

## Turnpike a model of highway robbery



By [Nafari Vanaski](#)  
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A young woman taking a different route home Monday stopped at a supermarket along the way to pick up a few things. At the register, she unloaded all her stuff.

The cashier, a teenager with an acne-laden face, scanned in the items. After the last item went through, the total came to \$23.70. As she took out her wallet to pay with cash, however, she noticed the cashier hit another button on the register.

The total jumped to \$26.07.

The shopper lowered her wallet and raised her eyebrows.

"Um, excuse me. What was that?" she asked.

"What?" the cashier answered neutrally.

"That thing you just did where you added an extra 10 percent on my bill. Why'd you do that?"

"Oh," he said. "That's our new policy that started today. Actually, it's really cool. If you use our store card and our automated checkout, you pay the posted price for everything in the store. But if you don't have the card, and need to use a cashier, then we charge an extra 10 percent."

"What's cool about that?" she said, shaking her head at the cashier's logic. "Well, sign me up for this card, and I'll go use the automated checkout."

"Great! That'll cost you \$41 dollars."

"Wait -- what???"

"The card," the cashier explained. "Starting the account costs \$41, which includes a \$6 annual fee and a minimum opening balance of \$35 you put on the card. Every time you shop here, the grocery bill comes out of your card balance. When the balance gets below a certain amount, money is automatically added from your account to the card online. It's a sweet deal."

"Are you kidding me?" she raged. "That system only works if you shop here on a regular basis! I shop here three times a year. You're penalizing me for not being a regular customer -- charging me extra to buy the same items because I don't really need your special card. How is that fair?"

The cashier cleared his throat, clearly a bit nervous. "Well, it is faster and more convenient for shoppers to use the card," he practically whispered.

"Hold on," the woman said. "This sounds like what the Pennsylvania Turnpike is doing. If you travel without an E-ZPass starting this week, you have to pay an extra 10 percent."

"Right," the cashier said, "that's where we got the idea. Like the turnpike, most of our customers are regulars. It should only affect a few people who want to pay cash -- like you -- so it's not that big a deal."

"Well, I didn't take the turnpike before, and I'm not doing it now," the shopper said defiantly. "It usually takes me another half-hour to connect with I-80, but I'd rather take that road across Pennsylvania than be a victim of highway robbery!"

"That's nice," the cashier said, holding out his hand. "So, are you going to pay for this, lady?"

"First off, don't call me 'lady.' Do I look like a senior citizen? Secondly, of course I'm not paying for this. This system is bull -- oney! What made you think something like this would work? No one's going to go for this!"

"Our bosses said it worked for the Turnpike Commission. No one's complaining about their 10-percent rate increase. What's the difference between this and that?"

The woman paused for a moment, trying to think of a snappy comeback, but there wasn't one. The kid was right.