

Veto No. 1982-2

HB 1394

June 25, 1982

To the Honorable, the House of Representatives
of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania:

I return without signature, House Bill 1394, herewith.

This legislation authorizes the Turnpike Commission to expand the Turnpike through several highway projects, specifically named in the bill.

I am vetoing this legislation because it would have the effect of halting several major road building projects currently underway, thereby depriving hundreds of thousands of citizens of the economic and transportation benefits of these necessary highway improvement projects — in addition to the thousands of immediate construction and related jobs now being provided by them.

I veto this legislation regretfully since I endorse the primary intent of the sponsor, namely the desirability of exploring the feasibility of toll-road financing to meet some of our vital transportation needs so critical to economic development and jobs. Further, I believe several of the named projects are needed and should be seriously considered under an expansion of the Turnpike. These include: Beaver Valley Expressway, Mon Valley Expressway, and U.S. 219.

However, this legislation is flawed in achieving that purpose and would wreak havoc on the existing highway and bridge program. Among the projects named in the bill are several which are already under construction using traditional financing, including 70-90 percent Federal shares funds. These include North Hills Expressway, the East Street Valley Expressway, the Cross Town Expressway, the Allegheny Valley Expressway, U.S. 220, and the Blue Route.

The Federal Highway Administration has made clear to me, that under current Federal law, it cannot and will not authorize any further expenditure of funds towards any of these projects without "assurances from the State that tolls will not be imposed on such projects."

It is not clear that if this bill became law, the State could provide such assurances, at least before feasibility studies for these projects were completed. Such studies would take at least one year, according to the current Turnpike Chairman, during which no Federal funds could be authorized for the projects currently under construction. This means that these projects would be halted. In addition, if any of the routes already under construction were found to be feasible as a result of the studies, such a project would continue to be denied Federal funds. Therefore, for at least many months and possibly for years, hundreds of thousands of people would be denied the immediate and long-term benefits of the completion of important highways which are now under construction.

Current Federal law provides that any routes constructed using Federal funds must be free from tolls. Some argue that this restriction should be amended reasonably so that tolls could be collected on interstates to provide funds for maintaining them. While there is merit to this argument, we have no choice but to act within the requirements of existing Federal law on this matter.

I agree with the basic objective of the bill, and am directing my administration to proceed immediately to implement that objective without legislation. This approach will not jeopardize the progress on any current construction and at the same time ensure that we proceed without delay to explore the opportunity of toll-road financing to provide key transportation needs.

DICK THORNBURGH