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NSW Toll Fee Promise Unmet, Drivers Demand Action

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The New South Wales (NSW) government faces mounting pressure to deliver on a 2023 election promise to cut toll road administration fees, as motorists grapple with soaring costs and Transurban supports reform.

Over two years after New South Wales Premier Chris Minns vowed to “declare war” on toll road administration fees during the 2023 state election, the NSW government has yet to deliver on its pledge to reduce these charges for drivers who fail to pay tolls on time. The fees, imposed by toll road operator Transurban on roads like the M2, M5, and WestConnex, have added significant financial burdens to motorists, exacerbating cost-of-living pressures. Transurban, which operates 11 of Sydney’s 13 toll roads, has

expressed support for consolidating toll bills to lower costs, but progress remains stalled as negotiations with the government continue.

In March 2023, Minns promised swift action to curb what he called “sneaky administration fees” that hit drivers without automated toll accounts. For example, motorist Luke Cook accumulated nearly \$5,000 in administration fees on top of \$2,030 in unpaid tolls, largely from trips on the M7 to visit his mother in Penrith, as reported by ABC News. Cook, who has sought a payment plan through the Transurban-funded Tolling Customer Ombudsman, argued he’s willing to pay the tolls but not the excessive fees. Transurban insists it does not profit from these charges and offers hardship programs, including fee waivers for drivers who open toll accounts.

The NSW government commissioned former Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) chairman Allan Fels and economist David Cousins to review the state’s tolling system in 2023. Their July 2024 report recommended replacing administration fees with late fees to encourage timely payments, a reform Fels said could be implemented quickly outside broader negotiations with Transurban. However, the government’s delay in acting on these recommendations has drawn criticism. NSW Roads Minister John Graham acknowledged the need for a fairer system, stating that toll reform is under discussion, but no timeline for fee reductions has been confirmed.

Motorists like Cook, alongside opposition figures such as Liberal Member of Parliament (MP) Julian Leeser, have voiced frustration over the government’s inaction, arguing it fails to ease the financial strain on Sydney drivers. With Transurban reporting \$3.2 billion in toll revenue in 2023-24, the pressure is on for the NSW government to deliver tangible relief.