

The Campaign for the Tolling Industry: How Can I Get Involved?

March 2, 2012

Background

In January 2011, the IBTTA board of directors approved a new strategic plan after more than a year of concentrated effort. In September 2011, the board recognized a serious gap between the strategic plan goals and the resources needed to achieve them; the board directed staff to develop an appropriate resource plan to achieve the goals. In November 2011, the board approved a \$2 million, three-year resource plan that calls on IBTTA to develop and implement a targeted high-impact campaign to reposition the tolling industry and IBTTA among key audiences. This positioning campaign will focus specifically on these two goals:

- Transportation policies will embrace tolling and other forms of user charging; and
- Continental toll interoperability will be a reality.

Why do we need a positioning campaign for the tolling industry and IBTTA?

The toll industry is one of the keys to funding transportation infrastructure. Tolling is a vital means to enhance mobility and the quality of life in communities around the world. The positioning campaign begins with the assumption that the health and future prosperity of the tolling industry depend on the perceptions of those who have the greatest opportunity to influence public policy affecting our industry.

For example, when American Trucking Associations President Bill Graves recently debated IBTTA's Pat Jones, he listed several reasons why he believes the expansion of interstate tolling is bad for America. Among his top reasons, he said:

- Toll agencies have a history of **questionable rate setting and spending practices** and the lack of accountability at both the political and operational levels is a well-documented concern.
- Tolls are an **inefficient means of collecting funding** for road construction and maintenance compared to the fuel tax.
- Tolls promote **traffic diversion which reduces safety** because of additional miles traveled and greater opportunity for accident exposure.
- Tolls reduce trucking industry productivity because they **are a disincentive to use the most cost efficient routes.**
- Tolls may be a **barrier to the freedom and mobility** that many Americans have grown to cherish and may be particularly cost prohibitive for low income Americans.

While we disagree with these statements – and we rebutted them vigorously in the debate – the fact that the ATA president is *saying* them reflects what they are telling Congress and the public. When confronted with the repetition and resources of ATA, public officials and opinion leaders will be inclined to *believe* and to act on these statements. When that happens, the tolling industry and all toll operators are bathed in a very unflattering light. Our entire industry suffers.

Unfortunately for us, these negative statements are embedded in the very fabric of political discourse in America and around the world. In spite of the benefits of tolling that we all know about, these negative stereotypes crop up in the most persistent ways.

We have to work very hard every day to correct this narrative. If we don't, then the freedom of toll operators to do their jobs will be severely limited. And the companies that serve tolling will also suffer.

My organization is a toll operator. How will my agency/concession benefit from this campaign?

In December 2011, two members of Congress introduced a bill called the “Commuter Protection Act” because they were unhappy with the manner in which one toll operator had instituted a toll increase. This Act would give the U.S. Secretary of Transportation authority to review and regulate tolls for passage over or through any bridge or tunnel on any Federal-aid highway. *Naturally, IBTTA registered a swift and strong objection to this Act.*

In our response, we said the Act would add an unnecessary layer of federal oversight in what is largely a state and local process. It would constrain public and private investment at a time when the country needs to encourage more transportation investment. We said that Congress should not interfere with the efforts of local toll agencies to provide for their own funding needs to advance mobility. We also noted that decisions about toll rates are complex and are best made at the state and local level.

The proposed Commuter Protection Act is just one example of how one or two lawmakers can dramatically change the rules of the game for our industry. This example demonstrates that no toll operator is insulated from the actions of politicians, even when those actions start hundreds or thousands of miles away. Provisions from the Commuter Protection Act could reappear as an amendment to the transportation bill in the U.S. Senate.

My company serves the toll industry. How will my company benefit from this campaign?

Your company is in the business of providing products and services to toll operators in the U.S. and elsewhere. When toll operators succeed, you succeed. When toll operators grow, your company grows. When public policies favor the expansion of tolling, you have more opportunities to grow your business.

One CEO recently wrote to IBTTA:

My company spent over \$500,000 last year on IBTTA exhibits, travel, etc. The money was well spent. When I first came to IBTTA, I had a small company that was struggling to survive. Since joining IBTTA, my company has become very successful in the toll industry. I have no qualms about making a contribution to support a critical initiative for IBTTA and our industry.

What will the positioning campaign accomplish?

In January 2012, the Strategic Plan Action Team met to define specific outcomes of the positioning campaign so that we can focus our resources effectively and efficiently.

Among the mega outcomes of this campaign, we seek to:

- Remove state prohibitions on tolling.
- Remove the federal ban on tolling interstate highways.

Among the supportive outcomes of this campaign, we will:

- Educate state and local elected and regulatory officials who are regularly engaged in transportation discussions to ensure that they understand the fundamental concepts of tolling and road user charging.
- Develop a consistent, well-defined message about tolling and road user charging.
- Create a compendium of tolling success stories.
- Demonstrate the reliability and predictability of toll roads.
- Establish a political environment in which decisions about tolling are made at the state and local level.

To advance these efforts, we will build alliances with organizations that see tolling as one of the main ways to fund infrastructure, provide mobility and promote quality of life.

Next Steps and Deliverables

The campaign will focus on raising awareness of the tolling industry's compelling economic story and increasing its clout to win on critical policy issues. The campaign

requires smart research to define the strategic course and significant actions to move the needle. We will embark on a first-year campaign of three phases.

During the first phase, we will focus on discovery, research, planning and development. We will gauge the perceptions and knowledge of policy elites, the media, and other key influencers toward the tolling industry; pinpoint the necessary strategy, tactics and resources for a winning effort, including messages, messengers, media and models; and develop the initial campaign.

In the second phase, we will begin an intense communications and advocacy effort to begin to turn the attitudes of policy makers and influential the media and create a positive framework about the industry's contribution to mobility and quality of life. From this positive foundation, the industry will be on firm ground from which to attack negative stereotypes about the industry.

In the third phase, we will use the messages and messengers to address the audiences and media that have been identified in the first two phases. This phase will aim to influence public policies that affect tolling in specific markets and regions.

What will the campaign cost and how can my organization contribute?

The board of directors has approved a three-year, \$2 million campaign. The board has also approved an effort to raise the necessary funds from the membership. In 2012, members are being asked to support the positioning campaign through payments in the range of \$2,500 to \$12,500 based on organizational size and revenues from tolling. Please contact IBTTA Executive Director and CEO Pat Jones at pjones@ibtta.org or 202.659.4620 x21 so that we can discuss your specific involvement in this fundraising effort.

A New Beginning

The campaign for the toll industry and IBTTA is the beginning of our transformation. It is the start of a new way of thinking for lawmakers, key influencers and the public. We have a positive story to tell. We are committed to enhancing mobility and the quality of life for all road users. We can lead the way in solving the infrastructure funding crisis. We want you on our team and need your help to spread the word. We hope you will join the campaign.