

ALEXANDRIA, Va., Sept. 13, 2013 /PRNewswire-USNewswire/ -- NATSO, the association representing travel plazas and truckstops, rejected a report that pushes for widespread tolling. The Sept. 12 report was prepared by the Reason Foundation, an organization that has long supported interstate tolls.

"The public detests interstate tolls, and with good reason," said NATSO President and CEO Lisa Mullings. "Tolls divert motorists and truck drivers to non-interstates, leading to more traffic deaths. Additionally, it costs the government more money to collect tolls than to collect fuel taxes."

Among its other faulty assumptions, the report assumes 5 percent collection costs for the entire interstate system based on a study of four existing urban toll roads. The vast majority of the interstate system is rural and therefore has lower volumes, so collection costs are bound to be much higher on average. Historically, it costs less than 1 percent to collect the fuel tax, which is collected at the wholesale level by about 1,500 registered taxpayers. Even with electronic tolling, it costs between 20 percent and 30 percent just for toll collection and administration.

The report claims motorists prefer tolls to higher fuel taxes, but this is based on surveys asking about tolls only on newly built lanes, not on existing interstates.

The Reason Foundation's report mischaracterizes why three states that have been granted conditional approval to implement interstate tolling under a federal pilot program have not moved forward. The report claims Virginia, North Carolina and Missouri have not "solved the political problem of getting legislative approval to go forward." The fact is the legislature in each of the states killed the tolling initiatives, citing overwhelming public opposition to it.

"It is not a 'political problem' when citizens urge their elected officials to reject a proposal that

NATSO Dismisses Tolling Claims in Reason Foundation Study

Written by Australian Business

would, if enacted, effectively tax them twice," Mullings said.

The document also projects diversion rates off the interstate system of 10 percent for cars and 20 percent for trucks, yet fails to look at the additional infrastructure, safety, congestion and air quality impacts. A recent study by the North Carolina Department of Transportation projected a diversion rate as high as 40 percent if the state had moved forward with its proposal to toll I-95.

Despite having the authority to toll existing interstates since 1991, no state has done so (other than HOV lanes) due to public opposition. Opposition centers on economic concerns for residents and businesses as well as concerns about the diversion of traffic to less-safe roads, the double taxation of motorists and the increased costs for shipped goods.

NATSO is the professional association of America's travel plaza and truckstop industry. Founded in 1960, NATSO represents the industry on legislative and regulatory matters; serves as the official source of information on the diverse travel plaza and truckstop industry; provides education to its members; conducts an annual convention and trade show; and supports efforts to generally improve the business climate in which its members operate.

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