

# ***POLICY BRIEF***

An electronic publication of  
The Allegheny Institute for Public Policy

---

October 1, 2007

Volume 7, Number 52

---

## **A Compelling Reason to Scuttle Plans to Toll I-80**

Many strong objections have been raised to the plan (contained in Act 44) to have the Turnpike Commission lease I-80 and make it a toll road. Among these: It would be severely damaging to the economy of many communities along that important corridor; it is inappropriate to levy tolls on a road for any purpose other than the maintenance and improvement of that road, especially a long existing federally built highway that runs across the entire country from New Jersey to California, passes through 11 states for a total of nearly 2,900 miles. And so on.

But another reason has just recently raised its ugly head, namely strikes by Turnpike Commission employees. In 2004, toll collectors walked off the job causing slowdowns and revenue losses by the Turnpike as a result of the decision to charge flat fees for cars and trucks to expedite movement through the toll booths. To some extent the adoption of the EZ Pass scheme will alleviate the toll collector problem. However, the larger point is that the right of commission, authority and government workers to go on strike poses a serious economic threat to motorists, businesses, and taxpayers in Pennsylvania.

It is beyond dispute that granting teachers, bus drivers and other employees engaged in providing key public services the right to strike gives them extraordinary power to keep their wages, benefits and working conditions far superior to those of workers who do not have the ability to shut down vital public services. And when they do strike it can create massive problems for the users of those services. Common sense would dictate they not have such powers and in most states they do not.

Turning I-80 over to the Turnpike Commission will, in effect, double the power of the collective bargaining units who can cripple the functioning of Pennsylvania's toll roads. It does not take much to imagine the devastating effect of having traffic on both major east-west corridors slowed to miles-long parking lots of slow moving vehicles. There would be enormous further damage to the state's already poor reputation as a state to do business in, not to mention the cost in time, wasted fuel and hardships for companies needing goods or raw materials delivered.

It is no good arguing there will be safeguards and protections against such an occurrence. A state that cannot stop the ruthless, mean-spirited and nation-leading frequency of teacher strikes or the economically damaging walkouts by mass transit workers is

unlikely to put in place any provision to prevent Turnpike Commission employees from using their new found power to disrupt the entire state by striking both toll roads simultaneously. Indeed, one can search Act 44 exhaustively and find no mention of such a dire eventuality or of the need to make sure it does not.

Therefore, the additional clout Turnpike workers will have under Act 44 can and will be used to extract excessive wages and benefits along with the most favorable work rules. History in Pennsylvania with teachers, mass transit employees and toll collectors offers a clear and unmistakable warning against granting Turnpike workers additional monopoly power. They are certainly not bashful about exercising such power.

---

**Jake Haulk, Ph.D. President**

---

*Policy Briefs may be reprinted as long as proper attribution is given.*

*For more information about this and other topics, please visit our website:*

[www.alleghenyinstitute.org](http://www.alleghenyinstitute.org)

<p>Allegheny Institute for Public Policy 305 Mt. Lebanon Blvd.* Suite 208* Pittsburgh PA 15234 Phone (412) 440-0079 * Fax (412) 440-0085 E-mail: <a href="mailto:aipp@alleghenyinstitute.org">aipp@alleghenyinstitute.org</a></p>
---