

Taking The Toll Road

Teamsters Secure Funds for Toll Facility Safety Study

The Federal Highway Administration has begun using the \$500,000 that was secured by the Teamsters for the Toll Facility Workplace Safety Study, a provision the union fought to have included in the massive highway reauthorization bill enacted last year.

"The fact that the Teamsters are out getting funds for studies like this really speaks highly of our union," said Gerry Flint, a toll collector and shop steward for the New York State Thruway Authority in Albany and Trustee of Local 72 in New York City. "It shows they genuinely care about making our workplace safer."

The study will evaluate the safety of various aspects of highway toll collection facilities, including: toll booths; crosswalks; facility design and construction; speed limit enforcement; safety training and practices; usage of warning and traffic control devices; usage of cameras to record traffic violations; law enforcement practices and jurisdictional issues; and incidences of accidents and injuries. Approximately 3,000 toll attendants and janitorial and maintenance staff in Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Canada are Teamsters.

Significant Study

"This is a significant study," said Azita Mashayekhi, an

Industrial Hygienist from the Teamsters Safety and Health Department. "It will establish the best health and safety practices for all toll area workers."

This study was initiated following the 1999 and 2001 deaths of two toll workers in the Buffalo area killed attempting to cross toll lanes.

"Two fatalities are two fatalities too many," said Terry Eldridge, Secretary-Treasurer of Local 72 and one of the initial proponents of the safety study. "Both of these tragedies were avoidable and we need to make sure that it doesn't happen again."

In order to get support for enhancing traffic safety

requirements, proponents had to convince staff members on Capitol Hill that safety problems at toll collection facilities were prevalent nationwide. A literature review of toll collector safety and health was commissioned by the Teamsters Safety and Health Department and recently completed by the Mt. Sinai Medical Center.

National Issue

"We had some information on accidents that had occurred, but we didn't have a good handle on the statistics or root causes," said Fred McLuckie, Legislative Director for the Teamsters Government Affairs Department. "When you write

federal legislation, you nationalize an issue. They wanted to see what kind of problem existed at the national level."

In order to gather more information surrounding traffic safety near toll collection facilities, a provision for the study was placed in the Highway Bill, which passed both the U.S. House and Senate.

"I think it speaks really well of the Teamsters that they have the will and the clout to get federal legislation passed," Eldridge said. "This study is significant because it will increase safety for our workers as well as the rest of the nation, as the number of toll roads increase across the country."

