NATIONAL MOTORISTS ASSOCIATION

Empowering Drivers Since 1982

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Testimony for the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee
On HB 4925, April 29, 2014 (based on the bill as introduced)

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, I would ask the committee to consider whether this bill is an integral and proper part of the $500 million dollar roads package the Speaker has proposed.

HB 4925 opens an entirely new area of taxation for MDOT and the Transportation Commission, without any legislative oversight. If it fails, which the National Motorists Association strongly advocates, does this mean the $500 million dollar package will be smaller than intended? And if not, why is this bill in the package?

MDOT can already do the most common type of "design-build" PPPs which conform to Michigan law and do not permit tolling as this bill would. Is the entire purpose of the bill to add tolling? Toll roads and tolling have not been a part of the larger public discussion of measures to support our roads in 2014 and beyond. If tolls were to become a part of the way we fund our roads, why has this very controversial source of taxation not been discussed as part of the $500 million dollar package, to give the public some chance to react? If for the first time in our history, toll roads and other tolled facilities not specifically approved case by case by the legislature will be a part of Michigan's road taxes package, shouldn't the public have a meaningful say in that major change? The NMA believes it should not be quietly wrapped up in the rest of this package.

If tolling and toll roads are not part of the overall road funding plan, then why is the bill needed at all? What other "reforms" are needed for MDOT regarding PPPs that it cannot already do under current law?

In the 2009-2010 Legislative session, HB 4961 would have given MDOT similar new authority to create toll roads, congestion based pricing, HOT lanes and other tolled facilities without legislative approval of each individual project in advance. The NMA, PIRGIM and the Owner-Operator Independent Drivers Association gave a joint statement objecting to giving MDOT and the Transportation Commission unilateral tolling authority. This issue became one key reason that the bill was defeated.

The National Motorists Association believes that Michigan does not need and should not have toll roads that the legislature has not approved in advance on a case by case basis through the public legislative process. We believe that giving up that legislative oversight and approval function is something the legislature should not do, now or at any future time. We urge the committee to vote against this bill.

In no other state in the Union is driving more synonymous with freedom than in Michigan, freedom from tolls and vehicular tracking should remain true. It is one important item in Pure Michigan.

Thank you and I would be happy to take any questions.

Respectfully submitted,

James C. Walker, for the National Motorists Association