

Tackling Transit Token Destruction

Reducing and recycling transit tokens replenishes state coffers.

Authorities for New Jersey's Garden State Parkway (GSP) practiced the three R's of reduce and recycle and ended up replenishing their coffers by nearly a quarter million dollars.

When authorities for the GSP began migrating away from their token-based payment system towards the transponder-based E-ZPass, they knew that at some point they would have to do something with the tokens. Because they are still accepted for transit along the GSP's 173 miles of roadways, the tokens have value for motorists. But they have not been actively sold for several years—instead they have been housed in secure storage facilities. So when a bid was let for the destruction of the tokens, authorities knew that they'd reduce their need for secure storage and eliminate a liability at the same time. They also figured that they would be involved in recycling as the tokens are melted down and made into new tokens or other items. But what surprised authorities was how much replenishing of the state coffers would occur from the project.

The GSP eliminated about 190,000 lb of its transit tokens—separate sizes and types for passenger vehicles and for commercial busses. This freed up much needed storage space and eliminated some costs while

returning nearly a quarter million dollars to the citizens of New Jersey.

Reduce

When transit tokens were introduced as a means of payment they were heralded as a huge time saver for frequent motorists. No longer saddled with the need for exact change, drivers traversing the GSP would arrive at their destinations faster thanks to the tokens and automated token collectors at each toll plaza.

Although effective, even this speedier method pales in comparison to the transponder technology allowed by the parkway's E-ZPass system. So the decision was made to phase out tokens in favor of E-ZPass. Since there are still tokens in circulation, they are accepted as payment (and continue to be accepted, though their usage is waning). Tokens accepted at toll plazas are consolidated and transferred by an armored car service to the closest of four secure

storage facilities. After placing the tokens in rolls then into cardboard containers that resemble bricks, armored car personnel put the bricked tokens into nested metal storage containers, which are kept under lock and key in secure storage sheds in Essex, East Orange, Great Egg, and Keyport.

Eliminating the tokens means that the New Jersey Turnpike Authority, operators of the GSP, no longer needed to keep them in a secure facility, nor are armored cars required to transport them. This frees up valuable storage room and eliminates a line-item cost from the operating budget.

Recycle

Because the tokens have high nickel-silver and brass contents, they are valuable to recyclers. Unlike disposal by throwing away, which might lead some tokens back into circulation, recycling of the tokens ensures that they will



Collected tokens are first rolled and then put into cardboard containers before being stored in four secure metal storage sheds.

be melted down and turned into something else—perhaps other transit tokens, or key chains, custom coins for promotional purposes, or any of a host of other items. In addition to providing peace of mind, recycling of the tokens is also an environmentally friendly way to alleviate the storage and disposal problems.

Replenish

Because the tokens have a value for recyclers, there is a financial component to their recycling. A portion of that value was returned to the state—after the bidders had covered their costs for removal of the boxed tokens, hauling to a secure recycling facility, and destruction to eliminate the possibility of any tokens finding their way back to the GSP. The winning proposal, submitted by Osborne Coinage Company, the firm that supplied the transit tokens, returned the tidy sum of a quarter million dollars to the state of New Jersey.

While many token destruction projects are rather straightforward, this particular one was fraught with perils. The four secure storage locations, while convenient to the other toll plazas, are not designed for token destruction. “There was not enough space on site to accommodate a destruction truck,” says Walt Hodge, destruction supervisor for Osborne.

Compounding this problem was the fact that the storage sheds were never designed for large scale movement of tokens in or out. The 40-in. doorways do not permit forklifts to enter the facility, so the nested containers were removed by hand. They also required additional wrapping to ensure their integrity would not be compromised during transit back to the destruction site in Cincinnati, OH.

The volume of traffic proceeding through the toll plazas was also an issue. Since tractor trailers are not permitted on the GSP, not all the bridges and underpasses accommodate tractor trailers, so special routing was required. The toll plazas are not designed to accommodate tractor trailers either. Five trucks and trailers were required due to the weight of the tokens (The trailers fill to


legal weight limits before their volume is full.) But the throughways would not physically accommodate the three trailers. And several semis with 50-ft trailers would cause quite a disruption for motorists unaccustomed to such a sight. So the decision was made to remove the tokens during the night. Hodges and the crews he supervised began with the East Orange plaza at 8:00 p.m. and worked through until 3:30 a.m.

Earning the trust of the Turnpike Authority was key to the success of the project. Because this project was far from standard—given the high level of materials handling required—Hodge visited the facilities before preparing the Osborne bid documents.

“Traveling to the various sites and seeing the conditions firsthand was really important to understand the scope of the material handling requirements,” said Hodge. “I had lots of questions for the turnpike folks, which they answered before asking many of their own. Ultimately we mapped out a detailed plan and then worked the plan. Everyone was great to work with—from the turnpike officials to the warehousing and trucking teams. There was a real sense that we were all working towards a common goal.”

One unique wrinkle to the bid documents concerns the possibility of finding U.S. currency among the tokens to be destroyed. Since it is a crime to destroy U.S. currency, coupled with the fact that the nickel-silver contents are far lower and would therefore reduce the value of the scrap material, Osborne has agreed to return any U.S. coins found among the tokens.

In addition to scouting all aspects of the project, Hodge also took photos of the toll plazas, the containers, and the storage sheds. He then shared the photos with the warehousing and trucking companies so that everyone was aware of the intricacies of the project. In addition to building trust with the authorities, eliminating surprises was another way to ensure success of the project.

Now that the project is complete the GSP secure storage sheds have more room for holding other controlled items. Armored cars are no longer required to transport tokens among facilities, so operating costs are reduced. With the removal and recycling of the passenger car and bus tokens, a significant liability has been avoided. And with the return of nearly a quarter million dollars to the state, this was surely a fiscal success as well. 



Recycling the tokens rather than discarding them makes sure they will be melted down and reused as other tokens or for promotional items.