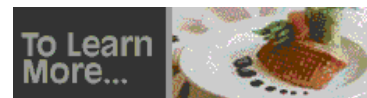


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Lawmakers suggest tolls on I-80

ASSOCIATED PRESS

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STORY CHAT: 8 Comments

Iowans who drive Interstate Highway 80 in Nebraska and Wyoming need to pay attention:

A Nebraska state senator says the numbers make it appealing to consider converting Interstate 80 into a toll road in that state. After all, Indiana received \$3.8 billion last summer when it leased its 157 miles of interstate toll road to a foreign consortium for 75 years.

A Spanish-American partnership agreed to pay Texas \$1.3 billion for a 50-year lease to build and run a toll road from Austin to Seguin.

And some commuters in Minneapolis and San Diego are willing to pay extra to drive in an express lane while other cars creep along in the free lanes.

A Wyoming state senator has suggested making I-80 a toll road through his state to help pay for maintenance and road construction, and now retiring Nebraska State Sen. Tom Baker of Trenton says the Cornhusker state should also consider the idea.

It would be interesting to put together a committee with people from Nebraska, Iowa, Colorado, and Wyoming, said Baker, chairman of the Nebraska Legislature's Transportation and Telecommunications Committee.

I-80 tolls would generate some revenue, primarily from folks who are passing through, said Baker, who leaves office in January.

Wyoming State Sen. Michael Von Flatern estimated last week that a passenger car might pay \$12 to \$15 to drive the entire 400-mile section of I-80 in southern Wyoming, or about 3 cents a mile.

He said drivers could expect more lanes, better maintenance and more snow plows working the interstate in exchange for their toll money.

But the idea of an interstate toll road faces at least one major roadblock: It is against federal law to turn sections of the interstate into a toll road, said Steve Maraman, finance administrator with the Nebraska Department of Roads.

A couple of states have gotten permission to experiment with tolls, and some toll road segments were grandfathered into the national interstate system when it was created in the 1950s, he said.

Nebraska does have three toll bridges, at Plattsmouth, Blair and Decatur.

Maraman said there's discussion all across the country about how to pay for new road construction and maintenance. Creating more toll roads is part of the discussion.

There's also talk of government leasing roads to private companies so governments still own the roads, but private entities operate and maintain them. And there's talk of public-private partnerships in building roads, Maraman said.

The toll road idea works well for coastal areas, but not so well for Midwestern states, Maraman said.

"We don't have the capacity and congestion problems of the coastal

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regions," he said.


And Nebraska is addressing one of its traffic problems by widening Interstate 80 between Omaha and Lincoln, he said.

Still Baker said the idea may be worth studying because many states are faced with less revenue from fuel tax for road construction and rising costs.

"We are going to have to look at alternatives," he said

STORYCHAT

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Reader Comment	Mon Dec 18, 2006 12:48 pm
Wyoming wants to put a toll to use I-80 across their state. I lived in Idaho for two years and having to drive through Wyoming back and forth to visit family here in Iowa, there is not a damn thing to see in Wyoming!	
Reader Comment	Mon Dec 18, 2006 11:29 am
Just another reason for people to avoid the mid-west.	
Reader Comment	Mon Dec 18, 2006 11:18 am
Just tax all the dope and cash runners cruising thru our fair state..... Oh wait.....thats right the Dallas Co Sherriffs Dept already does that!!...ha!! 	
Reader Comment	Mon Dec 18, 2006 11:09 am
Nebraska should pay people who dive across the state for pain and suffering.	
Reader Comment	Mon Dec 18, 2006 10:57 am
They have always told us that gasoline taxes pay for the roads and maintenance. How many times do we have to pay for them?	
I-80 Toll? NO!	Mon Dec 18, 2006 10:30 am
Yet another tax on people. Does anyone here really feel we get good results from all of our taxes? State governments need to budget better, use what money they already have more wisely. NO MORE NEW TAXES!!!	
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HELL NO!!!	
Reader Comment	Mon Dec 18, 2006 8:39 am
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