

Mayor Watson has 'no interest' in road tolls: spokesperson



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Mayor Jim Watson doesn't want road tolls in Ottawa. He doesn't even want to study them.

"As stated in the past, Mayor Watson has no interest in studying road tolls in the City of Ottawa," the mayor's spokeswoman Livia Belcea said in an email Friday. "Specifically, Mayor Watson feels very strongly that Ottawa residents should not be penalized because of where they choose to live in our vast city and he is not interested in spending tax dollars on a study to implement tolls."

The mayor's position on road tolls will undoubtedly influence councillors who will consider spending money on a study next month. Council's transportation committee will discuss the idea of road tolls at the request of Capital Coun. David Chernushenko.

The city can't charge tolls on its own roads but it can ask the province for the authority to do so.

A study would give councillors an idea of how road tolls and congestion pricing would work in Ottawa. It would be the first step toward pursuing tolls and possibly plugging the information into the next transportation master plan. But it would also mean spending \$80,000 for a consultant to research a toll framework for Ottawa.

Cumberland Coun. Stephen Blais is also wary about studying road tolls if fees would be applied to existing infrastructure. Blais previously pitched the idea of charging tolls on Hwy. 174 to non-Ottawa residents to help raise money for another road in the area.

Charging tolls for new infrastructure versus slapping fees on existing roads is an important distinction, Blais said.

The province has indicated it would work with municipalities that are interested in road tolls, which is different from 2013 when the province told the city it wasn't interested in allowing municipalities to charge tolls. The city request in 2013 related to Hwy. 174.

"Until the province takes some action and decides what they want to do, it's hard for us to study something without knowing the rules that will be in place," Blais said.

Chernushenko, the chair of the environment committee, wants council to support a study on tolls to see if the fees could reduce congestion and help pay for road maintenance.

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