

## Iler's failures take their toll

*Letter to the editor, [Brunswick Beacon](#), 02.01.24*

A unanimous Wilmington City Council and the mayors of Wilmington, Navassa, and Leland oppose tolls on the Cape Fear Memorial Bridge. Tolling the bridge would be a first in NC history for an existing road. A private corporation would collect the tolls — for profit. Tolls are inefficient, regressive taxes that place unfair burdens on residents, especially retirees and essential workers.

In a Jan. 23 statement, Rep. Frank Iler attacked toll opponents, including local Democrats, as political partisans — even though he knows the opposition is bipartisan. Iler's statement is shrill and defensive because he has much to be defensive about.

The legislator most responsible for failing to maintain our bridges is Iler. Since 2011 Iler has chaired the NC House of Representatives' Transportation Committee. Since 2015 he has also chaired its Appropriations on Transportation Committee. After years of Iler's failed leadership, the American Road and Transportation Builders Association called our bridges "among the worst in the country." The NC Chamber Foundation says we haven't invested enough "to maintain, let alone improve, the deteriorating system." TRIP, a transportation research nonprofit, says that failure costs us "\$10.3 billion each year."

Iler accuses toll opponents of endorsing "cronyism." This from a politician whose top ten donors are developers and realtors. The Strategic Transportation Investment Law Iler co-authored incentivizes highway expansion at the expense of preventative maintenance and public transportation. That's music to the ears of Iler's fourth largest 2022 contributor, the Carolina Asphalt Pavement Assn PAC.

In 2022, WHQR's Ben Schachtman asked Iler what "concrete steps" he would take "to build a bridge that doesn't have a toll." Iler's answer was a confession of failed leadership: "We have 10 years' worth of projects and 3 years' worth of money... we have about \$10-15 billion worth of needs..." Iler then trailed off without offering any "concrete steps" whatsoever.

We shouldn't have to pay for years of Iler's failures with years of Iler's tolls.

Ryan Buck  
Calabash