

Road tolls are political pothole: Poll

By BRYN WEESE, SUN MEDIA

Tolling the GTA's existing roadways would be political suicide, a Sun Media/Nanos Research poll has found.

An overwhelming 71% of Ontarians oppose the idea of adding tolls on roads to help pay for their construction and maintenance, an idea buoyed in February by a blue-ribbon panel -- appointed by Mayor David Miller -- to examine how to improve the city's finances.

"Seven out of every 10 Ontarians clearly oppose any type of toll on a major road," said Nik Nanos, president of Nanos Research, which polled 501 Ontarians at the end of March. "The results really show politically this is a non-starter."

A key recommendation from Miller's six-member fiscal review panel called for the city to look at transferring ownership of the Don Valley Parkway and Gardiner Expressway to the provincial government in exchange for hundreds of millions of dollars worth of annual toll revenue.

"If (the toll) was for a new road, then you might be able to persuade more people you need a toll on it," Nanos said. "But I think for existing major roads ... It could be perceived as a tax on getting to work."

Among the results, the poll found men were the most opposed to the idea of tolls, at 76%, compared to 67% among women.

Older Ontarians, 60 and over, were more opposed (76%) to tolls than other age groups. But tolls could be on the horizon as a means of addressing Toronto's growing congestion and transportation woes.

Rob Maclsaac, chairman of Metrolinx, said every option that improves transportation in the GTA is under consideration.

Metrolinx is expected to release recommendations in July on ways of improving the GTA's transportation system

"We've been studying the idea (of toll roads), but we haven't come to any conclusions yet. It's an ongoing file for us," Maclsaac said.

Previously, Metrolinx suggested travel times in the GTA could slow down by 50% over the next 20 years if current trends continue.

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