

Engineering firm proposes road tolls to govt

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A local engineering and transportation planning group is proposing a toll system on at least five thoroughfares in New Providence for the government's consideration.

Caribbean Civil Group (CCG) Limited principal Ray McKenzie said given the hundreds of millions of dollars the government has invested in roads over the past eight years, this is an opportunity to generate the funds needed to maintain them.

The roads eyed for a tolling system include, East West Highway/Independence Highway, Tonique Williams-Darling Highway, Sir Milo Butler Highway and Bethel Avenue.

The recommended toll is \$1.

CCG pointed out that since 1995, Tonique Williams Darling Highway cost taxpayers \$8 million to build; Sir Milo Butler Highway cost \$9 million; Baillou Hill Road cost \$4 million; the Airport Gateway Project cost \$60 million and the New Providence Road Improvement Project (NPRIP), which is ongoing, has a price tag of \$206 million.

"When we're investing over a quarter of a billion dollars in roadways we obviously want to be able to use them at their maximum levels," McKenzie told The Nassau Guardian.

"The recommendation to select toll some of the roadways just gives the government some means of adequately maintaining the roadways so the design service life can be realized, and that is typically 20 years.

"What we don't want is having invested significant sums of money to have to come and pay that capital infrastructure price again in another 10 years."

McKenzie said more requisite engineering and economic studies need to be carried out to determine traffic management impact, affordability, potential revenue, optimum placement of toll facilities and cost to implement the system.

Asked how much the system could generate, McKenzie said those proposed roads carry the most average daily traffic, although he could not project a figure.

He said the proposed toll of \$1 is subject to further study and extensive public consultation.

"It's a wonderful means for the government to fully fund its maintenance budget," McKenzie said.

He added, "It does not prevent the road user who does not want to pay the toll from using the [road] system.

"You can take the circuitous route if you decide...but what's in it for you as a road user is when you are traversing roads that are not well maintained there are certain costs, such as fuel, shock absorbers, wearable pads, struts and tires.

"They all go up and that hits you in the pocket. We know that intuitively".

The recommendation was first made to the Ministry of Works and the Office of the Prime Minister in August.

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