



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**JOINT STATEMENT BY THE BRUNSWICK & NEW HANOVER COUNTY DEMOCRATIC PARTIES
OPPOSING THE ADDITION OF TOLLS TO THE REBUILD OF THE CAPE FEAR MEMORIAL BRIDGE**

We hate to say we told you so, but the Commission in charge of replacing the Cape Fear Memorial Bridge (CFMB) has moved another step closer to giving our region a toll bridge. That's right: the Wilmington Metropolitan Planning Organization this week voted 8 to 4 to include tolling as a potential (and likely) funding option.

This is the second vote by this body to include tolls as an option – with each vote moving us closer to the construction of a toll bridge. The first vote was taken last January, at which time we, the leaders of the Democratic Parties of the two most heavily impacted counties, issued a strong statement that bears repeating because the facts have not changed, except that we are even closer to building a toll bridge.

-- Jill Hopman & Shelley Allen

OUR STATEMENT FROM JANUARY 19, 2024

The Brunswick (BCDP) and New Hanover County Democratic Parties (NHCDP) strongly oppose any proposed toll on the Cape Fear Memorial Bridge, which will have a devastating impact on our communities and place an inequitable financial burden on our residents, especially our workers.

Each day, nearly 70,000 people use the bridge to drive to and from work and school, attend medical appointments, see friends and family, visit beaches and museums, shop at local businesses and transport goods through our busy port. As the N.C. Department of Transportation (NCDOT) begins long-overdue repairs on the antiquated bridge, it is clear that our region, with its exploding population and economy, requires a modern, functional, and safe bridge to connect New Hanover and Brunswick counties.

Unfortunately, state officials like Rep. Frank Iler, longtime chair/vice chair of the House Transportation and Appropriations Committees, have failed to address the inevitable for years. As a result, the Wilmington Metropolitan Planning Organization (WMPO) is now proposing a toll to help finance a new structure, which would be run by a private corporation for profit.

This would be the very first toll placed on an existing road in state history. Instead of obtaining funds from the NCDOT and federal government, this toll places an unfair financial drain on our local taxpayers, particularly seniors and the working class, including teachers, first-responders, and union members. It is a misleading regressive tax that punishes our businesses and residents, who already pay taxes on their gas, income, and DMV services. That is why it is such a bipartisan issue, with Wilmington's City Council unanimously opposing such a toll, as well as Navassa's Mayor Eulis Willis and Leland's Mayor Brenda Bozeman.

While the NCDOT and some members of the WMPO claim that exploring a toll option would help for "scoring purposes" on infrastructure grant lists, it is a dangerous and slippery slope. The last time officials advised us to entrust public services to a private company, without transparency or accountability, they sold New Hanover Regional Medical Center to Novant and transferred more than \$1 billion in public funds to an endowment now controlled by partisan interests. It has been a disaster. A toll would be another privatization of public assets, and we cannot let it happen again. Some issues transcend politics — and ensuring local residents do not shoulder an expensive "toll tax" on our own is undoubtedly one of them.

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