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## Connecticut Gov. Lamont Pitches Highway Tolls

*State's special transportation fund faces a deficit in the fiscal year 2023*

By Joseph De Avila

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Connecticut Gov. Ned Lamont and a coalition of business leaders, labor officials and lawmakers called Wednesday for the establishment of highway tolls as a way to pay for upgrades to the state's crumbling transportation system.

Mr. Lamont, a Democrat, said the state needs a fresh source of money because it could face further economic declines. But the first-term governor must persuade a majority of state lawmakers to pass a measure that has faced stiff public opposition for several years.

The Lamont administration says tolling trucks alone would bring in about \$200 million annually. Tolling all vehicles, which could be implemented by 2024, would generate about \$800 million annually, and 40% of that would come from out-of-state drivers, according to the administration.

"I know it's unpopular. I know that people are going to be paying a little bit more," Mr. Lamont said at a news conference.

The new toll revenue could help pay for improvements that would alleviate congestion on Interstate 95 and other major highways, making the state more attractive for prospective businesses, the Lamont administration said.

The state currently needs \$1.2 billion annually for upkeep alone, officials said. And the state's Special Transportation Fund, which is primarily funded with gas taxes and pays for transportation projects, is projected to begin running a deficit in the fiscal year 2023.

Public opinion has been mixed on tolls. A poll from AAA in January 2018 found that 47% of Connecticut drivers support highway tolls, higher than those who supported other funding options like raising the gas tax or charging a mileage fee. A Quinnipiac University Poll released in August, however, found that 53% of state voters oppose tolls, compared to 40% who support.

Mr. Lamont has the backing of state House Speaker Joe Aresimowicz and Senate President Pro Tempore Martin Looney, both Democrats. But it remains uncertain whether Mr. Lamont will be able to rally enough support to pass it through the Democratic-controlled state Legislature.

“I think lawmakers are going to be paying attention to the opposition from their constituents,” said Patrick Sasser, a Stamford resident and head of the antitoll group No Tolls CT. “This is just another tax that’s going to land on the backs of the working class.”

Republican lawmakers also remain opposed to tolls. Len Fasano, the top-ranking Republican in the state Senate, said Connecticut could begin transportation upgrades in the fiscal year that starts in July under the GOP’s plan to pay for highway fixes by issuing bonds.

“I don’t agree that we need a new stream of revenue,” Mr. Fasano said.

Mr. Looney said using bonds alone isn’t feasible. “Anyone who is not committed to tolls in 2019 is not committed to dealing with our infrastructure problem,” he said.