



IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Contacts:
JoAnn Fleming, Executive Director
Grassroots America - We the People
(903) 360-2858

Terri Hall, Founder/Director
Texas TURF & Texans for Toll-free Highways
(210) 275-0640
terri@texasturf.org

Grassroots tell lawmakers to kill FAKE toll reform bill

Call out Krause for undermining Governor's Pledge for No More Toll Roads

Austin, Texas – State Representative Matt Krause recently filed [HB 1951](#) and dubbed it the “Toll Payer Protection Act.” Grassroots political leaders are calling it a FAKE toll reform bill. While Krause claims it includes key toll road reforms, taxpayer watchdogs **JoAnn Fleming**, Executive Director of Grassroots America — We the People; **Terri Hall**, Founder/Director of Texas TURF and Texans for Toll-free Highways; and **Julie McCarty**, President of the NE Tarrant Tea Party, say they believe the bill undermines Governor Greg Abbott’s ‘No toll’ pledge and sets Texas taxpayers up to subsidize the road lobby and toll companies.

Krause says HB 1951 does 4 things:

- Requires voter approval for all new toll projects;
- Brings major uniform toll bill reform;
- Sets a timeline for taking tolls off a road after it has been paid off;
- Allows the state to partner with the private sector, on a limited basis, and when it makes financial sense for the state and taxpayer.

On the same day Krause filed his bill, Fleming, who also heads the Texas Conservative Grassroots Coalition, delivered a letter to the Governor, Lt. Governor, Speaker and both the House and Senate Transportation Committees, defining the Coalition’s transportation priorities for the session, asking them to support Governor Abbott’s pledge of ‘No more tolls.’

The three grassroots political leaders warn that HB 1951 authorizes the most controversial type of toll project using contracts known as public private partnerships (Comprehensive Development Agreements or CDAs in Texas statute). [CDAs are a non-starter](#) for these taxpayer watchdog groups. Public private partnerships (or P3s) put public highways under the control of private, foreign corporations in multi-decade monopolies with guaranteed profits, taxpayer bailouts, and the ability to charge punitively high tolls (e.g. I-635 in DFW that can top \$24/day in peak hours). These toll projects are so reviled by Texans that both party platforms have planks opposing privatized toll roads.

Last session, Krause, as a member of the Freedom Caucus, helped [kill HB 2861](#), which would have authorized more CDAs. In a total flip-flop, Krause is now authoring legislation to do the same thing he fought to stop last session. While he claims these contracts would fall under new reforms, HB 1951 merely picks up where former Governor Rick Perry's toll road proliferation left off and simply re-authorizes these toxic, special interest deals in the same part of the statute. (Only part of the toll collection provision of his so-called reforms even apply to P3s.)

Krause's bill would also hand Spain-based Cintra the right of first refusal on several more toll projects under its original comprehensive development agreement called the **North Tarrant Express** in Krause's own backyard [[Sec. 1.04, Sec. 223.2012 \(a\)](#)]. More toll segments that connect to the North Tarrant Express would be handed to a single firm [without having to go out for bid](#) to other companies. HB 1951 gives advantages to foreign companies over our own Texas-based companies.

If that's not bad enough, the North Tarrant Express already snagged a half a billion in gasoline taxes and \$1 billion in taxpayer backed federal loans and bonds to subsidize a private toll project that gets the exclusive right to charge drivers repeatedly to drive on it for 50 years, well after the debt has been paid.

"We are stunned that Rep. Kraus would be convinced by the Big Road Lobby to file a bill that undermines the promises made by Governor Abbott and Lt. Governor Patrick to end toll roads. Rather than supporting a fix to TxDOT's underlying structural management problems as cited in the [2017 Sunset Advisory Commission's Report to the 85th Legislature \(page 2\)](#), the Big Road Lobby continues to wail that there's just not enough money. **As long as TxDOT is "not meeting expectations and is not prepared to effectively handle the influx of new transportation funding projected to double over the next decade," nor has it "met key on-time or on-budget measures for several years," there can NEVER be enough money poured into the transportation bureaucracy!** We are deeply disappointed in Rep. Krause for filing a fake "toll payer protection" bill that undercuts taxpayers, our Governor, and Lt. Governor in order to appease the road lobby. We call on him to reverse course, and we call on current House authors and co-authors to remove their support immediately." **JoAnn Fleming, Executive Director, Grassroots America – We the People PAC and its premier project – the Texas Conservative Grassroots Coalition**

"Whether he realizes it or not, Krause is being used as a tool for Cintra to get several more no bid contracts for the North Tarrant Express, which relates to Interstate 820 and several off shoots of that toll project that are currently dead, thanks to Governor Abbott," points out **Terri Hall, Founder/Director of Texas TURF and Texans for Toll-free Highways.**

Hall added, "This is why anyone who thinks they can appease the road lobby and the taxpayers at the same time gets burned in the process. When it comes to public private partnership toll road contracts, there can be no compromise. The only solution is to kill them and keep it that way."

Julie McCarty, President of the NE Tarrant Tea Party, calls on Krause to pull his bill down, "While Rep Krause is a friend and ally, as responsible citizens, we cannot play favorites when holding our electeds accountable. His bill HB1951 promotes Public Private Partnerships, something Matt actually

helped kill last session. NE Tarrant Tea Party calls on Matt to remove this bill, and we will do what we can to make that happen. It is not in line with the fiscal conservatism we usually see from Rep. Krause.”

Toll extension, not cessation

The bill also includes an escape hatch to removing tolls once the debt is paid by allowing the Texas Transportation Commission to extend the toll in 10-year increments [Sec. 372.154 (b)].

“That’s toll extension, not toll cessation,” notes Hall. “Genuine toll cessation actually removes the toll when the debt is paid off, which Rep. Matt Shaheen’s HB 436 would accomplish. HB 1951 doesn’t do that. It’s fake reform, there’s no way to sugar coat it.”

While some might think a public vote sounds like it brings accountability, it is actually a tactic by the road lobby to do an end run around Governor Greg Abbott’s pledge of ‘No more tolls.’

As it stands to today, there won’t be any more toll roads moving forward per the Governor’s pledge. Calling for a public vote puts toll roads back on the table. Even if voters say ‘No’ to a toll project in their community, TxDOT will simply stall adding any lanes and call for vote after vote (Sec. 372.054 allows repeat elections every 5 years) until the voters eventually give in to a new toll tax to pay for it.

“A public vote gives taxpayers false hope that they can stop unwanted toll projects. However, the public lacks a meaningful remedy to force officials to do a project non-toll even with a public vote. TxDOT can simply stall road improvements and keep forcing public votes on toll projects until they and the Big Road Lobby win it. So a public vote is a ruse and a way for politicians to undermine the Governor and kick the blame to local voters,” Hall explains.

Fleming, Hall, and McCarty say that – in reality – the voters already voted against toll roads when they voted to elect Greg Abbott twice by wide margins. He campaigned against toll roads twice, and the people back his ‘No toll’ pledge.

The grassroots political groups are asking Krause to pull down his bill and for legislators to get behind the authentic toll road reform bills for toll cessation, which are **SB 374** (Hall), and **HB 436** (Shaheen) and toll collection reform bill **SB 382** (Hall).

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