

TURF Testimony before Senate Transportation Committee

April 23, 2008

Terri Hall, Founder, Texans Uniting for Reform and Freedom (TURF). TURF is a grassroots, non-profit organization of nearly 50,000 members across Texas. TURF also has members from more than 22 states and internationally in Canada, Switzerland, among other countries.

Between a \$9 million ad campaign to advocate the TTC and tolls, the TTC-69 Public Hearing charade, the \$20 million in gas taxes to build a park in downtown Dallas, the Hwy 161 market valuation fiasco, indictments of TxDOT employees for bribery, and the talk of massive transportation tax increases at the Texas Transportation Forum with oil hitting \$120 a barrel yesterday, the taxpayers have had enough. Enough of politicians who refuse to represent them, enough of runaway taxation and leveraged debt, enough of “market valuation” for what’s really government sanctioned monopolies, and enough of the threats to dramatically increase the cost of transportation through not only tolls, but also gas taxes in a one-two punch that will devastate commuters and businesses alike.

We’re tired of hearing TxDOT is out of money when we all know it’s a LIE. Well, I’ll tell you something that is true, the **taxpayers** are out of money. The streets are like a ghost-town after commute hours because people are having to dramatically cut back on driving out of simple economics. There’s only so much money in the family budget for transportation and high gas prices are already starting to eat into other necessities like clothing and food. Clothing retailers are closing hundreds of stores. In just the last month restaurants and movie theaters have seen a 10% drop in business. Consumers don’t have any more money for transportation so they’re having to make dramatic changes to their lifestyles and reduce their standard of living just to survive. TxDOT’s own studies show toll roads are no longer financially viable at \$3 a gallon for gas. We’re well over that now, so WHY ON EARTH are we still discussing toll roads?

Watching the Hwy 161 debacle is enough to make the taxpayers’ stomachs churn in disgust. Market valuation is nothing more than a government Robin Hood scheme to tax one set of motorists to fund projects for other motorists.

Testimony from Dennis Enright before this committee on March 1, of 2007, proves CDAs cost the taxpayers 50% more than traditional toll roads. Surely you’re aware that “market valuation” is simply another form of a CDA that will also cost the taxpayers 50% more without the controversial private partner. Market valuation has replaced traditional toll roads with market-based toll models that allow the government tolling entities to cash in with up-front, quick cash to the tune of billions of dollars that our children and grandchildren will be paying back with interest. This insidious law not only assures we’ll continue in an economic downward spiral, it puts profit and greed ahead of the public interest of affordable, efficient transportation. There is no evidence or study that shows

increasing the cost of transportation is good for the economy. Our current financial situation as a country proves it.

In the past, it's been against the law for government to make a profit. Now under PPPs of all sorts, government entities are abusing their monopolies calling it "free market" and fleecing taxpayers while they rake in profits cleverly cloaked as "excess revenues" (Read about the Government Printing office's e-passport scandal in the Washington Times and about TxDOT's cash bonuses to management on WOAI.com).

We know that market-based tolls are a sneaky way to fund non-toll viable segments of the Trans Texas Corridor. We're aware from comments from prominent politicians that private entities are already telling you TTC-69 isn't toll viable, and they can't make any money on it. So as usual, rather than nix the nightmare and landgrab, government's answer is to find a way to subsidize it. Enter market-based toll road cash cows. Politicians in rural areas seem all too happy to sell-out urban commuters where toll roads have been deemed viable from on high in order to protect one's own backyard from a foreign-controlled Trans Texas Corridor toll road. It's not gonna fly.

Unethical, unnecessary taxation and eminent domain abuse in one part of the state is unacceptable to EVERY Texan in EVERY part of the State. We're not going to let you divide urban against rural, the wealthy against the middle class and the poor in a grand scheme to stick it to the taxpayers through an explosive increase in the cost of transportation that will also explode the cost of goods for EVERY Texan.

We demand fundamental reform in all things transportation and a public vote on ALL toll projects, including the Trans Texas Corridor. We're tired of politicians and bureaucrats making multi-billion dollar tax decisions that effect our daily survival and our ability to make a living without our consent. School Boards and municipalities have to come to the voters for approval of bonds, it's unconscionable that billions of dollars worth of bonds are being sold for toll projects without project by project voter approval.

We demand you clean house at TxDOT and give the taxpayers total transparency on ALL toll viability studies, market value studies, and other vital financial information as soon as they've been conducted (not 30 days prior to letting a contract when the deal is done). We don't need more "educating" and toll road indoctrination. We need to look no further than our own bank accounts to know what needs to be done. Stop pushing the MOST expensive transportation option, which is toll roads, stop raiding and wasting our gas taxes on parks in downtown Dallas or on rest stops with free WiFi, nix the unsustainable toll road plans and put some sanity back into transportation in this State. The taxpayer revolt and drumbeat will only get louder until you do.

This concludes my remarks.