

Turnpike: Time for tolls on I-80

■ Offered as alternative to privatizing turnpike.

HARRISBURG (AP) — The Pennsylvania Turnpike Commission has an alternative to privatizing the turnpike: putting tolls on other highways.

The commission proposes using unspecified high-tech equipment to collect tolls on highways that are now free, a newspaper reported. It suggests Interstate 80 would be a good first choice because it is a major east-west artery.

The commission was among about four dozen groups that offered to help state policymakers who want to determine the value of leasing the Pennsylvania Turnpike. Gov. Ed Rendell last month invited the

proposals in an effort to generate more state transportation funds.

Tolls on I-80, for example, could raise "tens of millions of dollars," Turnpike Commission Chief Executive Joe Brimmeier told the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette for Friday's editions.

The other proposals generated by Rendell's request came from companies that already operate toll roads and bridges, and some from investment firms.

Brimmeier said the commission's proposal to create more toll roads would pump more money into the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation than privatization.

"All the profits that would go to a private firm would go to PennDOT," Brimmeier said. "We intend to show how we can close the funding gap that lim-

its the state's ability to care for roads and bridges."

The Turnpike Commission voted to hire The Bravo Group, a Harrisburg lobbying firm, to help it craft a formal proposal to the state.

PennDOT spokesman Rich Kirkpatrick said there is no timetable for the state to consider proposals to privatize the turnpike. Estimates on the potential value of such a long-term lease have varied widely, from \$2 billion to \$30 billion.

"This is not a process that will yield a quick result," Kirkpatrick said.

The Turnpike Commission currently collects tolls on the mainline east-west turnpike, the Northeast Extension to Scranton and several sections of highway in western Pennsylvania.