



**Testimony of
Staten Island Chamber of Commerce President & CEO – Linda Baran
Proposed Port Authority Toll & Fare Increase Hearing
August 16, 2011, 8:00 p.m.**

Good evening, my name is Linda Baran, President & CEO of the Staten Island Chamber of Commerce. On behalf of the Chamber, our 800 members, and the 20,000 employees they represent, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to address the Port Authority regarding the proposed increases in bridge tolls.

You are no doubt familiar with the Port Authority's mission, but I will repeat it for those here today who may not be. It is "To enhance the region's competitiveness and prosperity by providing transportation services that efficiently move people and goods within the region and facilitate access to the nation and the world."

These drastic toll increases will reduce prosperity, eliminate the ability of the business community to compete with our neighbors, and further isolate the people and businesses of Staten Island. The proposal under consideration is in stark contrast with the agency's mission.

In a very real sense, the Staten Island business community is becoming an island within an island. Isolated from the rest of New York City by the high MTA tolls on the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge and on the cusp of being cut off from New Jersey and the rest of the country by the Port Authority, our businesses simply cannot compete outside of the borough. Smaller commercial vehicles will be required to pay up to \$34 roundtrip while larger vehicles could be paying in excess of \$228. Catering, construction, and similar companies that want to offer their services off-island must build into their price the cost of these exorbitant tolls, which prices them out of the market. As a result these local companies, that are being asked to create jobs and pull us out of the current economic slump, will not be able to grow or hire new employees. Some will ultimately leave the borough or go out of business!

High tolls and lack of infrastructure harm our local economy by deterring off island residents from seeking employment here, shopping at local establishments, or taking advantage of the many amenities Staten Island has to offer.

Staten Island has limited public transit alternatives - our residents have no other choice but to drive. We cannot get to work, or major transit hubs such as Newark Airport or Metro Park without a car. According to the Federal Highway Administration, more toll revenue is generated at the four bridge crossings here on Staten Island than in 43 other states.

The Staten Island Chamber of Commerce recognizes that the Port Authority does not receive tax revenue, making its toll and fare structure the primary way to pay for infrastructure projects. We understand the importance of moving forward with a capital plan that would create a significant number of jobs. That being said, additional revenues for this 10 year plan should not be raised on the backs of the community paying highest tolls in the nation! Until Staten Island starts to see an investment in public transit options, we simply cannot accept these increases.

This onerous proposal underscores the need for the federal government to fund infrastructure projects. In the absence of federal funding, I commend the Port Authority for looking at innovative alternative financing solutions, such as the public-private partnership model being used to finance and build the replacement for the Goethals Bridge. Higher tolls are not the answer! The Port Authority must not impose toll increases that our community simply cannot sustain.

Finally, the governors of both states must come together to support the Port Authority's mission. If Port Authority funds continue to be used to subsidize other, state specific projects, rather than reinforcing regional connectivity, communities like Staten Island will continue to get squeezed out.