

Road tolls not the answer: CAA

By [Jenny Yuen](#), Ottawa Sun
November 19, 2016

Road tolls may not be the most effective way to get rid of gridlock.

A new Conference Board of Canada report released Friday, Congestion Costs, Road Capacity and Implications for Policy-Makers, commissioned by the Canadian Automobile Association South Central Ontario, warns the hasty solution of tolls may mean pricing people out of their cars — and ending up without the expected revenue to fund infrastructure projects.

Instead, CAA is calling on policymakers — including politicians, stakeholders and road users themselves — to start using other tools to reduce congestion, including freeway ramp metering, reversible lanes, time-of-day truck traffic restrictions, parking controls and support for ride-sharing, public transit, cycling and walking, before committing to a congestion control strategy.

“Too often, the discussion around congestion starts and stops with ‘road pricing,’ with a lack of transparency on the objectives and how those expected to pay actually benefit, and this does little in tackling the frustration of getting around,” said Terese Di Felice, director of government and community relations at CAASCO.

“Motorists are paying for the maintenance and operation of roads. What’s happening here is we start off with a congestion fee or a road toll and you get a whole lot of push-back. That’s not the only solution and that’s not the ultimate solution.”

A previous report by the Conference Board of Canada determined drivers are already paying a fair share in vehicle registration fees, parking tickets and fuel excise tax — in Ontario, it was between 70% to 90% and in the GTA where congestion is a bigger problem, it was over 100% — for the current cost of maintaining and operating roads.

“The infrastructure for people to come out of their cars doesn’t currently exist in the city,” she said. “You may get some people out of their cars, but you don’t want to price them so everyone jumps out because then you don’t have the revenue you are relying on to build out the infrastructure.”

The report stresses a public consultation of costs and benefits of road pricing must include a full accounting of who pays, who benefits and by how much.

“If the motorists are expected to pay, what do they expect to get out of it?” said Di Felice. “Is it less cars on the road, more infrastructure so they have more choice? Are you trying to get people out of their cars or revenue to do other stuff? There needs to be a strategy.”

Technology as a solution is also not being implemented as much as it could be as it could be.

A suggestion by researchers at University of Toronto, which was proposed in the report, are smart self-learning traffic lights that cut down delays at busy intersections by up to 60%.

“Reducing unnecessary delays at intersections is akin to increasing the capacity of the network, but without having to make the investment in the physical stock of roads,” said the report.

jyuen@postmedia.com