



**NEWS RELEASE**

**March 29, 2012**

Media contact:

Tom Feeney

732-750-5333

feeney@turnpike.state.nj.us

## **Turnpike Authority moves to hold chronic toll violators accountable by suspending vehicle registrations**

*Working with the Motor Vehicle Commission, Authority launches pilot program to collect \$2.5 million in tolls and fees owed by 131 chronic toll violators*

**WOODBRIIDGE, NJ** – Continuing the Christie Administration’s efforts to recoup millions in unpaid tolls from New Jersey drivers and companies that have continually evaded their responsibilities while using the New Jersey Turnpike and Garden State Parkway, the New Jersey Turnpike Authority, working with the Motor Vehicle Commission, today launched a pilot program that will seek to suspend the vehicle registrations of 131 companies and individuals with thousands of dollars each in unpaid tolls and fees. This pilot program supplements on-going cross-agency actions to hold chronic toll violators accountable.

“The companies and individuals whose registrations we’re moving to suspend are chronic toll violators who have ignored every effort we’ve made to get them to pay. Last fall we announced that this step was coming and we spent the past few months working with the Motor Vehicle Commission to implement this pilot program while at the same time giving these violators every opportunity to make good on what they owe,” said Turnpike Authority Chairman and Department of Transportation Commissioner James Simpson. “Since they’ve ignored every notice we’ve sent and every effort we’ve made to collect, now they’ll have to face the consequences. It’s not fair to the honest drivers who pay what they owe to let these tolls go unpaid.”

The MVC has begun sending notices to those 131 chronic toll violators advising them of an impending registration suspension if the individuals and companies, who collectively owe a total of \$2.5 million in tolls and fees to the Turnpike Authority, continue to fail to meet their obligations. The number of toll violations committed by that group range from 82 to 2,820. The sums owed range from \$3,075 to \$116,281.

“By combining our resources and working together, the state will now be better able to track down those drivers who made a conscious decision to circumvent the system over and over instead of paying their fair share when traveling the toll roads of our state,” said Motor Vehicle Commission Chairman and Chief Administrator Raymond P. Martinez. “The recent introduction of our new, easily read temp tag will also play a significant role in identifying drivers who would otherwise speed through the toll plazas without paying.”

The New Jersey Turnpike Authority Act empowers the Chief Administrator of the Motor Vehicle Commission to revoke, suspend or refuse to renew the motor vehicle registrations of motorists who have failed to pay the required tolls on the Turnpike or Parkway. Neither the Turnpike Authority nor the former New Jersey Highway Authority previously acted to use the law’s provision.

However, the Turnpike Authority and the MVC have worked together since last fall to develop this pilot program, which seeks to suspend the registrations of chronic, New Jersey-based toll violators whose combined unpaid tolls and fees total more than \$1,000. Under the program, the Turnpike Authority will provide the MVC with evidence of the violations, including the names, addresses and license plate numbers of violators, along with the number of violations and the amount of tolls and fees owed. MVC will mail each violator a Scheduled Registration Suspension Notices to inform them that their registrations will be suspended in 25 days.

If violators make payment arrangements with the Turnpike Authority within the 25-day window, they will avoid a registration suspension. If violators fail to make arrangements, their registrations will be suspended after 25 days and will remain suspended until they have paid their outstanding tolls and fees.

Owners who continue to operate vehicles with suspended registrations will face stiff penalties under state law including up to \$1,000 in tolls and fines, expanded suspension periods and jail time. Additionally, law enforcement may impound a vehicle on site with a suspended registration.

When a vehicle goes through a Turnpike Authority toll plaza without paying, a notice is sent to the registered owner demanding payment of the toll and fees. If a vehicle owner does not respond to the initial request for payment, the Turnpike Authority sends a second letter warning that civil and/or criminal enforcement steps will be taken unless the toll and fees are paid. Next, the unpaid account is sent to a collection agency if the second letter does not lead to a resolution. The collection agency attempts to collect the debt before notifying the various consumer credit reporting bureaus.

In 2010, collection efforts yielded \$541,000 in recouped tolls and fees. Last year, because of increased efforts, those figures rose to \$1.9 million in recouped tolls and fees for the Turnpike Authority.

The Turnpike Authority regularly works with the New Jersey State Police by turning over the names of chronic toll violators to be investigated for theft of services. Over the past two years, State Police have investigated 87 violators. Of those, 62 have been arrested and nine have reached settlements before arrest. The remaining 16 cases are pending with the State Police and are not part of the pilot program.