

## What would be the toll rates on 281?

As of this writing, the ARMA, in their public hearing (PDF file), documented that the initial estimated toll rates would be \$0.17 per mile for vehicles with 2-3 axles and \$0.46 per mile for vehicles with more than 3 axles. In addition, direct connectors for vehicles with 2-3 axles will be \$0.57 per connector and \$1.15 per connector for vehicles with more than 3 axles.

The rates will escalate each year for the first ten years at a rate of 2.75% or the Consumer Price Index, whichever is greater. After that, they'll climb to 3% or the CPI, whichever is greater.

These rates are based upon an electronic toll collection system.

A little-known phrase that carries a huge stick is "market-based tolls." Essentially, this gives the tolling authorities the right to charge what the market will bear. Austin's toll on Hwy 183 is already as much as \$1.50 per mile in some areas. That's not exactly chump-change if you have to drive that to work and back everyday. With lending costs skyrocketing due to the credit crunch, both Fitch and Moody's site bond debt for toll roads as being risky. Moody's believes as driving goes down, governments will have to raise tolls to keep the roads from defaulting. The RMA is seeking a \$95 million loan to complete the financing package that will cost \$700 million in interest, bringing the total project cost up to over \$2 billion. The toll rates are likely to end up much higher than \$0.17 a mile to pay back such high interest debt.

Furthermore, TxDOT's own survey about toll rates for Loop 1604 show that, from I-10 to Kitty Hawk will be \$5.90...one way! If you have to drive that to and from work each day...well, let's do the math:

$$\$5.90 \times 2 = \$11.80 \quad \$11.80 \times 5 \text{ days/week} = \$59/\text{week} \quad \$59/\text{week} \times 52 \text{ weeks/year} = \text{Over } \$3,000/\text{year}$$

That's not counting driving on any other toll roads planned here or throughout the state.

It gets worse. There is another phrase you'll soon become familiar with if our roads get tolled. It's called Congestion Pricing. This is where toll rates will go up, as much as double in fact, during peak traffic times. The purpose is to discourage you from using the toll road during peak times in order to relieve congestion. They are hoping that you will instead "be motivated" to use nearby free roads or drive in off-peak hours. Of course, these free roads are already congested with people who can't afford or refuse to use the toll road. Don't think that'll happen? The citizens in Houston are fighting congestion tolling on I-10 toll lanes, but the lanes are set to open soon.