

## Pierce court to be reimbursed for messy toll transition

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**Published:** March 19, 2013 at 9:55 p.m. PDT

State transportation officials have agreed to pay Pierce County District Court a total of nearly \$108,000 to reimburse costs that the court incurred during the messy transition to a new tolling contractor in 2011.

The Washington State Department of Transportation earlier agreed to pay \$40,882 for the court's work during the first half of that year. It recently agreed to shell out another \$66,854 for its work during the year's second half, court administrator Chuck Ramey said.

"We think it's fair," he said.

Before Dec. 3, 2011, the District Court accepted payments and heard appeals of toll infractions. For every \$52 infraction, the court kept \$40 while the remaining \$12 went to the bridge fund to pay for toll collection and maintenance as well as pay down debt.

Now motorists who cross the bridge without paying up front receive a \$6 "photo toll" bill instead of a violation in the mail. Those who still don't pay receive a civil penalty rather than an infraction. A state administrative judge hears appeals instead of a district court judge.

Photo tolling was initially scheduled to begin in March 2011, shortly after the new contractor, Electronic Transaction Consultants Corp., took over tolling operations statewide. The transition was delayed nine months due to a litany of problems ETCC encountered. That led to the dismissal of tens of thousands of backlogged potential violations.

As a result, the court incurred costs to process them but ended up not receiving any payments.

County Executive Pat McCarthy wrote in a letter last year to Transportation Secretary Paula Hammond that Pierce County District Court lost \$1.9 million in revenue from the bridge.

But citing a “spirit of compromise,” McCarthy requested that the county need only be paid back \$100,000: the court’s estimated cost to process the infractions before they were dismissed.

The agreement gives WSDOT until April 8 to make the remaining payment. It also prevents the court from making future financial claims against WSDOT over the lost revenue.

Although the district court is out of the toll infraction business, it continues to track 98,780 infractions that have gone to collections and date back to the bridge’s July 2007 opening, Ramey said.