

Bay Area voters may be asked to OK bridge toll hike of up to \$3

By Matier & Ross | July 2, 2017

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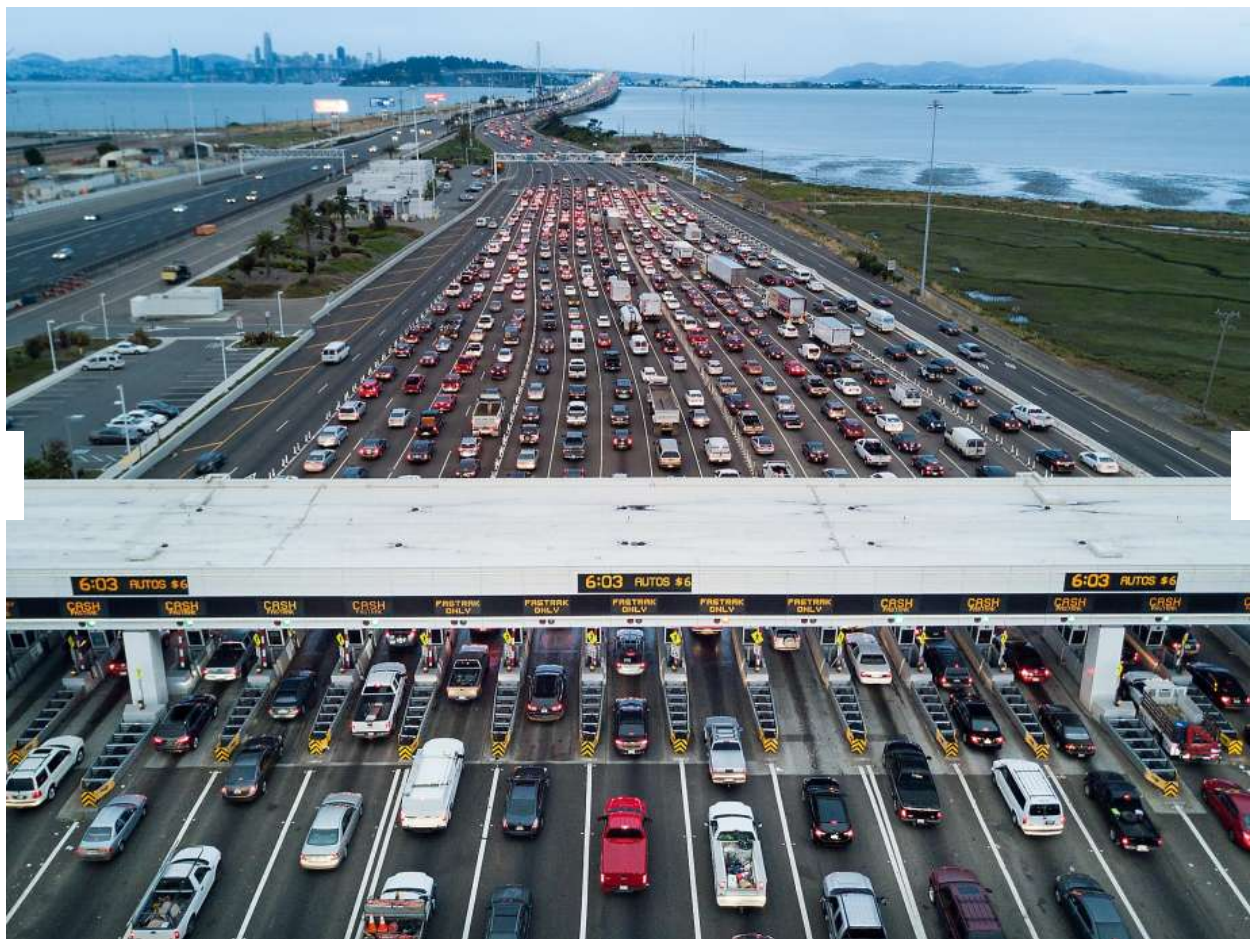


Photo: Noah Berger, Special To The Chronicle

IMAGE 1 OF 2

Traffic streams through the Bay Bridge toll plaza, where an increase could peg the toll at \$9.

Lawmakers, business leaders and staffers at the Metropolitan Transportation Commission have been quietly meeting at the state Capitol in an effort to draw up a proposal for a toll increase of \$2 to \$3 on the Bay Area's seven state-run bridges.

The goal is to have the measure in front of voters either in next year's June primary election or on the November general election ballot.

Money from the toll increase — an estimated \$125 million a year — would pay for a number of projects intended to ease traffic congestion. Those could include funding for 300 new BART cars, something that would allow the transit agency to run more trains; construction of more high-occupancy vehicle lanes on Interstates 80, 680 and 880, plus Highway 101; expanded ferry systems and more express buses; BART service to San Jose; and the growing cost of the new Transbay Transit Center in San Francisco.

“We want to make sure that the projects will have a positive impact on traffic,” said **Carl Guardino**, president of the Silicon Valley Leadership Group, which is among those talking in Sacramento about a possible toll increase.

The increase could bring tolls on state-run spans to as much as \$9 on the Bay Bridge, which has congestion pricing, and \$8 on other bridges. The exact proposal hasn't been set, but one idea under discussion is to raise tolls by \$2 and set an automatic increase in future years that would be tied to inflation.

The only bridge exempt from the increase would be the Golden Gate, which is run by its own transit district. **Tolls there** top out at \$7.75.

Two of the biggest players pushing for the toll increase are the Silicon Valley Leadership Group — whose members include such tech titans as Genentech, Facebook and Google — and the Bay Area Council, which represents some of the region's biggest employers, including Kaiser Foundation Hospitals, Pacific Gas and Electric Co. and UCSF.

A poll of Bay Area voters that the two business groups commissioned showed that 59 percent of those surveyed would support a \$2 toll increase that paid for transit improvements, and 56

percent would back a \$3 increase. The online poll was conducted by the firm Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz and Associates, and had a margin of error of 2.2 percentage points.

“When you consider the huge amount of time that commuters waste in traffic every day, adding a couple extra dollars to bridge tolls will help cut congestion and expand critical regional mass transit that benefits the entire Bay Area,” **Jim Wunderman**, an executive with the Bay Area Council, said in a statement.

The urban planning group SPUR has also been in on the talks.

“Right now much of the discussions are centering around where the money will go,” said state Sen. **Jerry Hill**, D-San Mateo, one of the lawmakers in on the negotiations.

And with good reason.

Any toll increase would need a simple-majority approval in a cumulative vote of the nine Bay Area counties — San Francisco, Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, Sonoma, Napa, Solano, San Mateo and Santa Clara. But voters in some of those counties drive the bridges a lot more than others.

For example, Alameda County accounts for 31 percent of drivers paying bridge tolls, but its share of the nine-county electorate amounts to just 22 percent, according to the Metropolitan Transportation Commission.

Santa Clara County, on the other hand, has 22 percent of the Bay Area vote, but it accounts for just 3 percent of bridge toll payers.

“So a balance has to be worked out,” Hill said.

And so does the sales pitch to voters.

Election tip: **Daniel Lurie**, head of the Tipping Point Community charity, was spotted having lunch the other day at AT&T Park’s Gotham Club with Giants President **Larry Baer** and a mutual friend, Hyatt Hotel heir **John Pritzker** — where they were overheard discussing Lurie’s prospects for a 2019 mayoral run in San Francisco.

From what we hear, this was very much a case of Lurie testing the waters for possible political support.

Lurie wasn't taking our call about the lunch, but he told us earlier that he had "too much on my plate right now" and that "I don't view myself as a politician."

Lurie did, however, put himself into the thick of one of the city's most contentious issues when he recently announced his group would **contribute \$100 million** to try to cut the chronically homeless population in half over the next five years.

Talk of a Lurie run was also the hot table topic at Tipping Point's annual gala at the Bill Graham Civic Auditorium a couple of months back — an event that drew 1,200 guests and raised more than \$16 million for the 12-year-old poverty-fighting organization.

"It's no secret that people do frequently ask Daniel if he will get involved in politics, because he is so committed to alleviating poverty and he is a charismatic public speaker," said Lurie adviser and political consultant **Nathan Ballard**, who was press secretary to former Mayor **Gavin Newsom**.

Lurie may be best known as chairman of the San Francisco host committee for Super Bowl 50, which helped raise \$12 million that was plowed into putting on the big party last year and supporting dozens of local charities.

Even before that, he was well connected.

Lurie's dad, Rabbi **Brian Lurie**, headed the Jewish Community Federation of San Francisco, the Peninsula, Marin and Sonoma counties for 17 years. His mother, **Mimi Haas**, married philanthropist **Peter Haas**, the late CEO of Levi's.

And he has a long contact list of local string pullers.

San Francisco Chronicle columnists Phillip Matier and Andrew Ross appear Sundays, Mondays and Wednesdays. Matier can be seen on the KPIX TV morning and evening news. He can also be heard on KCBS radio Monday through Friday at 7:50 a.m. and 5:50 p.m. Got a tip? Call (415) 777-8815, or email matierandross@sfchronicle.com. Twitter: [@matierandross](https://twitter.com/matierandross)



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