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WASHINGTON, May 31, 2002

For Whom The Suckers Toll

Commentary And Road Rebellion From CBSNews.com's Dick Meyer

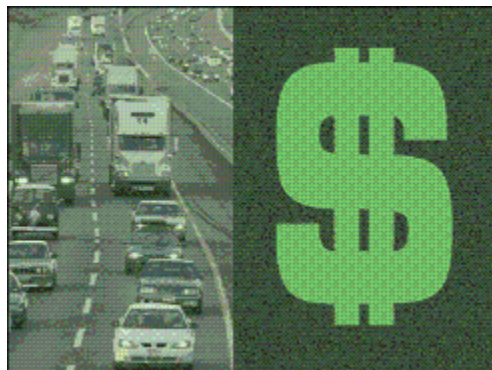
By Dick Meyer

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(AP / CBS)

(CBS) Tolls extract too high a toll on drivers, according to this [Against the Grain](#). CBSNews.com's Dick Meyer says it time to tear them all down.

Memorial Day invariably and violently reminds me of one of the most primitive, stupid and maddening self-inflicted hassles in American life -- highway tolls.

Tolls are a bureaucratically sadistic relic of the times of evil Prince John and Sherwood Forest. They are now a pox on the road map of America. We can abolish them in our lifetime and make the world safer and cleaner for future generations.

Drivers of the world unite.

The Boston Tea Party worked just dandy. I say we declare this 4th of July National Blow The Tolls Day. From sea to shining sea, drivers, truckers, motorcyclists and right thinking citizens everywhere should just get on the road and blow through the tollbooths. We'll send trucks through first to knock down those cheesy striped gates. We'll tear up the tickets. We'll just say no. We'll get empowered. We'll talk back to power. We shall overcome.

Anyone who has ever sat in traffic at a toll plaza knows with moral certainty that tolls are evil. But let's quickly review some counts of the indictment.

Tolls pollute. They cause cars and trucks to decelerate, reaccelerate and idle in line, needlessly sending emissions out to smog up our little planet. Don't take my word for this. Two economists, Jonathan Peters and Jonathan Kramer, made the case well in, "A Model of the Total Cost of Highway Toll Collection." It's a must read.

Tolls are dangerous. They cause fender benders, rear-enders, sideswipes and occasionally shmushed booths and worse.

Tolls create road rage. Anyone who has sat at one of the end tolls on the New Jersey Turnpike for, say, two hours, cannot reasonably be expected to motor on for the rest of their journey in a state of interstate nirvana.

Tolls degrade human dignity. It is inhuman and totalitarian to make people wait in gridlocked toll lanes when so many sensible alternatives exist. It is a waste of man hours and a drag on productivity.

Tolls are unfair. Why should some people get to drive on some roads for free and others have to pay tolls? We all pay gas taxes, whether we are forced to use toll roads or not. Even people who don't drive benefit from roads -- duh. Deliveries come to their homes, so do firemen, plumbers, Harry & David fruit and in-laws.

Tolls exacerbate regional hostilities and interstate xenophobia. For example, I hate New Jersey and Delaware and would not allow my daughter to marry men from those states.

Tolls create double taxation. Drivers who pay tolls also pay gas taxes, which maintain about 98 percent of the country's roads. If tolls are the fairest ways to pay for roads, almost all roads are unfair.

Finally, no person in the 21st century should have to be a tollbooth collector. It's barbaric.

There are just a few categories of misguided or selfish souls who like tolls.

Some politicians do because tolls can be the easiest routes to raising money. Country people like tolls because they hardly ever have to pay them. Some libertarian or free market economists like them because they think are a perfect free-market user fee. Some entrepreneurs like them because they want to build private, for-profit toll ways. Some cops like them because they can be easy spots to park and reach ticket quotas. Gas companies like them because they waste gas.

There are scads of righteous anti-toll groups scattered around various cities and states. But there's no national organization. We need one.

The agenda is simple and it would be as popular as the four-day workweek.

All municipalities, all states, all cities, must demolish all toll plazas by July 4, 2003, the first anniversary of National Blow the Tolls Day.

The only exceptions would be for toll-like setups that use perfected E-Z Pass or Express Tool technology that would allow cars to pass sensors that automatically bill them -- without having to slow down, change lanes or smile courteously.

And I could be talked out of that exception.

Dick Meyer, a veteran political and investigative producer for CBS News, is editorial director of CBSNews.com based in Washington.

E-mail your questions and comments to [Against the Grain](#)

By Dick Meyer




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
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