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## DeSaulnier: Bridge toll plan fails East Bay commuters miserably

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Our region has attracted people from around the country and the world to raise their families, pursue their education, and start some of the world's most innovative businesses. However, our productivity and quality of life that have given us a competitive edge are at risk if we don't address our transportation issues in a thoughtful, meaningful way that invests in modeling and performance. For example, commuters from the East Bay on the Richmond-San Rafael Bridge lose an estimated 2,040 hours per day in traffic.

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A bill now before the California Legislature, SB 595, would ask voters to approve a \$3 toll increase on major Bay Area bridges, except the Golden Gate, for a total of \$8 or \$9 a trip with the purported goal of reducing congestion. Unfortunately, this shortsighted bill is a terrible deal for East Bay residents.

There are four components of SB 595 that make it obvious the bill must be defeated in the legislature, and, if passed, must be fought at the ballot box and in court:

First: With the toll increase, commuters could face trips costing \$8 or \$9, totaling a cost of thousands of dollars each year. The impact of this burden on so many working, middle-class families already struggling to afford commuting and housing costs would be severe.

Second: Adding insult to injury, the bill forces East Bay residents to pay for infrastructure improvements that would disproportionately benefit other, more affluent communities in the region — some of the very same communities that have resisted the densification and affordable-housing developments that would ease some of the pain of long commutes and high housing costs in our expensive region. Contra Costa County residents could potentially contribute 18.4 percent of the revenue and receive less than 10 percent of the benefits. According to the East Bay Times, Contra Costa and Alameda counties together would contribute 49 percent of the revenue, but receive just 39 percent from projects.

Third: The bill spends money on projects that will not reduce congestion for the East Bay residents. If commuters are forced to pay \$3 more to cross the bridge, they should see benefits from projects sooner rather than later. SB 595 prioritizes projects that will not make their lives any better in the foreseeable future.

Fourth: The proposal does not require any oversight or accountability. How many times will we ask tax- and toll-payers to foot the bill for projects that are poorly planned with massive cost overruns? The San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge, which was supposed to cost \$1.1 billion and open in 2003, was more than a decade late and more than \$5 billion over budget.

MTC, our region's metropolitan planning organization, used toll money to pay for the acquisition and renovation of its new headquarters in San Francisco, failing to anticipate a cost overrun of more than \$90 million. And the new Transbay Terminal project is now nearly double the \$1.189 billion budgeted. In the meantime, metropolitan regions around the world are surging ahead with transportation investments based on rigorous analysis, transparency, and performance-based decisions.

SB 595 presents us with a misinformed, ill-advised plan. Not only does it fail basic tests of fairness, it ignores the realities of what projects are most feasible, practical, and can make the most difference in people's lives.

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Until and unless it is reworked, SB 595 should be rejected. It is a classic example of political institutions failing us by not providing the infrastructure to keep up with economic growth. What will happen to California's prosperity and innovation if political institutions refuse to change, adapt, and provide the infrastructure we need based on performance and analysis, and not backroom politics?

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