

# *South Hampton Roads Midtown and Downtown Tunnels Tolls Survey*

## *Part I: Pre-Tolling Report and Findings*



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# 1. Project Overview

## 1.1 Project Goals

The goals of this study are to assess the public's views and anticipated behavior in light of the implementation of tolling on the Midtown and Downtown tunnels.

The data and analysis in this report focuses on commuting experiences, knowledge and views of tolls on the Midtown and Downtown tunnels, anticipated changes to commuting patterns, and knowledge and use of the EZ Pass system.

## 1.2 Survey Methodology

- √ Data for this report are from a random sample telephone survey of 601 residents of the cities of Norfolk, Portsmouth, Chesapeake, Suffolk, and Virginia Beach, including landline and cell phones, conducted January 26-31. Calls were made between 5 PM and 9 PM on week days, and between 1 PM and 7 PM on Sunday.
- √ The maximum Margin of Error (MoE) for the overall survey (n=601) is +/- 3.9 percentage points at the 95% level of confidence. This means that 95 times out of 100 the reported results will be within 3.9 points of the actual results if we were to survey the entire population of drivers 18-older in the five cities included in the study. In addition to sampling error, the other potential sources of error include non-response, question wording, and interviewer error.
- √ The response rate (AAPOR RRI Standard Definition) for the survey is 17%. Four callbacks were employed in the fielding process.
- √ Live calling was conducted by trained interviewers at the Wason Center for Public Policy Survey Research Lab at Christopher Newport University.
- √ The data are weighted using the HRTPO Travel Demand Model trip ends to reflect as closely as possible the locality of residence of drivers using the Midtown and Downtown tunnels.
- √ The weighted proportion of respondents by locality is:

<b>Q1. Could you tell me which locality you are a resident of? (weighted)</b>	Norfolk	21
	Portsmouth	32
	Chesapeake	20
	Suffolk	6
	Virginia Beach	21

## 2. Summary of Key Findings

### 1. Commuting Experiences

- Vast majority of residents drive; a third commute through one or both tunnels, and nearly two-thirds of them do so during Peak hours.

### 2. Views on Tolls

- Residents are slightly more supportive of tolls than opposed; tolling most popular option for paying for transportation improvements in Hampton Roads.

### 3. Knowledge of Tolls

- Residents think a reasonable toll for cars and light trucks is \$.77, and for commercial heavy trucks is \$1.75; split on whether current toll for cars and lights trucks is too high.

### 4. Anticipated Changes to Driving Habits

- Few say they will change where they live to avoid tolls, but majority say they will change their commute or where they travel to avoid them.

### 5. Issues Related to EZ Pass

- Most residents have heard about EZ Pass; majority have opened an account or say they don't need one. Most employers not helping with toll costs.

### 3. Commuting Experiences

#### KEY FINDINGS

- **Most South Hampton Roads commuters experience traffic related delays on a regular basis.**
- **A third of South Hampton Roads commuters use the Midtown or Downtown tunnels at least once a week.**
- **Nearly 60% of commuters who use the Midtown or Downtown tunnels at all do so during Peak driving times.**

Several questions were included to assess commuting habits of drivers in the five cities of South Hampton Roads, including questions that gauge how residents commute, how often they are late getting somewhere due to traffic, how often they commute through the Midtown or Downtown tunnels, and when their tunnel commute occurs.

The vast majority of South Hampton Roads residents get around the region by driving a vehicle (Q3), and face a delay getting somewhere due to traffic an average of five out of seven days per week (Q2). The typical household has at least one driver who commutes through the Midtown or Downtown tunnels to get to work, school, or some other obligation (Q5), and 29% of residents say they personally commute through the tunnels at least once a week (Q6). A majority of those commutes take place during Peak hours, either in the morning or afternoon/early evening (Q7).

<b>Q2. Thinking about your typical 7-day week, about how many days are you late getting somewhere because of traffic problems?</b>	Average = 5 days
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<b>Q3. Thinking about your typical 7-day week again, how do you normally get around, do you normally...</b>	
Drive your own vehicle	87
Drive someone else's vehicle	5
Take the bus, ferry, or light rail	3
Take a taxi	1
Take turns sharing rides with other people, such as "carpooling"	1
Walk or ride a bike	1
Some other way	2

<b>Q5. How many drivers in your home ever commute through either the Midtown or Downtown tunnels to get to work, school, or fulfill some other obligation?</b>	Average = 1
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**Q6. And how about you personally, how often do you use the Midtown or Downtown tunnels between Norfolk and Portsmouth?**

Daily	16
Once a week	13
Few times a month	22
Very seldom	19
Almost never	18
Never	10
Dk/refused	2

**Q7. And when do you typically make that drive...**

In the morning before 5:30	3
In the morning between 5:30-9:00	16
In the afternoon between 2:30-7:00	19
Both in the morning between 5:30-9:00 AND in the afternoon between 2:30-7:00	22
During the day between 9:00 AM and 2:30 PM	15
In the evening after 7:00	10
Dk/refused	15

## 4. Views on Tolls

### KEY FINDINGS

- **Knowledge of the tolls prior to their implementation was widespread.**
- **Residents of South Hampton Roads are more supportive of the tolls for their stated purpose than opposed to them.**
- **When given a series of options, tolls are the most popular way to pay for future transportation improvements among residents of South Hampton Roads.**

Several questions were included to assess resident's views on the pending tolls on the Midtown and Downtown tunnels, including questions that assess how much respondents had heard about the tolls, whether they supported the purpose of the tolls, and how they preferred to pay for future transportation improvements in Hampton Roads.

The public was very aware of the pending tolls on the Midtown and Downtown tunnels before they began to be collected (Q4). Just over three-fourths (76%) of residents said they had heard a lot about the tolls, while another 11% said they had hear some about the tolls. Only 4% said they had not heard about the tolls. Support for the tolls was higher than opposition to the tolls (Q8), with 44% saying they supported the tolls being collected to finance improvements to the Midtown and Downtown tunnels, while 36% say they opposed the tolls being collected for this reason. Among South Hampton Roads residents, tolls are the most popular way to pay for transportation improvements (Q9), followed closely by a statewide sales tax and a statewide gas tax.

<b>Q4. How much have you heard about the tolls that are coming to the Midtown and Downtown tunnels between Norfolk and Portsmouth on February 1, have you heard...</b>	A lot	76
	Some	11
	A little	9
	None	4

<b>Q8. The tolls on the Midtown and Downtown tunnels are being collected to finance transportation improvements, including expanding the Midtown Tunnel from one tube to two tubes, resulting in a total of four lanes. Would you say that you generally support or generally oppose the toll for this purpose, or don't you have an opinion either way?</b>	Support	44
	No view	18
	Oppose	36
	Dk/ refused	2

**Q9. There are various ways that have been discussed over the years for paying for transportation improvements in Hampton Roads. I'm going to read a list of several that have been discussed. Please tell me which one, if any, you most support for future transportation improvements**

Tolls on specific projects	24
A regional sales tax	9
A regional gas tax	9
A statewide sales tax	20
A statewide gas tax	20
None (vol)	11
Other (vol)	3
Dk/refused	4



## 5. Knowledge of Tolls

### KEY FINDINGS

- **Residents think toll rates for both cars and light trucks, and heavy commercial trucks are higher than they actually are.**
- **Residents are not sure if the toll rate for cars and light trucks is too high or generally reasonable, but think the toll rate for commercial vehicles is too high.**

Several questions were included to assess resident's knowledge of the tolls, including questions that assessed whether respondents knew how much the tolls were scheduled to be, and whether they viewed the toll rates as too high, reasonable, or too low.

When asked to say what the toll rates are scheduled to be for cars and light trucks during Off-Peak\* times, South Hampton Roads residents say, on average, \$1.12 (Q20), which is \$.37 higher than the scheduled rate. When asked about Peak\* time rates for cars and light trucks, they say, on average, \$1.61 (Q21), which is \$.61 higher than the scheduled rate.

Residents are split on whether they think the actual Peak time toll rate for cars and light trucks of \$1.00 is too high, with 48% saying it is too high and 48% saying it is generally reasonable (Q22). Asked to say what they would consider an overall reasonable Peak time toll rate for cars and light trucks, on average residents say \$.77 (Q23).

Residents are not as split in their views about the actual Peak time toll rate for commercial heavy trucks of \$4.00, with 69% saying it is too high and 26% saying it is generally reasonable (Q24). Asked to say what they would consider an overall reasonable Peak time toll rate for commercial heavy vehicles, on average residents say \$1.75 (Q24).

<b>Q20. There are different toll rates depending upon whether you travel through one of the tunnels during times of heavy traffic volume – called Peak times, or during times of light traffic volume – called Off-Peak times. Can you tell me how much the toll rate will be for cars and light vehicles during Off-Peak times?</b>	Average = \$1.12
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\* Peak times are considered the hours of high traffic volume, between 5:30-9:00 AM and 2:30-7:00 PM. All other hours are considered Off-peak, with lower traffic volume.

<b>Q21. And how about the amount during Peak times, can you tell me how much the toll rate will be for cars and light vehicles during Off-Peak times?</b>	Average = \$1.61
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<b>Q22. Just to let you know, the toll rate is scheduled to be as high as \$1.00 for cars and light trucks during Peak travel times. Regardless of whether you support or oppose the toll, do you think this amount is generally reasonable, too high, or too low?</b>	Too high	48
	Generally reasonable	48
	Too low	2
	Dk/ refused	2

<b>Q23. And what amount would you consider to be a reasonable toll for cars and light trucks during Peak travel times, when traffic volume is high?</b>	Average = \$.77
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<b>Q24. And the rate is scheduled to be as high as \$4.00 for commercial heavy trucks during Peak travel times. Again, regardless of whether you support or oppose the toll, do you think this amount is generally reasonable, too high, or too low?</b>	Too high	69
	Generally reasonable	26
	Too low	1
	Dk/ refused	4

<b>Q25 And what amount would you consider to be a reasonable toll for commercial heavy trucks during Peak travel times, when traffic volume is high?</b>	Average = \$1.75
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## 6. Anticipated Changes in Driving Habits

### KEY FINDINGS

- **Residents are more likely to change commuting patterns than where they work or live to avoid paying tolls.**
- **The High Rise Bridge is a more likely alternative route than the Gilmerton Bridge.**
- **Residents more likely to carpool than take the bus or ferry to avoid paying tolls.**

Several questions were included to assess potential changes to commuting habits as a result of the tolls on the Midtown and Downtown tunnels, including questions about what residents might do to avoid paying the tolls, and different methods of commuting they might consider.

It is clear that residents of South Hampton Roads will look for alternatives to paying the tolls if they can (Q10). Strong majorities say they will consider changing their commuting patterns (57%) or consider avoiding traveling to destinations that require paying tolls (58%). A third of residents say they will consider telecommute or working from home, while only 19% say they would consider changing where they live or work to avoid the tolls.

In terms of alternative routes (Q14), the High Rise Bridge is more popular as an alternative (60%) than the Gilmerton Bridge (48%). In terms of alternative modes (Q17), carpooling or vanpooling is more popular as an alternative (53%) than taking the ferry (40%) or the bus (20%).

**Q10. I'm going to read several changes people have said they might make to their commutes once tolls are put in place on the Midtown and Downtown tunnels. For each one, please tell me "yes" or "no" if it is a change you think you might consider.**

	Yes	No	Dk/refused
Change where you live or work to avoid the tolls	19	77	4
Change your commute to avoid the tolls	57	38	5
Avoid traveling to destinations that require paying the tolls	58	38	4
Telecommuting or working from home	33	60	7

**Q14. Several alternative driving routes are available to avoid driving through the Midtown and Downtown tunnels. As I read each one, please tell me if it is a route you would consider taking to avoid paying the tolls.**

	Yes	No	Dk/refused
The Gilmerton Bridge	48	46	7
The High Rise Bridge	60	35	5

**Q17. There are also several alternative modes of transportation available. As I read each one, please tell me if it is a mode of transportation you would consider taking to avoid paying the tolls.**

	Yes	No	Dk/refused
The bus	20	77	3
The ferry between Portsmouth & Norfolk	40	57	3
Carpooling or Vanpooling	53	4	3

## 7. Issues Related to EZ Pass

### KEY FINDINGS

- **Knowledge of EZ Pass was widespread.**
- **Most residents have not opened an EZ Pass account because they do not think they will need one.**
- **A small but significant percentage of residents have not opened an EZ Pass account due to financial limitations or a lack of understanding about how to open one.**

Several questions were included to assess resident’s awareness of the EZ Pass system, including whether they had opened an EZ Pass account, and why not if they had not opened one.

Like awareness of the tolls generally, the public was very aware of the EZ Pass system for paying the tolls (Q26), with 66% saying they had heard a lot about it and 19% saying they had heard some about it. Only 3% said they had heard nothing about it.

Only 12% of residents said they had opened a new EZ Pass account (Q27), while 26% said they already had one, and 61% said they had no opened one. Of those who had not opened an EZ Pass account (Q28), the vast majority (69%) said they had not opened one because they did not need one or would not use one enough. However, 13% had not opened an account for reasons related to financial constraints or not knowing how to open one.

Finally, few employers are helping their employees cover the costs of the tolls (Q29), with 6% saying their employer is helping and 73% saying their employer is not helping.

<b>Q26. In order to pay for the tolls at the Midtown and Downtown tunnels, drivers are being encouraged to open EZ Pass accounts, which will collect the toll electronically. How much have you heard about the EZ Pass accounts, would you say...</b>	A lot	66
	Some	19
	A little	11
	None	3
	Dk/ refused	1

<b>Q27. And have you opened an EZ Pass account?</b>	Yes, already had one	26
	Yes, opened a new one	12
	No	61
	Dk/refused	1

<b>Q28. (If No to Q27) Which statement best describes why you have not opened an EZ Pass Account.</b>	
I have not had time to open one	18
I do not know how to open one	4
I cannot afford to open one	8
I do not have a checking or saving account to open one	1
I do not need one / will not use it enough	69

<b>Q29. Do you know if your employer is offering any help to their employees to offset the cost of the tolls, such as helping pay part of the cost?</b>	
Yes, employer is helping	6
No, employer is not helping	73
No, not employed	15
Dk/refused	7

## 8. Conclusion

The goals of this study are to assess the public's views and behavior in relation to the implementation of tolling on the Midtown and Downtown tunnels. Several broad conclusions can be drawn from the study.

South Hampton Roads residents were very aware of the pending tolls, and the EZ Pass system for collecting tolls. The tolls are supported more than they are opposed, although residents generally think the toll rates are higher than is reasonable, saying that a reasonable Peak-time rate for cars and light trucks is \$.77. Residents especially think the Peak-time toll rate for commercial heavy trucks is higher than is reasonable, saying that a reasonable Peak-time rate for commercial heavy trucks is \$1.75.

However, when given an option of several alternative methods for paying for transportation improvements, tolls still come out as the most popular alternative.

The vast majority of South Hampton Roads residents drive, and about a third use the Midtown or Downtown tunnels on at least a weekly bases. The effect of tolls on commuting patterns could be noticeable, with strong majorities of residents saying they would consider using different routes and avoiding traveling to locations that require them to pay tolls. They are less likely to use a different method of commuting, unless it involves carpooling or vanpooling, and they are much less likely to change jobs or move due to the tolls.

Finally, most people know about EZ Pass, but far fewer have opened a new EZ Pass account. While most people who have not opened a new EZ Pass account say they have not because they will not use it enough or do not need it, a small but significant percentage (13%) either do not know how or cannot afford to open one.

## 9. Appendix

### 9.1 Full Survey Questionnaire (with Weighted Responses)

INTRO: Hello! My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I'm a student calling from Christopher Newport University. This is not a sales call but a poll about transportation issues in Hampton Roads. This number was selected at random, and your answers are completely confidential. Would you be willing to take this short 8 minute survey?

Q1: Could you tell me which locality you are a resident of...

Norfolk	21
Portsmouth	32
Chesapeake	20
Suffolk	6
Virginia Beach	21

Q2: Thinking about your typical 7-day week, about how many days are you late getting somewhere because of traffic problems?

Average = 5

Q3: Ok, thinking about your typical 7-day week again, how do you normally get around, do you normally...

Drive your own vehicle	87
Drive someone else's vehicle	5
Take the bus, ferry, or light rail	3
Take a taxi	1
Take turns sharing rides with other people, such as "carpooling"	1
Walk or ride a bike	1
Some other way (vol.) (record exact answer)	2

Q4: How much have you heard about the tolls that are coming to the Midtown and Downtown tunnels between Norfolk and Portsmouth on February 1<sup>st</sup>, have you heard...

A lot	76
Some	11
A little	9
None	4

Q5: How many drivers in your home ever commute through either the Midtown or Downtown tunnels to get to work, school, or fulfill some other obligation?

Average = 1

Q6: And how about you personally, how often do you use the Midtown or Downtown tunnels between Norfolk and Portsmouth? Do you use them daily, at least once a week, a few times a month but not weekly, very seldom, or almost never?

Daily	16
Once a week	13
Few times a month	22
Very seldom	19
Almost never	18
Never – go to Q8	10
Dk/ref (vol.)	2



Q7: And when do you typically make that drive...

In the morning before 5:30	3
In the morning between 5:30-9:00	16
In the afternoon between 2:30-7:00	19
Both in the morning between 5:30-9:00 AND in the afternoon between 2:30-7:00	22
During the day between 9:00 AM and 2:30 PM	15
In the evening after 7:00	10
Dk/ref (vol.)	15

Q8: The tolls on the Midtown and Downtown tunnels are being collected to finance transportation improvements, including expanding the Midtown Tunnel from one tube to two tubes, resulting in a total of four lanes. Would you say that you [RANDOMIZE: “generally support” or “generally oppose”] the toll for this purpose, or don’t you have an opinion either way?

Generally support	44
No view	18
Generally oppose	36
Dk/ref (vol.)	2

Q9 There are various ways that have been discussed over the years for paying for transportation improvements in Hampton Roads. I’m going to read a list of several that have been discussed. Please tell me which ONE, if any, you MOST support for future transportation improvements.

**[RANDOMIZE LIST]**

Tolls on specific projects	24
A regional sales tax	9
A regional gas tax	9
A statewide sales tax	20
A statewide gas tax	20
None (vol.)	11
Other (vol.) (record exact answer)	3
Dk/ref (vol.)	4

Q10: I’m going to read several changes people have said they might make to their commutes once tolls are put in place on the Midtown and Downtown tunnels. For each one, please tell me “Yes” or “No” if it is a change you think you might consider:

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Dk/ref (vol.)</u>
Change where you live or work to avoid the tolls	19	77	4
Change your commute to avoid the tolls	57	38	5
Avoid traveling to destinations that require paying the tolls	58	38	4
Telecommuting or working from home	33	60	7

**No Q12-13**

Q14: Several alternative driving routes are available to avoid driving through the Midtown or Downtown tunnels. As I read each one, please tell me if it is a route you would consider taking to avoid paying the tolls:

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Dk/ref (vol.)</u>
The Gilmerton Bridge	48	46	7
The High Rise Bridge	60	35	5

**No Q15-16**

Q17: There are also several alternative modes of transportation available. As I read each one, please tell me if it is a mode of transportation you would consider taking to avoid paying the tolls:

	Yes	No	Dk/ref (vol.)
The bus	20	77	3
The ferry between Portsmouth & Norfolk	40	57	3
Carpooling or Vanpooling	53	44	3

**No Q18-19**

Q20: There are different toll rates depending upon whether you travel through one of the tunnels during times of heavy traffic volume - called Peak times, or during times of light traffic volume - called Off-Peak times. Can you tell me how much the toll rate will be for cars and light vehicles during Off-Peak travel times?

Average = \$1.12

Q21: And how about the amount during Peak times, Can you tell me how much the toll rate will be for cars and light vehicles during Peak travel times?

Average = \$1.61

Q22. Just to let you know, the toll rate is scheduled to be as high as \$1.00 for cars and light trucks during Peak travel times. Regardless of whether you support or oppose the toll, do you think this amount is generally reasonable, too high, or too low?

Too high	48
Generally reasonable (skip to Q24)	48
Too low	2
Dk/ref (vol.)	2

Q23. And what amount would you consider to be a reasonable toll for cars and light trucks during Peak travel times, when traffic volume is high?

Average = \$.77

Q24: And the rate is scheduled to be as high as \$4.00 for commercial heavy trucks during Peak travel times. Again, regardless of whether you support or oppose the toll, do you think this amount is generally reasonable, too high, or too low?

Too high	69
Generally reasonable (skip to Q26)	26
Too low	1
Dk/ref (vol.)	4

Q25. And what amount would you consider to be a reasonable toll for commercial heavy trucks during Peak travel times, when traffic volume is high?

Average - \$1.75

Q26: In order to pay for the tolls at the Midtown and Downtown tunnels, drivers are being encouraged to open EZ Pass accounts, which will collect the toll electronically. How much have you heard about the EZ Pass accounts, would you say...

A lot	66
Some	19
A little	11
None	3
Dk/ref (vol.)	1

Q27: And have you opened an EZ Pass account?

Yes, already had one (skip to Q29)	26
Yes, opened a new one (skip to Q29)	12
No	61
Dk/ref (vol.)	1

Q28: Which statement best describes why you have not opened an EZ Pass account?

I have not had time to open one	18
I do not know how to open one	4
I cannot afford to open one	8
I do not have a checking or savings account to open one	1
Don't need it / won't use it enough (vol)	69

Q29: Do you know if your employer is offering any help to their employees to offset the cost of the tolls, such as helping pay part of the cost?

Yes, employer helping	6
No, employer not helping	73
No, not employed (vol)	15
Dk/ref (vol)	7

## Demographics

### EDUC

High school or less	18
Some college	31
Vocational or technical training	6
College graduate	28
Graduate study or more	15
Dk/ref (vol.)	1

### HISPANIC

Yes	2
No	93
Dk/ref (vol.)	5

### RACE

White	58
Black or African American	30
Other (vol.)	12

### AGE

18-24	9
25-34	15
35-44	15
45-54	23
55 & older	38

MILITARY OR CIVILIAN EMPLOYEE AT MILITARY INSTALATION

Yes	16
No	82
Dk/ref (vol.)	3

INCOME

Under \$25,000	8
\$25-\$39,999	11
\$40-\$49,999	12
\$50-\$74,999	18
\$75-\$99,999	15
\$100,000-\$124,999	9
\$125,000-\$149,000	3
Over \$150,000	6
Dk/ref (vol.)	18

SEX

Male	43
Female	57