



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Chris Jacobs

## Congressman Higgins, Senator Jacobs, Assemblyman Morinello, Supervisor McMurray Renew Push for Cashless Tolls

SENATOR JACOBS May 11, 2017

| ISSUE: **CASHLESS TOLLING, NEW YORK STATE THRUWAY AUTHORITY, TOURISM, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**



(Buffalo, NY) Congressman Brian Higgins (NY-26), New York State Senator Chris Jacobs (SD-60), Assemblymember Angelo Morinello (AD-145), and Grand Island Supervisor Nate McMurray are together pushing for conversion to cashless tolling at the Grand Island bridges.

“Open road tolling is the future for toll road operation generally and it is only a matter of time before it replaces inefficient, delay-causing and polluting conventional tolling nearly everywhere there are tolls,” Congressman Higgins wrote in a letter to the New York State Thruway Authority. “We are urging the Thruway Authority to move to a cashless system here in Grand Island on an expedited timeline.”

Shortly after taking office Senator Jacobs began addressing the Grand Island tolls issue. In January he wrote New York State Thruway Authority Executive Director Bill Finch requesting the authority to implement cashless tolling just as they did at the Tappan Zee Bridge in Tarrytown. Jacobs sent a similar written request to Governor Cuomo in February after the Governor announced plans to build a \$20 million welcome center on Grand Island. In early March, Jacobs and Assemblyman Morinello formally introduced legislation calling for the removal of the tolls.

“Grand Island residents have lived with the traffic congestion, increased air pollution and safety risks associated with these tolls for far too long now, not to mention the financial inequity of having to pay a toll to get back and forth to and from their homes,” said New York State Senator Chris Jacobs (60th SD). “The Grand Island bridges and the section of the Interstate 190 between them are a key connector between the population centers and tourism hubs of Buffalo and Niagara Falls. At a time when our State is talking about spending tens of millions of dollars to promote our tourism industry, we can’t ignore the need to remove these toll booths which are barriers to enhancing our economy and quality of life,” Jacobs added.

Earlier this year Assemblyman Morinello introduced legislation ([A05614](#)) which would discontinue collection of tolls at the Grand Island bridges

“Last March, I joined my colleague Sen. Chris Jacobs in calling for the New York State Thruway Authority to implement open road tolling on Grand Island. I am once again proud to reaffirm my support for this technology, along with Congressman Brian Higgins, Sen. Chris Jacobs and Grand Island Town Supervisor Nate McMurray,” said Angelo J. Morinello (R,C,I,Ref-Niagara Falls). “Like the thousands of cars that remain idle on I-190 every day, the Thruway Authority has remained idle in its commitment to improving the Grand Island Bridge congestion. It is paramount that we resolve this issue as it has lingered for far too long and became a detriment to the daily lives of Grand Island residents.”

Grand Island Supervisor Nate McMurray has been a champion for cashless tolling at the Grand Island gateways pointing out that despite incentives or other promotions, off-island customers don't come to Grand Island to frequent local businesses because of the tolls.

“It's not about the buck. It's about the pollution, the traffic jams, and the burden on our community,” said Supervisor McMurray. “Cashless tolling will alleviate much of this and better connect a now prosperous Buffalo to Niagara Falls. It will also allow our beautiful Island (the Heart of the Niagara River) to become a true hub for eco-tourism in Western New York.”

The Western New York leaders note that residents both on the Island and across the region are negatively impacted by the toll barriers. Bridge congestion at the booths day-after-day forces commuters to spend time in traffic backups, slows down commerce and generates greater air pollution.

“The daily delay caused by the tolls is nothing short of painful to be stuck in. Toll time takes away from productivity at work and family life at home. Open road tolling presents a tremendous opportunity to alleviate this burden for everyone,” said Brian R. Michel, Citizen Activist and Organizer for WNY for Grand Island Toll Barrier Removal. “The voice of the

people has never been clearer, the time for change is now. WNY must not be forgotten at the end of the line with open road tolling implementation."

Federal, State and local leaders argue that cashless tolling at Grand Island is a matter of basic fairness. Of the 18 toll bridges located exclusively in New York State, 11 bridges, all of which are located downstate, either currently have cashless tolling or are slated for conversion to cashless tolling this year.

New York State has also committed to constructing a Welcome Center on Grand Island, scheduled to be opened in 2018. The leaders noted seamless travel across the bridges would further facilitate a welcoming gateway to Grand Island, Niagara Falls and the greater-Western New York region.