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The Contra Costa Taxpayers Association opposes the Bay Area Toll Authority (BATA/MTC) taking any action to increase bridge tolls now.

As the December 8 *East Bay Times* revealed, BATA's bridge toll accounting books are a mess. BATA/MTC should follow the lead of Caltrans and BART and create an Office of Internal Audits and Investigations, headed by an independent Inspector General. That structural reform is necessary to ensure accurate tracking of existing bridge toll accounts.

First, voters approved the initial dollar toll in 1988 via RM1 with funds designated for operation, maintaining and replacing the bridges as well as making transit improvements.

Second, the voters in 2004 with RM2 and in 2018 with Regional Measure 3, approved increases (other than bridge operation, maintenance and replacements) to help fund other activities, transit, freeway, bicycle and pedestrian projects, including BART seismic retrofit, new rail cars, Warm Springs station improvements and the Caldecott tunnel-off bridge improvements.

Third, \$3.00 of the current \$7.00 bridge toll (43 percent) goes to the "seismic retrofit" program. Yet BATA supposedly completed that program in 2019. As "seismic retrofit" debt is paid down, that should free up the existing revenue stream for bridge operations, maintenance, and rehabilitation. Therefore, BATA must provide an accounting of the "seismic retrofit" program before seeking the proposed toll increase.

Fourth, comingling of funds is a "NO-NO." Restricted funding must be accounted for separately and released from restricted funds only by the voters. Restricted funding does not allow MTC to use any of the separately approved money for any other purpose. BATA/MTC votes by committee this week and full Commission next are contrary to prior voter approval.

Fifth, your CFO says it would be "good practice" to track the revenues and expenditures for each program. BATA/MTC have the information to do that for RM3 and in a couple of months it could be applied for the other voter-approved programs.

Sixth, voter-approved restricted funding can only be released from the restriction by another vote. The action without voter approval punishes those who commute the furthest, have the highest gasoline and insurance bills, and represent a large percentage of working class and low-income commuters. Your proposed toll increase is inflationary to a population that already is economically struggling. Fifty-five percent (55%) of Contra Costa County voters opposed Regional Measure 3, and 14 of its 19 cities voted NO.

Finally, the BATA Board should not take an action on their toll hike proposal until BATA and its CFO have completed necessary fiscal reforms which allow the BATA Board to make well-informed decisions and produce transparency to the public. The proposed toll increase being considered is not set to begin until 2026, so rushing BATA/MTC actions this week and next week is ill-advised and should be postponed.

Whatever action that the BATA Board takes this month, the Contra Costa Taxpayers Association will ask Contra Costa County BATA Board members Federal Glover and Sue Noack to explain their actions.

Contra Costa Taxpayers Association

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Marc D. Joffe". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the text "Contra Costa Taxpayers Association".

Marc Joffe, President