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**Parkway tolls up Monday**

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With higher toll rates to start Monday on the Garden State Parkway and the New Jersey Turnpike, experts expect some drivers to vote with their steering wheels and avoid toll roads, for a little while.

Parkway drivers who pay 35 cents for a one-way toll will pay 50 cents starting Monday. On the New Jersey Turnpike, the toll of \$1.20 for an average 22-mile trip will increase to \$1.70.

Signs with the new toll rates covered up have been erected on the Parkway, and variable message signs on both toll roads are reminding drivers that they'll have to dig deeper.

"There are those who are so turned off by the cost of living in New Jersey, that will keep them off the (toll) road," said David Weinstein, AAA Mid-Atlantic spokesman. "You'll see some clogged (toll-free) roads, and some state roads will be bumper to bumper for a while."

That means more drivers will try to squeeze onto the likes of Routes 9, 35 and 1 and Interstate 295, where they parallel the toll roads. But the cost in time spent may send people back to the toll roads, at least during rush hour, Weinstein said.

A plan approved in October would double Parkway tolls by 2012, but it rolls back September's proposed toll increases on the New Jersey Turnpike by 6 percent. Historically, toll roads see some diversion of traffic when tolls are increased, but those drivers usually return, experts said.

"We're not expecting a great deal of diversion and, if drivers were to divert, we expect they'll come back for the convenience," said Joe Orlando, spokesman for the New Jersey Turnpike Authority, which operates both the Turnpike and Parkway.

Shore area Parkway drivers don't have a lot of alternatives to the toll road, said Jonathan Peters, assistant professor of finance at City University of New York, who studies toll roads.

Those who are most likely to change roads are drivers traveling at off-peak hours.

"Most will stay on the Parkway. You'll see some diversion in the off-peak hours," said Peters, a Fair Haven resident. "Certain people may choose to avoid toll roads and use Route 35 or 9, maybe not during peak periods, but in the evenings."

Authority officials said the toll increase was needed to repay bonds that the agency sold to finance major construction projects. Revenue also will bankroll an \$8.25 billion construction program that includes widening parts of the Parkway and Turnpike and committing \$1.25 billion to help fund building a second Hudson River rail tunnel.

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