

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**JOINT STATEMENT BY THE BRUNSWICK & NEW HANOVER COUNTY DEMOCRATIC PARTIES**

The Brunswick (BCDP) and New Hanover County Democratic Parties (NHCDP) strongly oppose any proposed toll on the Cape Fear Memorial Bridge, which will have a devastating impact on our communities and place an inequitable financial burden on our residents, especially our workers.

Each day, nearly 70,000 people use the bridge to drive to and from work and school, attend medical appointments, see friends and family, visit beaches and museums, shop at local businesses and transport goods through our busy port. As the N.C. Department of Transportation (NCDOT) begins long-overdue repairs on the antiquated bridge, it is clear that our region, with its exploding population and economy, requires a modern, functional, and safe bridge to connect New Hanover and Brunswick counties.

Unfortunately, state officials like Rep. Frank Iler, longtime chair/vice chair of the House Transportation and Appropriations Committees, have failed to address the inevitable for years. As a result, the Wilmington Metropolitan Planning Organization (WMPO) is now proposing a toll to help finance a new structure, which would be run by a private corporation for profit.

This would be the very first toll placed on an existing road in state history. Instead of obtaining funds from the NCDOT and federal government, this toll places an unfair financial drain on our local taxpayers, particularly seniors and the working class, including teachers, first-responders, and union members. It is a misleading regressive tax that punishes our businesses and residents, who already pay taxes on their gas, income, and DMV services. That is why it is such a bipartisan issue, with Wilmington’s Mayor Bill Saffo and City Council unanimously opposing such a toll, as well as Navassa’s Mayor Eulis Willis and Leland’s Mayor Brenda Bozeman.

While the NCDOT and some members of the WMPO claim that exploring a toll option would help for “scoring purposes” on infrastructure grant lists, it is a dangerous and slippery slope. The last time officials advised us to entrust public services to a private company, without transparency or accountability, they sold New Hanover Regional Medical Center to Novant and transferred more than \$1 billion in public funds to an endowment now controlled by partisan interests. It has been a disaster. A toll would be another privatization of public assets, and we cannot let it happen again.

The BCDP and NHCDP, along with many other community organizations, invite the press and public to join our fight against a bridge toll. Before the WMPO vote, we will host a week-long bipartisan action initiative, which will include: requesting meetings with the WMPO; a wide-scale email, phone and ad campaign to contact each undecided or pro-toll member; a **community rally with Mayor Saffo on Jan. 29 from 4-5:30 p.m. at Dram Tree Park**; and a large public presence at the WMPO vote on Jan 31.

Some issues transcend politics — and ensuring local residents do not shoulder an expensive “toll tax” on our own is undoubtedly one of them.

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