



P.A. study shows huge profits on Staten Island spans

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STATEN ISLAND, N.Y. -- The cost of doing business on Staten Island is a whole lot more expensive than in New Jersey, a financial and transportation expert said Wednesday after looking at raw data from a much-awaited study on the economic impact of bridge tolls on truckers.

A whopping 95 percent of truckers doing business at the New York Container Terminal in Mariners Harbor pay Port Authority bridge tolls, compared to just 20 percent who use Global Container Terminal in Jersey City, said Dr. Jonathan Peters. He based his conclusions on a cursory look at raw data culled from the P.A. study that a judge here ruled last week had to be turned over to Assemblywoman Nicole Malliotakis (R-East Shore/Brooklyn).



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Ninety-five percent of truckers doing business at the New York Container Terminal in Mariners Harbor pay Port Authority bridge tolls, compared to just 20 percent who use Global Container Terminal in Jersey City, said Dr. Jonathan Peters. He based his conclusions on a cursory look at raw data culled from the P.A. study that a judge here ruled last week had to be turned over to Assemblywoman Nicole Malliotakis (R-East Shore/Brooklyn).

Peters, a professor of finance at the College of Staten Island with expertise in transportation issues, and Ms. Malliotakis, who went to court to force release of the information, noted 6,741 truckers at P.A. bridges were interviewed during a five-day period beginning Feb. 27 -- with 3,162 of the truckers headed for NYCT and 3,579 bound for Jersey City.

That means, said Peters, "nearly every single trucker going to the port on Staten Island is hitting that toll. ... That is clearly an extra cost on their businesses."

Truckers traveling with an E-ZPass at peak times currently pay \$10 an axle; that is set to escalate to \$18 come 2015.

Ms. Malliotakis enlisted Peters' help after the P.A. dumped the data answers -- but no data questions -- in her lap last Thursday, prompting Supreme Court Justice Joseph Maltese to rule that the bi-state agency had to provide

her with all of the raw data so she could assess it.

Ms. Malliotakis and other elected officials here who are battling bridge tolls have argued for months that the study -- partially paid for with taxpayer money -- must be bad news for Staten Island businesses, otherwise the P.A. would have released it long ago.

The P.A. had resisted, claiming it was in draft form.

NYCT chief Jim Devine has said he might have to shut down in a few years' time if the toll situation isn't resolved, imperiling 550 jobs here.

During an initial review of the material in Ms. Malliotakis' Midland Beach district office, Peters also pointed to the P.A.'s 2011 financial report, which showed tremendous profits on two of three bridges NYCT truckers use.

The agency made \$86 million on the Goethals Bridge and \$75 million on the Outerbridge Crossing.

The agency lost \$4 million on the Bayonne Bridge.

"It's a lovely business to be in," quipped Peters.

"This is a massive impact on our business community," Ms. Malliotakis said. "This is a huge disparity."

Ms. Malliotakis also was irked that the study data intake, completed in early March, was compiled by April 20, according to information she received.

"Why does it take them five months?" she asked. "Clearly, they have had plenty of time."

"I don't understand why a research report that has this kind of economic impact on the community can't be released," added Peters. "This is a well-known dodge used by agencies. The reality is that they [the P.A.] are making policy decisions based on this."

The two called crunching the numbers and interpreting the data a "massive task." Still, they said they hoped to have some conclusions as early as Monday -- and promised to release it publicly.

In addition to his CSI workload, Peters is a research fellow at the University Transportation Research Center at the City College of New York.

Ms. Malliotakis, a first-term lawmaker, holds an M.B.A. and has a background in statistics.

As part of his ruling, Maltese also asked for the raw data as well as any conclusions the P.A. has reached thus far. He could rule as early as Friday whether the information should be released to the public in whole or in part.

