



## Toll Authority Out of Control

What public entity would feel free to transfer valuable naming rights to a retiring executive and pay royalties for 27 years? Answer: The Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, owner of the world's busiest bridges and tunnels and the iconic World Trade Center complex.

In an unbelievable story, the *Bergen Record* reported that in 1986 the Authority sold the naming rights to the World Trade Center to a foundation set up by one of its retiring executives for \$10. A stunning example of a conflict of interest gone wild, the executive went on to rake in millions of dollars in profits as a result of the golden parachute transfer. Incredibly, Authority officials still insist that they don't need any oversight.

After the story came to light, the Authority's Executive Director had the sense to call the sale a "shameful episode" and the Governor called for an investigation by the Attorney General, but the real issue is how this shocking deal survived for nearly three decades.

Meanwhile, the Authority continues to turn its back on public accountability. A recent report by the non-partisan Government Accountability Office (GAO) criticized the Authority's lack of transparency or oversight when subjecting the public to toll increases.

Authority officials protested, arguing that internal audit and hearing procedures are adequate to protect the public—only days before the name sale scandal surfaced.

The GAO report also found that the Authority's toll increases are tied primarily to its \$30 billion in debt, amassed in large part from the \$11 billion in cost overruns associated with rebuilding the World Trade Center.

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The report also noted that the federal law protecting toll payers from unreasonable interstate tolls has little effect, since no federal agency has the authority to enforce it. Whether the law has any effect may ultimately be clarified in the lawsuit by AAA New York against the Authority, currently pending in federal court. However, one thing is clear: the Authority behaves as if it doesn't have to answer to anyone—and, in fact, according to the GAO report, it doesn't.

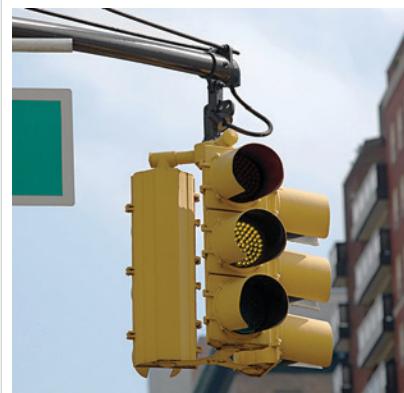
Tolls are set to go up again this December. Tell your elected officials you have had enough of this rogue authority running amok and that they need to restore federal oversight to the Port Authority.

**Go to [AAA.com/SpeakOut](http://AAA.com/SpeakOut).**

## readers ask

Road and Travel FAQs

**q** How long should it take for a driver to react to a green light turning yellow and come to a safe stop? It seems that some stoplights have varying and unsafe durations for a yellow light.



**a** It should take anywhere from 120 to 200 feet or between 2 and 3 seconds for a vehicle traveling 40 mph on a level surface to come to a complete stop. The range would depend on the pavement condition (wet or dry), the vehicle's brakes and the reaction time of the driver.

There are non-binding guidelines put forth by the Institute of Transportation Engineers that establish the recommended yellow signal timing. For a 40 mph road, the recommended yellow time is 3.9 seconds. With the proliferation of red-light cameras in New York state, AAA is stressing the importance of following those guidelines even more.