



# Ask not for whom the bridge tolls, it tolls for thee, not for free

Published on *Show-Me Institute* (<https://showmeinstitute.org>)



*By: David Stokes*

Discussions about a new bridge over the Mississippi are heating up. The Post-Dispatch has an [updated story](#) on today's meeting of the East-West Gateway Coordinating Council. Quick, how many bridges connect Metro East, Illinois to Missouri? I bet most people would guess low. The answer, and I just did this in my head so feel free to correct me, is nine. Six for cars and trucks, one for trains, one for MetroLink, bikes and pedestrians, and one for bikes and pedestrians only. We absolutely do not need the billion dollar bridge people have proposed over the river. The fact that Missouri can't afford its share of any bridge, much less the expensive option, has made the goal of our own Golden Gate impossible.

Both of the options being considered currently:

Under one plan, Illinois would shoulder the cost of building a companion bridge to the Martin Luther King Bridge. Under another, a private group would pay for and build a bridge and collect tolls ranging from \$1 to \$6.

are preferable to earlier proposals. The toll road idea is excellent. I believe the fears of Illinois politicians are overblown, as most of their voters will remain on the free bridges while many of

the same trucks that so often tie up those bridges will choose the new toll road. Time is money in trucking, and toll expenses are tax write-offs.

The MLK companion / addition is also a good idea. As anyone who had crossed the MLK knows, it is a little tight in the turns. Making the current bridge all eastbound and adding new westbound lanes on a connected bridge will significantly improve flow into north downtown and onto 70 westbound.

The final option I like, not discussed in the article, is expanding [MetroLink](#) into Madison County. St. Clair County residents in Illinois use MetroLink more than any other demographic group in the area. Going north from Fairview Heights to add a line and stations in Collisville and Edwardsville would serve many commuters who work in Downtown St. Louis and greatly reduce traffic. Any of these three proposals will cost Illinois a great deal of money and Missouri little to none. So I can't really understand why Missouri's reps on the Council all voted against the companion bridge proposal when they are not being asked to pay for it.

## About the Author



*David Stokes*

*David Stokes was a policy analyst at the Show-Me Institute from 2007 to 2014 and was director of development from 2014 to 2016.*

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5297 Washington Place      3645 Troost Avenue  
Saint Louis, MO 63108      Kansas City, MO 64109  
Phone: (314) 454-0647      Phone: (816) 287-0370  
Fax: (314) 454-0667

Email: [info@showmeinstitute.org](mailto:info@showmeinstitute.org)

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