

## Editorial: Troubling plan for \$3 Bay Area bridge toll hike

By EAST BAY TIMES EDITORIAL BOARD |

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A proposed \$3 Bay Area bridge toll increase would disproportionately benefit the Silicon Valley, and would provide a windfall for BART without adequate cost controls for the troubled transit agency.

The increase from \$5 to \$8 would also be permanent, with annual inflation adjustments and no opportunity for voters to weigh in after next year.

Many of the projects to be funded with the toll hike are badly needed. But this plan is a recipe for waste and abuse. It must be fixed before voters from the nine Bay Area counties weigh in next year.

The toll increase, which would affect every Bay Area bridge except the Golden Gate, first requires state legislation. The state Senate in May passed [SB 595](#) even though it contained no specifics.

Amendments with the troubling details were revealed just before an Assembly hearing this month.

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For starters, of \$4.2 billion in planned capital projects, \$1.1 billion would go for BART-related projects, including \$500 million for new train cars.

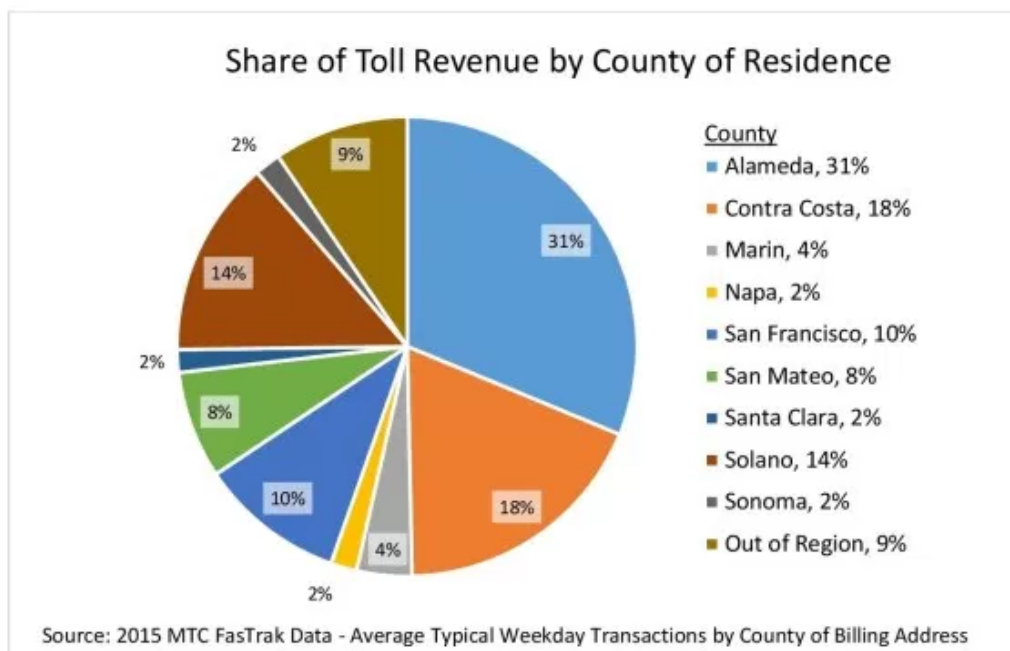
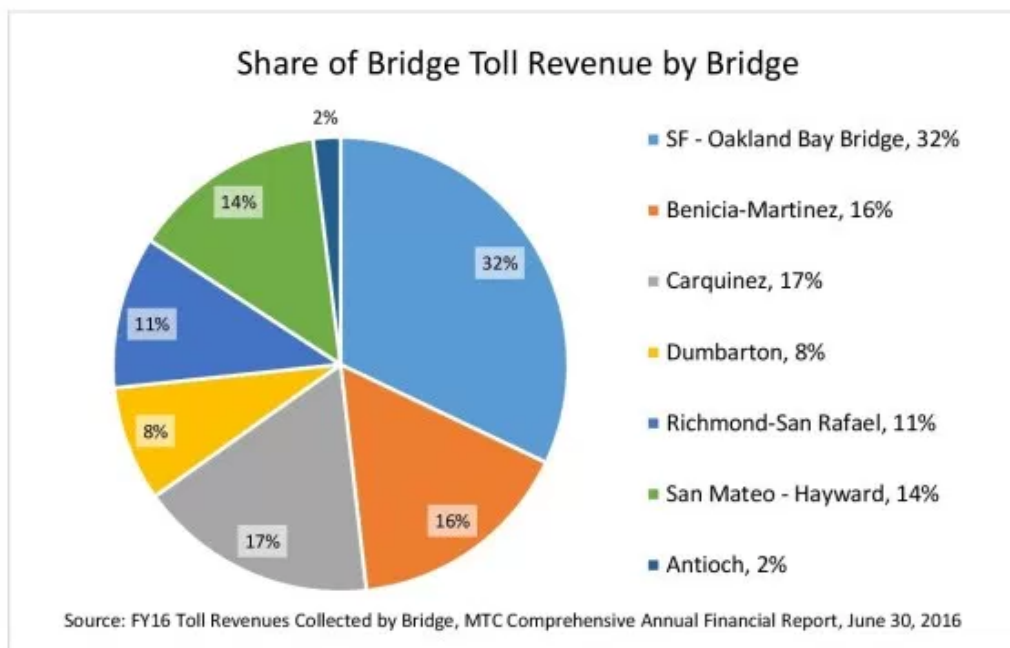
Yet, there are no provisions guarding against BART repeating its [current taxpayer rip-off](#), using new voter-approved property taxes intended for capital projects to indirectly subsidize [out-of-control labor costs](#).

State Sen. Steve Glazer, D-Orinda, has proposed appointment of a state inspector general to oversee BART expenditures. Assemblywoman Catharine Baker, R-Dublin, has called for [binding requirements](#) that would stop BART's accounting shell game.

Voters should reject any bridge toll hike that doesn't include those provisions.

More BART train cars are critical to improving the flow of Bay Area transportation, but the transit system cannot be trusted to spend money as intended. There must be safeguards.

Similarly, the issue with the regional distribution of new toll money is not whether planned projects are merited. It's whether they should be paid with bridge toll money and whether one region should be subsidizing another.



These charts from the Metropolitan Transportation Commission show sources of toll money at state-owned Bay Area bridges.

Most regional bridge toll money comes from the central and north bay. Specifically, [78 percent](#) is collected on the Bay Bridge and the four bridges further north. And 63 percent of tolls are paid by residents of Alameda, Contra Costa and Solano counties.

Conversely, only 2 percent of tolls are paid by Santa Clara County residents. Yet 15 percent of capital money would go to projects primarily benefitting them.

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That includes BART to San Jose, [light rail](#) between the future Milpitas BART station and the Eastridge Transit Center, and improvements to San Jose's Diridon Station.

That's not surprising because state Sen. Jim Beall, D-San Jose, is leading the push for the toll hike. What's disappointing is that it passed the Assembly transportation committee, chaired by Jim Frazier, D-Oakley.

Residents of Frazier's county, Contra Costa, are getting an especially raw deal. They pay 18 percent of the bridge tolls and wouldn't get anywhere near their proportional benefit.

This bill must be fair and it must have safeguards. So far, it fails both tests.

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