

Toll Increase to \$4 Needed for Maintenance, MBA Says

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highest in the history of the bridge. Commuter rates also would increase by 50¢, to \$2 per crossing.

Proposal B calls for a two-step rate increase of 50¢ for a passenger car, which increases the one-way fare to \$3. In 2013, a second increase of \$1 would set the toll at \$4 a trip. Commuter rates would remain at \$1.50 per crossing until 2013, when they would increase to \$2. Proposal B also requires the Authority to sell

\$100 million in bonds in 2018.

Fares for other types of vehicles are also affected, as detailed in the box accompanying this story.

"None of these are cast in stone," said Bridge Authority Chairman Bill Gnodtke about the proposals, "but we've got to have something to get out there for the public hearing."

The board plans to vote on some kind of rate increase in late December.

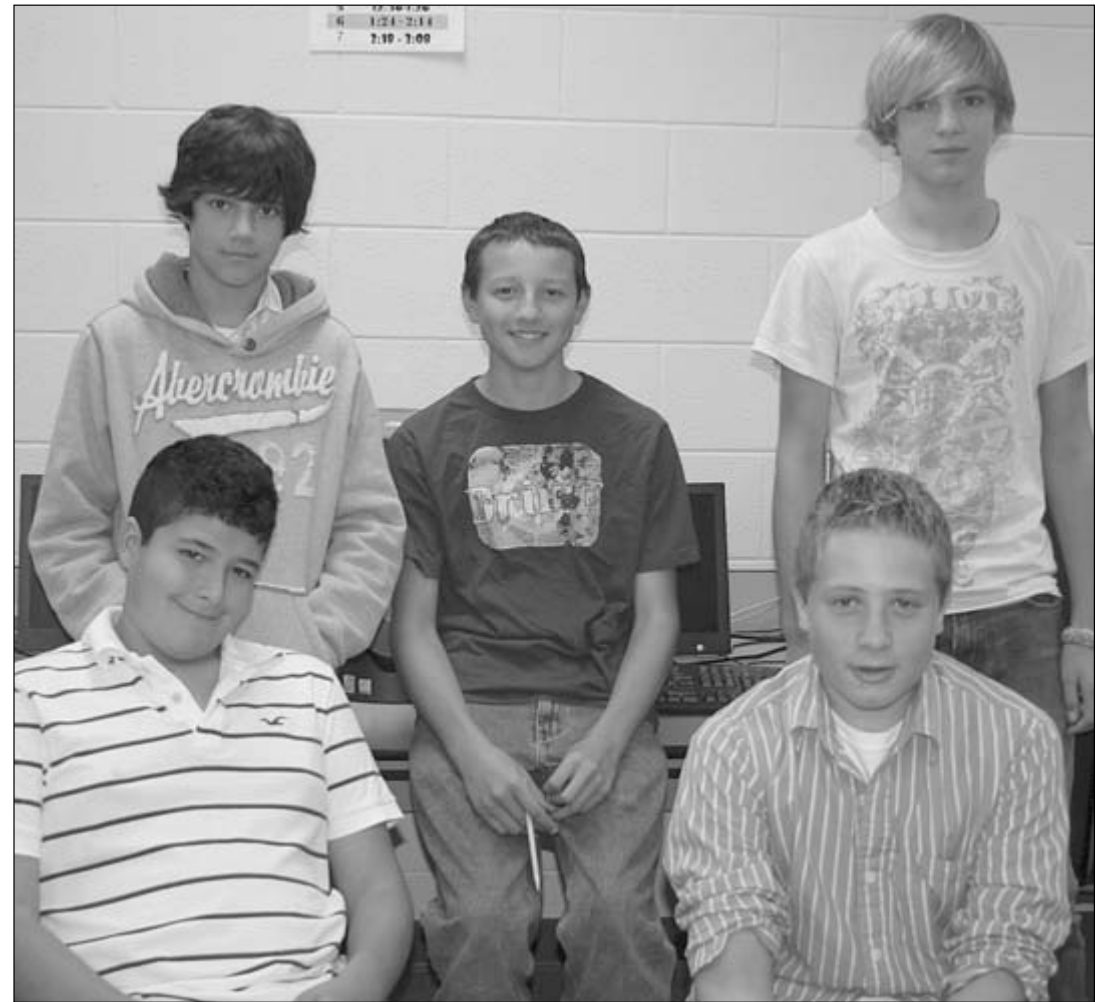
The Mackinac Bridge Authority raised the toll in May 2003, from \$1.50 per passenger vehicle to \$2.50, citing the same upcoming projects.

Driving the rate hike, say Authority members, are \$40 million needed to finish painting the bridge and another \$190 million to replace the deck. Painting the north portion of the bridge is scheduled to begin in 2009. The deck replacement project is slated for 2018. The Bridge Authority believes both projects should be funded from tolls.

"We're talking about the stability and integrity of that bridge," said board member Patrick "Shorty" Gleason, a 35-year ironworker veteran. "There is no ifs, ands, or buts about it. We're looking at a projected figure right now of \$192 million" for deck replacement.

By comparison, the bridge cost \$99.8 million to build 50 years ago.

"When this bridge was built, the designers and engineers and the Authority knew that this re-decking project was going to have to occur," said board member Barbara Brown, "so, we are



Meet Mackinac Island's Eighth Grade Class

Eighth grade (Class of 2012): (front row, from left) Anthony Rickley, Tyler Cherwonka; (back) Caleb Kolatski, Devon Hunt, and Austin Jaruzel.

Bridge Fare Proposals	
Current Rates	
Car	2.50
Commuter	1.50
Car & Trailer <i>per Axle</i>	1.25
Motor Home <i>per Axle</i>	2.00
Trucks <i>per Axle</i>	3.00
Proposal A	
Car	4.00
Commuter	2.00
Car & Trailer <i>per Axle</i>	2.00
Motor Home <i>per Axle</i>	5.00
Trucks <i>per Axle</i>	5.00
Proposal B	
<i>Immediate</i>	
Car	3.00
Commuter	1.50
Car & Trailer <i>per Axle</i>	2.00
Motor Home <i>per Axle</i>	4.00
Trucks <i>per Axle</i>	4.00
<i>In 2013</i>	
Car	4.00
Commuter	2.00
Car & Trailer <i>per Axle</i>	2.00
Motor Home <i>per Axle</i>	5.00
Trucks <i>per Axle</i>	5.00

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going to have to pay for it. That is just a fact. It is our task to appropriately plan."

Authority member Dan Musser III said maintaining the bridge will bolster tourism.

"As far as affecting the tourism business, we'd be derelict not to look at some kind of fare increase," he noted. "Where we really need to be sensitive is to the community and the person that needs the bridge for their daily livelihood to sur-

vive."

Board member Bob Struck of Marquette agreed the rate increase has to be balanced between maintenance demands and the burden on the traveler.

"If we raise it too high, people that have some discretion, they might not cross over," he said. "Even if it's only a few bucks, there's a psychological threshold that they might say, 'it's not worth it.'"

The Authority is responsible

Sale of Bridge Tokens Stopped

By Karen Gould

To cut back on financial losses, the Mackinac Bridge Authority has eliminated the discount rate for rolls of bridge tokens, suspended the sale of the tokens until January 1, and doubled the price of token gift packs. The Authority also raised prices for shuttle rides during the annual bridge walk and placed an expiration date on commuter cards.

The measures go along with a proposal to increase bridge fares by January 1, as the Authority enacts changes to boost revenues. The decisions were made during a Fares, Fees, and Classifications Committee meeting attended by the full board Friday, November 2, in St. Ignace. The sale of tokens is being suspended to prevent people

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for maintaining the bridge and making sure funding is in place for needed projects, said Authority member Murray Wikol.

"We need to make this the bionic bridge, rebuild it, and have it for our children and our grandchildren," said Mr. Wikol. "I think these increases are moderate and they will just barely cover what we need to do and be in a position where we could be bondable. Right now we are not bondable, because our rate structure does not allow us to do this work. In reality, it's something we must do."

When bridge tolls were not able to meet bond obligations, the state, in 1969, advanced \$3.5 million a year to pay off the bonds and lower the toll. Consequently, approximately \$64,306,172 still is owed to the state to repay the advance. So far, the MBA has paid \$11 million and continues to collect tolls to repay about \$250,000 a year.

In addition, the state Legislature has authorized the Mackinac Bridge Authority to collect tolls for routine maintenance, preserving the life of the structure, and operation.

Unlike the Mackinac Bridge, said Kirk Steudle, director of the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT), who sits on the Authority, the Zilwaukee Bridge on I-75 was built with 80% federal funds and 20% state funds. When federal funds are used, he said, a provision requires the road be kept free of charge to the traveling public.

The Mackinac Bridge was built before I-75 was constructed, and bridge costs were funded through the sale of bonds.

A decrease in revenues from fuel taxes and vehicle registrations, said Mr. Steudle, has resulted in a \$300 million budget deficit for MDOT in fiscal 2008.

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