

## David Joyner steps down from NC Tolls after 9 years - says independent turnpikes essential for tolling

### NORTH CAROLINA TURNPIKE VERSUS DOT



2013-01-07: David Joyner has seen toll models at work from both the sides of state government: (1) the North Carolina Turnpike Authority and (2) the state Department of Transportation. He believes the independent toll agency approach is the way to



go.

"Much of tolling is new for a state DOT," Joyner says, "It's just not what they were designed to do... any more than a battleship is not designed to do what a PT boat does."

Effective turnpike authorities, Joyner says, have a handful of very expensive projects that require a relatively small staff with a strategic approach, whereas DOTs have hundreds of projects of all shapes and sizes that require a large staff and system-driven approach.

Turnpikes need to be "very agile, highly focused and exceedingly schedule-driven."

He sums up: "I believe if we are going to make progress in tolling we need to do it through specialist type of agencies."

### Resigned last week



We contacted Joyner after he resigned from almost eight years in charge of developing tollroads in North Carolina, first as the executive director of the new North Carolina Turnpike (NCTA) as an independent agency, then within the DOT after the Turnpike Authority was transferred to NCDOT early 2009.

When taken over the Turnpike Authority had a staff of 30 or so positions, but over the past three years DOT cut it to just a handful - this within a department of some 14,000 people.

Operations and engineering for the toll projects were transferred to DOT units that we also charged with delivering tax-supported roads.

Joyner resigned last week following the completion of the state's first toll road and the transfer of the department from Democrat to Republican control, saying it was time for the new governor's team to decide how they wanted to proceed with tolling.

Although the Turnpike Authority has kept working on its projects within the DOT structure, Joyner admitted it has been what he calls, in we suspect an understatement, "challenging. "

### A Different Process

"Decision-making was a quicker and easier process when we were an independent agency," Joyner says. As an independent Turnpike, members of the team understood the process was "schedule driven," Joyner says.

The majority of the work was streamlined, using five directors plus a minimal support staff and several consultants. When the consultants were no longer needed they were let go, again a different process than generally used with employment heavy DOTs.

"Together we worked to maintain a mutually agreed upon timeline. At DOT however, while there are good and very capable people, they are often situated throughout the department sometimes outside the building with other responsibilities. Consequently, scheduling and decision-making was difficult and the process could easily get bogged down."

### Public Affairs and Outreach

With tolling, Joyner says the project development has to begin with public outreach.

"If local citizens, who are in most cases our customers, don't want a project it's unlikely to ever be built." It's essential that members of the community and elected leaders understand and approve of the project well before holding environmentally mandated public hearings. At DOT projects are endorsed by MPOs and RPOs before being added to the STIP. With tolls, controversy seems to follow and it's crucial that the public understand and appreciate why tolls are necessary."

Joyner says. "You can't be reactive. To do tolling it is essential to be proactive. You must get out there ahead of the project, meet with local leaders, 'influencers,' and the people affected. You've just got to shape a project around what people being affected want. You have to meet the citizens directly, look them in the eye and discuss their concerns. You have to help them realize that if they want the road, tolls are going to be needed to fund the construction and maintenance costs."

### **Media very important**

"You've also got to talk and be open with local editors and reporters from the beginning and keep in touch with them. The media can make or break a project."

And Joyner says it is necessary to discuss with citizens not just the construction side of a project, but different ways of structuring tolls so they can see how it will affect them individually. The federal permitting process has little room for the discussion of financing.

"Very often people who start out opposed to a project will recognize that the positives will offset the negatives - for them," he says if you treat them with respect, listen to them, and discuss it.

And most importantly, he says you have to do all this well before the project is clearly defined, so that "the citizens can be, and feel, that they were a part of how the project was shaped."

### **Planning has it backwards for tolling**

Joyner says the traditional highway planning process has it backwards for tolling.

Going out to the public after the project is in the engineering and design phase is too late.

Local citizens will get the impression the project is being imposed on them because the first they hear of it is when the planner -selected 'alternatives' are presented to them in a large meeting hall full of people and they are talked at.

They see it as a big government imposition, and they push back, feeling they've had no say.

### **Tolls not DOTs' primary expertise**

Most DOTs are new to toll systems and operations, Joyner says.

Keeping up with rapidly advancing toll technology is "outside their primary areas of expertise".

Setting up accounts and dealing with customers, collecting money on a per-trip basis, communicating toll rates and providing customer service are not what DOTs do.

Also, he says, project financing is foreign to most DOT mindsets. In their experience highway dollars are appropriated by legislators.

"So some of the key skills and critical players are absent in most DOT 'org' charts."

### **Small toll agency more "collaborative"**

Joyner says there are relatively few offsetting efficiencies from tollroads being part of a DOT, as advocates of integration assert. When NCTA was independent the Directors of Engineering, Finance, Operations and Outreach all sat in offices a few feet away. They continually discussed issues formally and informally.

But once the engineering, finance, and outreach (PIO) was taken over by NCDOT the dialogue and collaboration began to wane. Joyner says that it is very difficult to function effectively in a large environment with so many specialist units that are almost separate agencies in their own right.

### **Knew nothing except to hire good people**

Joyner says he's particularly proud of the work they did to develop the state's first modern tollroad, the Triangle Expressway, now open and operating.

He says he knew nothing about tollroads when he started. "I was rather surprised to be offered the job but I followed the old rule of hiring good people with the expertise and experience, then listening to them. We had a great team and we built a great project - one of the most advanced in the country that I hope will serve the area well."



Joyner at map of Triangle Expressway - pic Triangle Business Journal

### **Toll projects ongoing**

Other toll projects that NCTA has under development are well advanced and Joyner is confident they'll get built, despite delays:

- Triangle Expressway Southeast Extension the next stage of the 540 extending the TriEx across the south of the Raleigh area to I-40 has been delayed by what Joyner describes as ill-advised legislation banning consideration of an alternate route.

Joyner says the Turnpike never wanted to build the route which would have split the town of Garner: "It would make no sense at all." But the federal permitting process requires all viable routes be considered. The US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) said federal law required the route be studied and they won't issue a 404 permit without analyzing it as an alternative."

Joyner says to meet federal requirements a fix is in the works to amend the state law and allow the route to be studied as part of the EIS to satisfy Washington DC.

- the Outer Banks Mid-Currituck crossing being developed with ACS Dragados as a P3 is delayed because of a major difference between DOT cost estimates and the developers. An audit is being done to assess the cost differences.

It will either be renegotiated with Dragados, he thinks, or rebid as a traditional design-build project. But he thinks it will get built because it will save many thousands of visitors over an hour in travel time each way.

- Monroe Connector to the east of Charlotte is "a very solid project" that will relieve a great deal of congestion and regularly save 20 minutes of travel time. The financing on that project is complete.

- the Garden Parkway or Gaston East-West Connector west of the Charlotte area has a Record of Decision (completed EIS) but is delayed by litigation by an environmentalist lobby and a local anti-growth group.

<http://www.ncdot.gov/turnpike/projects/>

### **I-95 tolling done by traditional DOT approach**

Tolling of I-95 was a project developed by the DOT completely without involving the Turnpike. It has run into opposition from the local communities in the corridor.

### **Joyner's Future**

Joyner says he's planning to take some time off with his new wife but is interested in doing consulting work, perhaps helping develop outreach strategies for future toll projects. He thinks the only way the interstate system will get rebuilt and modernized will be with tolls.

But he says that the affected people are going to have to be educated community by community to understand that that the improvements are in their best interests. It can't be imposed on people from the top down.

Born and educated in North Carolina, Joyner spent twenty years in Washington DC working at USDOT prior to starting a business which he later sold to The Washington Post. Joyner has been back in North Carolina over a decade now.

Following the death of his wife in 2009 he re-married in May and resides in Raleigh, where he has many friends, and enjoys the area. He is also discussing a possible new business venture. Joyner is 62.

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