

John Tory is right about road tolls

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By **BOB RAE**
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After dismissing, and dissing, road tolls, John Tory has finally endorsed the need to put a price on the Gardiner and the DVP. It will not be instantly popular, but road pricing is an essential part of improving the infrastructure of the city.

The 407, whose construction began in the early 1990s when I was in government, was sold at less than value by a successor government. That was a mistake, as was the disastrous decision to stop construction on both the Eglinton and Spadina loop, which are still as yet uncompleted today.

There is no point in crying over spilt milk, or simply holding out the begging bowl to Queen's Park and Ottawa. Yes, more revenue for Toronto's infrastructure is vitally needed. And yes, new ways (like sharing income and corporate taxes) need to be found to get money where it is needed. But in the absence of those better decisions, Toronto needs to show that it is prepared to take responsibility to fix its own problems.

Most of the great cities in the world have embraced road pricing as an essential part of its taxation mix. With the technology that was pioneered (and has now been improved) with the opening of the 407, tolling can be unintrusive and efficient.

Both Ottawa and Queen's Park should be matching the mayor's courage and leadership by introducing progressive tax credits to help lower income Canadians with higher road and energy costs, and also by getting revenue dollars more directly to other levels of government - an area where municipalities and First Nations alike have deep and justifiable grievances. But we can't afford to wait for that. We have to look to ourselves to solve our own challenges.

No doubt there will be grouching about "flip flops" and the kind of populism that looks for rubber dollars to come bouncing in from somewhere else. John Tory has shown the courage and good sense to change his mind, and he deserves our full support. His speech today was an important step in the fight for a better city and more mature and sensible approach to politics.

***Bob Rae** is a partner at Olthuis Kleer Townshend LLP and teaches at the University of Toronto.*