of the employment agreements.
- There will be up to 90 staff at TC Flow (Port Mann tolling contractor) and we anticipate the contractors will find them other employment or will lay those people off. Affected employees will receive severance according to the terms of their employment agreements.
- There will also be 50 staff at V-Flow (Golden Ears tolling contractor) impacted by this change. TransLink will be working closely with the affected staff.

Why would you keep any TI Corp staff if you're no longer charging tolls after September 1? - Minister

- A number of TI Corp staff will still be needed to collect tolls that are outstanding and to wrap up tolling and TI Corp financial operations as well as transition technical operations over the next six months and beyond.
- A transition plan will be put in place. We rely on TI Corp to operate and maintain the Port Mann, and this work will continue during the transition.

How much severance do you anticipate paying? - Minister

- We will pay severance according to the terms of the employment agreements.
- This cost will be offset as we will save approximately \$25 million every year by no longer having to administer the tolls for these bridges.

What provisions will be put in place for affected TI Corp staff and the tolling contractor and their staff? - Minister

- The Port Mann tolling operator is a contractor providing that service to TI Corp.
- I am not privy to the employment terms between the tolling contractor and their staff.
- For the TI Corp, the work they undertake will transition over the coming months as we wrap up tolling.
- We will seek potential transfer opportunities within government for affected TI Corp staff, and some will be provided with severance as per their employment agreements.

Will any TransLink staff be affected by the Golden Ears stopping tolling? - Minister

- We don't expect any staff from TransLink to be effected by this decision.
- However, there will be 50 staff at V-Flow (Golden Ears tolling contractor) impacted by this change. TransLink will be working closely with the affected staff.

What will you do with the buildings and offices where TI Corp is located? - Minister

- A number of TI Corp staff will still be needed to collect tolls that are outstanding and to wrap up tolling and TI Corp financial and technical operations over the next six months and beyond.
- A transition plan will be put in place. We rely on TI Corp to operate and maintain the Port Mann, and this work will continue during the transition.
- As for the office, TI Corp employees are mainly located in a small portion of the Ministry of Transportation-owned Regional Transportation Management Centre.
- This building houses many more staff than just TI Corp, including regional transportation management centre staff, South Coast Region and District staff and Passenger Transportation Branch staff.
- The ministry will continue to need this building and will look to repurpose the space when it becomes available.

Questions – Other bridges

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