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January 10, 2019

Thank you for opening a meeting tonight to allow the public an opportunity to provide comments for Tim James, Inc.'s application to operate a Toll Bridge over Lay Lake. My name is Steven Dudley and I am the Staff Riverkeeper at Coosa Riverkeeper. We are a river conservation non-profit organization with over 600 dues-paying member focused on the protection, restoration, and promotion of the Coosa River and all of her tributaries in Alabama. I come to you tonight to voice concerns about this proposal.

My first concern with this proposed toll bridge is the lack of information and transparency regarding certain aspects of this proposal. Being more forthcoming with the public and the commission about the toll bridge, such as conducting a traffic study and cost analysis, would be in the applicants best interest... that is if they are being honest with their intentions. On Thursday, we received news that not only is the applicant proposing a toll bridge over the Coosa, but over the Cahaba as well in what is deemed "The Project." Clearly the applicant has far more in mind than just constructing these bridges and making a marginal amount of money off of the tolls.

These toll bridges will open up the possibility for developers like the applicant to completely change the landscape of the area from beautiful forests and waters to an industrial pathway like we have seen in other parts of the state. Or the applicant could simply construct this bridge promising low tolls, then sell it to another company, like they did with the Foley Beach Express. The tolls at that bridge have dramatically increased since it was originally constructed, leaving the community with a toll that they shouldn't have needed to pay in the first place.

While the potential economic boost to the county as a result of this toll bridge may sound enticing, it will inevitably be in the benefit of the applicant and their cohort, not the residents who live in the area. The business of toll bridges has been a family business for three generations. Fob James passed legislation that makes the business of toll bridges more profitable, and in turn Tim James Sr. and Jr. are benefitting from it.

Regardless of who benefits from this potential economic boom, there is plenty of economic incentive to maintain a peaceful and healthy lake. People from all around Alabama come to

Lay Lake to either put down roots to have a home in peace and quiet or to come and see what they can reel in for the day. These are major economic drivers in the area and are far from insignificant.

My second concern are the potential environmental impacts as a result of the construction of this bridge. We can only speculate the impacts in the surrounding areas where the toll bridge is proposed to be

constructed, but the environmental impact of the construction of the toll bridge itself is in need of careful consideration. Construction activity will result in a significant increase in sediment runoff going directly into the Coosa. This in turn will increase the turbidity levels in the water, and harm the aquatic wildlife in the area. There are Best Management Practices in place to reduce sediment runoff, but, as many of us know, the history of environmental enforcement in Alabama is significantly lacking. It is very likely that the lake will look like chocolate milk as a result of this toll bridge.

Lay Lake is also listed as impaired by ADEM on the most recent 303(d) list for PCBs. As many folks are already aware, PCBs are legacy pollutants that don't readily break down in the environment and accumulate in sediment. The construction of this bridge will ultimately stir up the sediment of the river bottom, stirring up any PCBs that might be present. These impacts would not only impact aquatic wildlife, but will also diminish the ability for folks to enjoy the lake safely.

I strongly urge the Talladega County Commissioners to carefully consider the ramifications of authorizing a license to the applicant to operate a toll bridge over Lay Lake. It may seem like a no brainer to have a private entity come and build a bridge and improve the roads leading up to it, but there is always a price to pay for the sake of convenience. What price are you willing to pay?

Thank you for your time.

For the Coosa,

Steven Dudley
Staff Riverkeeper



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