

# Rutgers - Eagleton Poll

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## **CORZINE FACES UPHILL CLIMB TO SELL TOLL ROAD IDEA**

*Voters are not inclined to give the governor an “E-Z Pass” on leasing Turnpike, Parkway*

If Gov. Jon Corzine proposes to lease the New Jersey Turnpike and the Garden State Parkway as a way of raising money to pay state debt, he will face opposition from across the political spectrum, according to the latest Rutgers-Eagleton Poll.

While Corzine has yet to reveal the details of his proposal to use state assets to address the state’s sizable debt, one of the most commonly discussed elements of the plan – leasing the toll roads to a non-profit corporation – drew opposition from 61 percent of voters surveyed Aug. 2-7, 2007. The telephone survey of 891 voters has a margin of sampling error of plus or minus 3.3 percentage points.

Opposition was virtually the same across political parties, with 61 percent of Democrats, 61 percent of Republicans, and 63 percent of independent voters opposing the idea.

**Rutgers-Eagleton Poll • Eagleton Institute of Politics**

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Also, 64 percent of voters said they oppose raising tolls on the Turnpike and the Garden State Parkway to pay off state debt. Seventy-two percent of Republicans, 64 percent of independents, and 60 percent of Democrats objected to the idea.

“The electorate does not seem inclined to give Gov. Corzine an E-Z Pass on these issues,” said Tim Vercellotti, director of the Rutgers-Eagleton Poll.

The poll results, however, also point to circumstances under which Corzine might be able to build support for raising tolls to pay state debt. Toll hikes are viewed in a different light when voters are asked to choose between raising tolls, raising taxes, or cutting services to help get the state out of the red. Given those choices, 44 percent of voters opt for toll increases, 28 percent favor service cuts, and 9 percent support increasing taxes.

“Public opinion on this issue is sensitive to the choices placed before the voters,” Vercellotti said. “If the governor can convince voters that there is a fiscal crisis, and that the only alternatives are increases in tolls or taxes, or service cuts, then he might begin to turn things around. But he has not made that case yet.”

The scope of the task awaiting Corzine is evident in the percentage of his own supporters who oppose leasing the toll roads and raising tolls. Fifty-nine percent of those approving of the job Corzine is doing as governor said they oppose leasing the toll roads, and 55 percent said they oppose raising tolls to retire state debt. Among those disapproving of the job Corzine is doing, 64 percent oppose leasing the toll roads, and 78 percent object to raising tolls.

Public opposition to the possible elements of Corzine’s “asset monetization plan” exist even as the governor’s job approval hits a new high in the Rutgers-Eagleton Poll – 57 percent, compared to 51 percent last October.

The Rutgers-Eagleton Poll also found that, for now, as voters learn more about the leasing concept, they are more likely to oppose it.

Among those who had heard or read “a lot” about leasing the toll roads, 85 percent said they oppose the idea. Public awareness was highest among independent and Republican voters, with 62 percent of independents and 54 percent of Republicans saying they had heard or read “a lot” or “some” about the idea, compared to 43 percent of Democrats.

Overall, 22 percent of voters said they had heard or read “a lot” about the idea, 26 percent said they had heard or read “some,” 29 percent had heard or read “very little,” and 23 percent said they had heard or read “nothing at all.”

Public opinion concerning the prospect of toll hikes to pay state debt did not vary significantly by how much voters had heard about the leasing idea. Instead, public views about toll increases were more closely related to opinions regarding whether the current tolls are too high, and whether the tolls are high compared to tolls in other states.

More than half of voters – 57 percent – said the current tolls are just about right, with 32 percent saying the tolls are too high and only 3 percent saying the tolls are too low. Voters in the central part of the state – in Hunterdon, Mercer, Middlesex, Monmouth, Somerset and Union counties – were the most likely to complain about tolls, with 41 percent saying they are too high. Twenty-nine percent of voters in North Jersey and 31 percent in South Jersey said the same.

Of those who said the tolls are too high, 82 percent object to raising the tolls to pay off state debt. But even 60 percent of those who said the tolls are “just about right” oppose the idea.

Voters were divided about whether New Jersey’s tolls are higher or lower than those collected in most other states, with 30 percent saying higher and 42 percent saying about the same. Only 11 percent said the Garden State’s tolls are lower than in other states, and nearly one-

fifth of voters – 18 percent – said they didn’t know or declined to answer the question. Voters in North and Central Jersey were more likely than their counterparts in South Jersey to say the tolls are higher here than in other states.

Of those who perceive the tolls to be higher, 73 percent object to raising the tolls to pay off state debt. But opposition also was high – at 62 percent – among those who consider New Jersey’s tolls to be about the same as tolls in other states. Voters who consider New Jersey’s tolls to be lower than in most other states oppose raising tolls 57 percent to 42 percent.

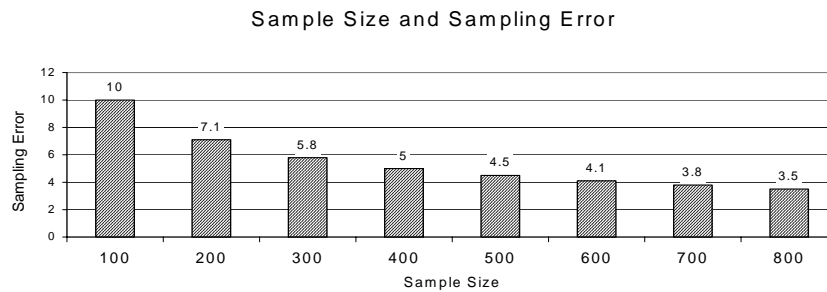
Perceptions of New Jersey’s tolls are in contrast to the findings in a study released in July by AAA Mid-Atlantic. The study found that the average toll per mile charged on the New Jersey Turnpike and the Garden State Parkway is lower than on any other toll road in the region, except for the New York State Thruway.

“Winning public support for a set of policies is as much about perception as reality,” Vercellotti noted. “For now, most voters believe the state is charging too much or just enough for tolls, and it is up to Gov. Corzine to convince them otherwise if he pursues these ideas.”

**BACKGROUND MEMO – RELEASE (EP 162-2) AUGUST 14, 2007**

The latest Rutgers-Eagleton Poll was conducted Aug. 2-7, 2007 with a scientifically selected random sample of 1,002 New Jersey adults. This sample yielded 891 adult residents who said they are registered to vote in New Jersey. Unless otherwise noted, most of the figures in this release are based on the statewide sample of registered voters. Sampling and data collection were conducted by Braun Research, Princeton, NJ.

All surveys are subject to sampling error, which is the expected probable difference between interviewing everyone in a population versus a scientific sampling drawn from that population. The sampling error for a sample of 1,002 adults is  $\pm 3.1$  percent, at a 95 percent confidence interval. The margin of sampling error for 891 registered voters is  $\pm 3.3$  percent. Thus if 50 percent of New Jersey registered voters were found to approve of the job Jon Corzine is doing as governor, one would be 95 percent sure that the true figure would be between 46.7 percent and 53.3 percent ( $50 \pm 3.3$  percent) had all New Jersey registered voters been interviewed, rather than just a sample. Sampling error increases as the sample size decreases, so statements based on various population subgroups are subject to more error than are statements based on the total sample. The following chart shows the relationship between sample size and sampling error. Sampling error does not take into account other sources of variation inherent in public opinion studies, such as non-response, question wording or context effects. This background memo contains the verbatim wording of all questions featured in the release.



- T1. Thinking about the tolls that are collected on the New Jersey Turnpike and the Garden State Parkway, do you think the tolls are too high, too low, or just about right?

		Aug. 2007				
		Too High	Too low	Just about right	DK/RF	(n)
Registered voters	Statewide	32%	3%	57%	8%	891
Region*	North	29%	2%	60%	8%	426
	Central	41%	5%	49%	6%	225
	South	31%	3%	58%	8%	210

\*North region = Bergen, Essex, Hudson, Morris, Passaic, Sussex and Warren counties.  
 Central region = Hunterdon, Mercer, Middlesex, Monmouth, Somerset and Union counties.  
 South region = Atlantic, Burlington, Camden, Cape May, Cumberland, Gloucester, Ocean and Salem counties.

- T2. Compared to most other states, do you think the tolls collected on the New Jersey Turnpike and the Garden State Parkway are generally higher than those collected in other states, lower, or about the same?

		Aug. 2007				
		Higher than other states	Lower than other states	About the same	DK/RF	(n)
Registered voters	Statewide	30%	11%	42%	18%	891
Region	North	32%	10%	38%	19%	426
	Central	36%	13%	37%	15%	225
	South	22%	9%	50%	19%	210

*(Note: Questions T1 and T2 were followed by questions about the 2008 campaigns for the presidency and the U.S. Senate, and President Bush's job approval rating. Depending upon the answers given, the respondents heard 26 or 28 questions on those topics before hearing the following questions about Gov. Jon Corzine and the leasing of toll roads. The placement of the questions was designed to minimize potential bias resulting from the order of the questions concerning tolls and the leasing of toll roads.)*

J1. Do you approve or disapprove of the way Jon Corzine is handling his job as Governor?

		Approve	Disapprove	DK/RF	(n)
Aug. 2007	Registered voters	57%	33%	10%	891
Party ID	Democrat	76%	16%	8%	268
	Republican	39%	52%	9%	205
	Independent	53%	36%	11%	325
Oct. 2006	Registered voters	51%	32%	17%	695
Sept. 2006	Registered voters	50%	34%	16%	660
June 2006	Registered voters	45%	35%	20%	699
Mar. 2006	Registered voters	41%	36%	23%	676

J2. Do you approve or disapprove of the way Jon Corzine has handled the state budget?

		Approve	Disapprove	DK/RF	(n)
Aug. 2007	Registered voters	44%	42%	14%	891
Party ID	Democrat	62%	24%	14%	268
	Republican	31%	56%	13%	205
	Independent	43%	42%	15%	325
June 2006*	Registered voters	36%	42%	22%	699

*\*Question wording in June 2006 was: Do you approve or disapprove of the way Jon Corzine is handling the state budget?*

AM1. The state is considering leasing the New Jersey Turnpike and the Garden State Parkway to a non-profit corporation. The corporation could sell bonds to pay debt and improve roads, and increase tolls to pay off the bonds. How much have you heard or read about this idea?

		August 2007					
		A lot	Some	Very little	Nothing at all	DK/RF	(n)
Registered voters	All	22%	26%	29%	23%	0%	891
Party ID	Democrat	18%	25%	35%	22%	0%	268
	Republican	28%	26%	26%	19%	1%	205
	Independent	30%	32%	23%	14%	1%	325

AM1a. Would you support or oppose the state leasing the New Jersey Turnpike and the Garden State Parkway to a non-profit corporation?

		Leasing the Turnpike and Parkway to a Non-Profit Corporation			
		Support	Oppose	DK/RF	(n)
<b>August 2007</b>	<b>Registered voters</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>61%</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>891</b>
How much have you heard or read about lease idea	A lot	12%	85%	3%	224
	Some	32%	54%	13%	244
	Very little	16%	60%	24%	255
	Nothing at all	22%	49%	29%	162
Tolls too high, too low, or about right	Too high	19%	65%	16%	287
	Too low	**	**	**	**
	Just about right	22%	61%	17%	493
NJ tolls compared to tolls in other states	Higher	24%	65%	11%	276
	Lower	22%	66%	12%	101
	About the same	20%	60%	20%	340
Party ID	Democrat	18%	61%	20%	268
	Republican	23%	61%	16%	205
	Independent	22%	63%	15%	325
Corzine job approval	Approve	22%	59%	18%	495
	Disapprove	21%	64%	15%	304
Region	North	23%	60%	17%	426
	Central	16%	66%	18%	225
	South	21%	58%	20%	210

\*\*Subgroup contains fewer than 50 respondents

AM1b. Would you support or oppose raising tolls on the New Jersey Turnpike and the Garden State Parkway to pay off state debt?

		Raising Tolls to Pay off State Debt			
		Support	Oppose	DK/RF	(n)
<b>August 2007</b>	<b>Registered voters</b>	<b>29%</b>	<b>64%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>891</b>
How much have you heard or read about lease idea	A lot	33%	64%	4%	224
	Some	34%	60%	6%	244
	Very little	24%	68%	8%	255
	Nothing at all	26%	64%	10%	162
Tolls too high, too low, or about right	Too high	14%	82%	4%	287
	Too low	**	**	**	**
	Just about right	35%	60%	5%	493
NJ tolls compared to tolls in other states	Higher	24%	73%	3%	276
	Lower	42%	57%	1%	101
	About the same	30%	62%	8%	340
Party ID	Democrat	29%	60%	11%	268
	Republican	25%	72%	3%	205
	Independent	30%	64%	6%	325
Corzine job approval	Approve	36%	55%	9%	495
	Disapprove	20%	78%	2%	304
Region	North	29%	63%	8%	426
	Central	26%	66%	8%	225
	South	32%	63%	4%	210

\*\*Subgroup contains fewer than 50 respondents

AM2. Given the choice between raising tolls, raising taxes, or cutting services to pay off state debt, which approach would you prefer (ROTATE AND READ RESPONSES)

		Raising Tolls or Taxes, or Cutting Services to Pay off State Debt							
		Raise tolls	Raise taxes	Cut services	Combination of approaches (VOL)	None of the approaches (VOL)	DK/RF	(n)	
<b>August 2007</b>	<b>Registered voters</b>	<b>44%</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>28%</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>891</b>	
How much have you heard or read about lease idea	A lot	33%	12%	39%	2%	8%	6%	224	
	Some	46%	8%	31%	1%	9%	5%	244	
	Very little	46%	9%	22%	3%	12%	7%	255	
	Nothing at all	50%	5%	21%	2%	12%	9%	162	
Tolls too high, too low, or about right	Too high	39%	5%	35%	2%	12%	6%	287	
	Too low	**	**	**	**	**	**	**	
	Just about right	47%	10%	25%	3%	11%	5%	493	
NJ tolls compared to tolls in other states	Higher	36%	10%	33%	2%	14%	5%	276	
	Lower	54%	10%	20%	2%	12%	2%	101	
	About the same	49%	7%	28%	2%	7%	7%	340	
Party ID	Democrat	48%	11%	21%	3%	8%	8%	268	
	Republican	35%	8%	42%	1%	9%	5%	205	
	Independent	47%	7%	28%	1%	10%	7%	325	
Corzine job approval	Approve	52%	10%	21%	3%	6%	8%	495	
	Disapprove	34%	7%	42%	1%	12%	3%	304	
Region	North	42%	10%	28%	2%	11%	7%	426	
	Central	44%	10%	27%	2%	10%	6%	225	
	South	51%	6%	27%	2%	9%	4%	210	

\*\*Subgroup contains fewer than 50 respondents