



High bridge tolls wallop Staten Island businesses

Staten Island Advance Editorial By **Staten Island Advance Editorial**

on September 24, 2012 at 7:53 AM, updated September 24, 2012 at 8:11 AM

We have long known that the Port Authority did not really want its analysis of the economic impact of high tolls on the New York Container Terminal to be made public.

But now that the P.A. has been compelled by the court to release the study, we're beginning to understand exactly why the authority never wanted the report - "draft form" or no - to see the light of day.

Assemblywoman Nicole Malliotakis, whose lawsuit in state Supreme Court forced the issue, has been working through the report with College of Staten Island finance professor Dr. Jonathan Peters and Kendra Adams, president of the New York State Motor Truck Association.



Staten Island Advance photo

Assemblywoman Nicole Malliotakis has led the fight to force the Port Authority to release its report on the impact of its high tolls.

And what they've found is devastating to the authorities' blithe claim that toll hikes have a negligible effect on the local economy.

The study, of course, focused on the New York Container Terminal, which co-sponsored it. And NYCT has since reached a separate agreement with the Port Authority to provide alternative financial relief for the terminal in lieu of deeper toll discounts for its truckers.

That agreement aside, the numbers still tell quite a story.

For example, the raw data in the study indicates that truckers using the NYCT must pay on average \$40.25 more in tolls than haulers going to New Jersey terminals.

It also shows that for a trucker using NYCT, the \$88.34 cost of an average 20-mile trip is a staggering 144 percent above the national average, according to the assemblywoman.

Ms. Malliotakis charged, "That is the figure the Port Authority doesn't want the public to see, because it proves that their toll structure operates as a boon to New Jersey's economy while putting New York at a disadvantage."

She added, "With these tolls scheduled to reach \$18 per axle by 2015, the Port Authority has levied a death sentence [on the NYCT]."

Well, she spoke before she learned of the announcement of the deal between the P.A. and NYCT, so perhaps the container terminal has indeed since gotten its reprieve.

But as Rep. Michael Grimm and others have pointed out, that deal doesn't involve any toll relief, just other financial aid for the terminal. And while NYCT may be out of the woods as a result of the Port Authority's pledged investment, a lot of other Staten Island businesses that depend on their trucks crossing on the bridges are still living under the death sentence levied last September by the Port Authority and the governors who signed off on the toll hike.

What about those businesses?

Ms. Malliotakis points out that the P.A., according to its own annual report, took in \$157 million in profit after costs from its three Staten Island bridges in 2011.

That fact, combined with the heavy burden tolls have placed on businesses, makes the toll hikes, in place for a year now, "unjust and unreasonable," she said.

Given how the P.A. has used toll money for other expenses, we don't see how the court could dispute her assessment.

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