

# The *Jamestown* REAL ESTATE SHOWCASE

## EZpass

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to work with Carter and Burgess of Fort Worth, Texas, for 1,730 hours under a contract for \$293,703; and Traffic Technologies of New Windsor, N.Y., quoting on 1,780 hours for \$399,100.

The Smith firm, founded in 1952, is a leading toll collection and violation prevention firm with 1,000 employees in 47 offices in America and nine in international locations, with headquarters in Columbia, S.C., for half a billion dollars in contracts in 2006. Its proposal stated that it has worked on projects in many transportation systems, does not out source its work to subcontractors and considers itself independent because it has no connections with equipment and software providers.

### Approval

In recommending the Smith firm, RITBA Executive Director Earl "Buddy" Croft said he and his selection committee were impressed by the caliber of all bidders. He reported the firm projected that collection installation seemed feasible, "to be easily accomplished."

RITBA, in August, agreed to hire a consultant to evaluate the appropriateness of using an electronic toll collection system, such as EZPass, which is used widely in the Northeast and would replace tokens. Authority and staff members have been collecting data on such systems for about three years. They are convinced one would provide convenience for users of the Pell - Newport Bridge, the only toll link in the Rhode Island road system.

At their September meeting, Vice Chairman Richard Eannarino asked about implication for returning to a toll system for the authority's Mount Hope Bridge, where tolls were eliminated in 1998. Others at the meeting suggested it might be a possibility, but consideration should be postponed, pending findings with the system to be chosen for the Pell Bridge.

An electronic system for the Newport bridge is expected to end use of tokens, but cash tolls would continue. Specifics about the system and the impact on toll rates would be determined in conjunction with consultant studies and findings.

The current \$2 cash rate for two-axle vehicles to cross the Newport Bridge has been the same since the bridge opened in 1969. Tokens later were introduced at 91 cents when bought at \$10 for 11, or 84 cents each when bought at 60 for \$50. About 10 million vehicles crossed the bridge in each of recent years, of which, about eight million used tokens.

RITBA officials want to eliminate congestion, reduce costs and keep the toll rate the same. Preliminary details suggest the electronic rate might be more than \$1, plus the one-time device cost of \$35 per vehicle and possible credit or debit account charges to vehicle owners. Estimates of annual costs to operate the system have ranged from \$12,500 to \$200,000. Installation costs have been cited as up to \$2 million, but Croft said an actual figure will become available as part of the work by the Smith consultants.

David Darlington, authority chairman, said in August that im-

pact on toll rates was to be determined in conjunction with the consultant studies and findings. He said the authority frequently reviews the rate structure, and consideration is given to raising the rate, but no such decision has been made. He said the impact of EZPass costs would be a consideration about the rate, but EZPass automatically would not be the reason to raise the amount of the toll.

According to the RITBA website, the "collection equipment at the Newport/Pell Bridge is designed to accommodate the EZPass system. However, our present level of traffic does not warrant the required additional investment that would be necessary in order to participate in the system."

Darlington said another important consideration was the expectation that use of EZPass might influence more people to use the bridge, and bring in enough added income to offset costs. He said RITBA needs to decide about tolls before its existing system and equipment become obsolete, especially in relation to tolls elsewhere.

"We're observers, not drivers of the process (of toll collections)," he remarked.

### The system

EZPass, installed in each vehicle, sends a radio signal to toll plaza computers that read the identity of the signal and charges a pre-paid account. Several companies, or systems exist (A Pass, I Pass,

I Zoom, ETC, Smart Tag, Fast Lane, FasTrak, MnPass, PikePass, Smart Tag, SunPass, TxTag), and many use each other's systems. EZPass is the dominant system in the Northeast. Latest reports a year ago are that nearly 60 percent of toll payers use electronic options over cash and/or token payment.



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