



**OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL**  
*Illinois State Toll Highway Authority*

**NOTICE OF POSTING**  
**August 28, 2025**

**OIG Case #IG-24-006**  
**Respondent: Joseph McDonnell**

Pursuant to 605 ILCS 10/8.5 (e)(3), the attached redacted summary report is being posted to the Illinois Toll Highway Authority's public website. As required by law, the Office of the Inspector General for the Illinois Toll Highway Authority (OIG) sent a copy of this report to the Respondent and gave him time to provide suggested redactions and/or a written response. Respondent provided a response and a suggested redaction, which have been appended to the report, as requested by Respondent.

OIG issued a summary report on May 22, 2025 that includes findings and recommendations resulting from an investigation. OIG initiated this investigation after learning that Roadway Lighting Manager Joseph McDonnell (McDonnell) had been suspended in August 2024 for actions that violated Tollway policies including driving his Illinois Toll Highway Authority (Tollway)-issued vehicle without permission to an off-duty retirement party, consuming alcohol at the party, and then driving that Tollway vehicle to his residence after the party. This investigation has established reasonable cause to find that the disciplinary decision was based on incomplete information, because it failed to account for prior instances where McDonnell misused his assigned vehicle and committed other policy violations.

OIG's investigation of discrepancies between the AVL and Vehicle Logs shows that McDonnell used his Tollway vehicle in the past for unauthorized personal trips, which he initially denied. McDonnell's conduct reflects a disregard for Tollway rules and policies. OIG recommended that the Tollway review the findings regarding McDonnell's prior unauthorized personal use to determine if further disciplinary or administrative action is appropriate.

On June 27, 2025, the Tollway terminated McDonnell's employment.



**OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL  
SUMMARY REPORT OF INVESTIGATION  
OIG Case #IG-24-006  
May 22, 2025**

This report provides a summary of evidence set out in the attached investigative materials, and the Office of the Inspector General's (OIG's) analysis of that evidence. An index of these investigative materials is attached.

**I. INTRODUCTION**

OIG initiated an investigation after learning that Roadway Lighting Manager Joseph McDonnell (McDonnell) had been suspended in August 2024 for actions that violated Tollway policies including driving his Illinois Toll Highway Authority (Tollway)-issued vehicle<sup>1</sup> without permission to an off-duty retirement party, consuming alcohol at the party, and then driving that Tollway vehicle to his residence after the party. This investigation has established reasonable cause to find that the disciplinary decision was based on incomplete information, because it failed to account for prior instances where McDonnell misused his assigned vehicle and committed other policy violations.

OIG notes that none of the supervisors involved in this matter reported this incident to the OIG. OIG recommends that the Tollway review the additional evidence discovered during this investigation to determine if other disciplinary or administrative action is appropriate. Most critically, OIG recommends that the Tollway remind employees and supervisors of the duty to promptly report misconduct to OIG, especially where interviews or detailed evaluation of records is necessary for a complete understanding of the incident and a meaningful disciplinary assessment.

**II. APPLICABLE RULES, REGULATIONS, LAW**

**A. Illinois Tollway Policy and Procedure Manual**

1. Chapter VII. Employee Conduct and Discipline: Section A: "Employee Conduct," in relevant part:
  - Improper use of Tollway vehicle or personal vehicle for Tollway Purpose
  - Other conduct unbecoming a Tollway employee

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<sup>1</sup> Roadway electric 1 (RE-1), a white Chevy Equinox with Tollway markings.

2. Chapter VIII. Drug and Alcohol Policy: Section A: “General Provisions,” in relevant part:

The Tollway is committed to providing a safe, efficient, and productive work environment for all employees and the public. Using or being under the influence of unauthorized controlled substances or illegal drugs or alcohol on the job may pose significant health and safety risks to the employee, coworkers, or the public. Employees on Tollway premises or conducting Tollway related business shall not use, possess, distribute, sell, or be under the influence of alcohol, unauthorized controlled substances, or illegal drugs.

**B. Illinois Tollway Vehicle and Equipment Operation Policy Manual. Vehicle Operation provides, in relevant part:**

1. Vehicle Operation

a. Vehicle use

Tollway vehicles are to be used for Tollway business purposes only and in compliance with the Tollway’s vehicle use policies established herein, the Tollway Policy and Procedure Manual and all applicable laws and regulations related to vehicle operation. The following vehicle use policies apply:

1. The use or assignment of a Tollway vehicle does not automatically include approval to drive the vehicle home.
  - Permanently Assigned Vehicles are to be used only for official duties and are eligible for employee travel to and from work if duties necessitate 24/7 access.

b. Unauthorized Use of a Tollway Vehicle

Unauthorized use of a Tollway vehicle may result in immediate disciplinary action up to and including termination. Unauthorized use may also result in suspension of all privileges to operate a Tollway vehicle and may result in an employee paying for damages to a vehicle or vehicle operating costs. Below is a list of infractions that may result in suspension of privileges and disciplinary action up to and including termination (but are not limited to the following):

1. Use of a Tollway vehicle for personal reasons other than those approved in this policy.”

c. Transportation, Possession or Consumption of Alcohol/Illegal Substances

Operation of a Tollway vehicle or a private vehicle for Tollway business, while under the influence of alcohol, illegal substances, or other controlled

substances is strictly prohibited. Vehicle operators who are found to be under the influence of these substances are subject to the rules and regulations outlined in the Tollway's Drug and Alcohol Policy and other applicable laws or regulations.

1. Any employee, who is under the influence or in possession of alcohol, or illegal substances while operating a Tollway vehicle, or a private vehicle for Tollway business, shall be subject to disciplinary action. This prohibition does not apply to employees transporting prohibited substances in the performance of law enforcement duties or other employment related duties.

2. Vehicle Maintenance and Repair

- a. Flat Tires

In the event a driver changes a flat tire, they must notify the Tollway repair facility that normally performs their vehicle repairs and bring the unit in to have the flat tire repaired and reinstalled on the vehicle.

- b. What to do if You Pay for a Repair

All Tollway vehicle operators (including District 15 personnel) must contact Fleet for approval prior to the commencement of any Tollway vehicle repairs. In the event of an emergency and you are forced to pay for a vehicle repair, the repair must be approved by Fleet before submitting a reimbursement request. See Vehicle Maintenance and Repair Section to obtain prior approval. A copy of the invoice shall be submitted to Fleet for the vehicle files.

### **III. BACKGROUND**

#### **A. Parties Involved**

1. Joseph McDonnell, Roadway Lighting Manager

According to Tollway records, McDonnell began his employment with the Tollway on June 16, 2022, as a Roadway Lighting Manager. At all relevant times, McDonnell was assigned Tollway vehicle RE-1, a Chevy Equinox, as a take-home vehicle.

2. [REDACTED] Manager 1. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Manager 1 is McDonnell's direct supervisor; approximately 200 to 220 employees report to Manager 1.

3. [REDACTED] Deputy Chief, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] Deputy Chief is Manager 1's direct supervisor.

4. [REDACTED] Chief, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Chief is Deputy  
Chief's direct supervisor.

#### **IV. SUMMARY OF INVESTIGATION**

OIG reviewed and analyzed relevant documentation and interviewed pertinent Maintenance and Traffic Operations section personnel, including Manager 1, Deputy Chief, and Chief about Tollway vehicle use, the July 19, 2024, retirement party, and McDonnell's vehicle use. OIG also interviewed Senior Manager [REDACTED] [REDACTED] and McDonnell. In summary, OIG learned the following.

##### **A. Take Home Vehicle Use**

Take-home vehicle use must comply with all Tollway policies, and Chief said employees must not consume alcohol when using take home vehicles. According to Chief, take home vehicles cannot be used for personal use without approval; and either he, or [REDACTED] Chief of Facilities, must grant permission depending on whether it is a Fleet vehicle or an Engineering vehicle. Chief said he only approves personal use of a take home vehicle if the stop is on the route of an employee's drive home. Chief noted that limits for time and usage of take-home vehicles for personal use is "unspoken." Employees should not drive out of their way or add additional mileage to the vehicle. Manager 1 concurred, noting that employees are allowed to take their Tollway vehicle to lunch or doctors' appointments with permission. They are allowed to make stops for mostly medical related reasons if the stops are on their way home. Any other stops would require permission.

Chief could not recall any other instances where an employee violated the vehicle usage policy.

Chief said that discipline for misuse of a take home vehicle could result after a complete, thorough investigation and would depend on the incident. Roadway Maintenance personnel generally start an investigation after a "hint" of an incident. Employees found to have violated the vehicle usage policy could be suspended, terminated, or issued a written warning. The District Manager, Roadway Manager, Deputy Chief, or Chief conducts the investigation.

When determining discipline, Chief needs information about the infraction, witness statements, the truthfulness of the employee involved, and previous discipline of the involved employee. Chief

involves Administration into the disciplinary process and considers precedents. Similar situations should be handled similarly. He sends his discipline recommendation to Administration.

## **B. Vehicle Logs**

Chief said that everyone operating a Tollway vehicle must manually complete a written Vehicle Log, and identify where and when they stopped as well as the mileage each day. He said that in Engineering he expects employees to update the vehicle log every time the vehicle moves no matter the situation. The vehicle logs must be signed by the employee and submitted to their supervisors on a regular basis<sup>2</sup>.

## **C. Automated Vehicle Location (AVL)**

In some instances, Chief relies on AVL information. AVL is a system that automatically tracks vehicle movement, like GPS, and can provide information about general location, speed, and other relevant factors. If he deems AVL records to be important for his disciplinary recommendation, Chief has full discretion to determine how many months of records to review and may review a month or a year. In order to see if there is a pattern of misuse, he often reviews as far back as he can. Some vehicles also have a new system, Synovia, that allows the driver to input the movement of the vehicle from a tablet located inside the vehicle. But it is not currently required, and he knows that McDonnell did not use that system.

## **D. Timeline of events following Retirement Party**

The following timeline is based on records and interviews conducted by the OIG.

### **1. July 19, 2024 [REDACTED] retirement party**

An email was sent to ALLISTHA on May 31, 2024, titled “[REDACTED] Retirement Celebration,” inviting people to a party to celebrate [REDACTED] retirement. The email provided the following details:

Location: [REDACTED] Romeoville, IL.

Time: 6:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m.

Date: July 19, 2024

### **2. July 23, 2024 McDonnell’s vehicle use and drinking reported to Manager**

1

Manager 1 said he first learned about the incident on the following Tuesday at M-2 when [REDACTED] told Manager 1 that he and others saw McDonnell drinking alcohol at the party and had driven his Tollway vehicle to the party, and [REDACTED] asked who let McDonnell take the vehicle to the party. Manager 1 responded that he did not know why McDonnell had the Tollway vehicle there.

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<sup>2</sup> Illinois Tollway Vehicle and Equipment Operation Policy Manual states vehicle logs must be submitted monthly.



Manager 1 said that he served as the party's master of ceremonies and was the first to arrive and the last to leave. Manager 1 did not exit the building or see the parking lot during the party. Manager 1 observed McDonnell drinking Stella beer but did not know at the time that McDonnell had driven a Tollway vehicle to the party, or how many beers McDonnell drank. Manager 1 told [REDACTED] he was not aware the vehicle was there or why he had taken the vehicle. [REDACTED] told Manager 1 that other managers saw the RE-1 vehicle in the parking lot and saw McDonnell drinking inside. Manager 1 also spoke to [REDACTED] about the incident.

Manager 1 was very disappointed that neither [REDACTED] nor [REDACTED] tried to stop McDonnell from driving after drinking and for not reporting the incident to Manager 1. Manager 1 said that if he had known, he would have given McDonnell a ride home and had the car towed to McDonnell's home.

a. Manager 1 obtained written statements about the incident

On the morning of July 23, 2024, Manager 1 contacted Deputy Chief for guidance as this was the first time Manager 1 encountered a situation like this. Manager 1 explained that [REDACTED] told him McDonnell had driven a Tollway vehicle to the retirement party and had been drinking at the party. Deputy Chief directed Manager 1 to handle the incident the same way as other incidents and get written statements. After the call, Manager 1 obtained written statements from [REDACTED] and McDonnell.

i. Statement [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] was present at the July 19, 2024 retirement party and saw the RE-1 Tollway vehicle. He also stated that he saw McDonnell consuming Stella beer.

ii. Statement [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] was present at the retirement party. When [REDACTED] arrived at the venue, he noticed RE-1 parked in the lot. At the party, he noticed what appeared to be a beer bottle in McDonnell's hand. He could not see the label on the bottle, because McDonnell's hand covered the label.

iii. Statement Joseph McDonnell, Roadway Lighting Manager

McDonnell's statement read:

This serves to confirm our conversation today regarding Tollway Vehicle Policy on off-road driving without permission. This also confirms my admission to have consumed alcohol before driving home from Romeoville with the Tollway Vehicle. I realize both acts are contrary to Illinois Tollway Vehicle policy.

b. Deputy Chief provided guidance to Manager 1 on steps to take

After he received the written statements, Manager 1 asked Deputy Chief if he should drive McDonnell to his residence and take away his vehicle. Manager 1 asked because on a prior occasion, an employee who with a positive drug test had his vehicle taken away, was driven home, and placed on suspension pending. Deputy Chief told Manager 1 not to take any action at that time. Manager 1's steps after learning of the incident were a part of his training and what he does for discipline or injury-related matters that require investigation.

c. Manager 1 sent Deputy Chief informal recommendation

Manager 1 emailed Deputy Chief and attached McDonnell, [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] written statements about the incident. Manager 1 wrote, "When asked why permission to use the vehicle wasn't requested, I was told he was in a hurry and just went there. Mr.cDonnell [sic] did take accountability for consuming what was recounted as four (4) beers." Manager 1 added that he would share his formal recommendation after he returned from an appointment, but that it would, **"include a recommendation of termination as this is a very serious infraction."** (emphasis added).

Manager 1 initially recommended termination for McDonnell, but Deputy Chief told him to wait for Chief to speak with Deputy Chief of HR Administration [REDACTED].

d. Deputy Chief called McDonnell to discuss use of take-home vehicle at the party.

Deputy Chief called McDonnell to discuss why McDonnell thought taking the Tollway vehicle to the party was allowed and why he did not ask for permission. McDonnell admitted he took the vehicle to the party. According to Deputy Chief, McDonnell would always ask for permission for everything. McDonnell told Deputy Chief "I'm not even going to try to make up an excuse. I hopped in the vehicle at my house, and I went." (Deputy Chief interview recording 12:35). McDonnell admitted to Deputy Chief that he drank a beer at the retirement party. McDonnell told Deputy Chief he could not recall any doctors' appointments the day of the party.

e. Deputy Chief called Chief to inform him of incident and steps taken

Deputy Chief called Chief to inform him of the allegations and that Manager 1 had gathered statements. Chief instructed Manager 1 and Deputy Chief to complete the investigation and report their findings to him. Deputy Chief then provided [REDACTED] [REDACTED] and McDonnell's statements to [REDACTED].

Chief asked several questions, including why McDonnell drove the Tollway vehicle to the retirement party when his shift ended at 3:00 p.m. and the party did not start until 6:00 p.m.; who gave McDonnell permission to use the vehicle; where McDonnell lived; and, whether he got pulled over. Chief said that he was told that McDonnell admitted to taking the vehicle and having two beers. Chief wanted to establish a timeline. He noted McDonnell was not a CDL holder and he wanted to know if McDonnell were to have been pulled over, would the amount of alcohol he consumed exceed the legal limit. Chief requested a suspension and loss of use of the take home



vehicle. He reevaluated McDonnell's need for the vehicle, and Deputy Chief and Chief took the loss of take-home vehicle out of the discipline. He also looked at what discipline could they take to deter other employees from doing the same thing.

3. July 24, 2024 Deputy Chief reviewed Automated Vehicle Location (AVL) records for McDonnell's vehicle

Deputy Chief requested six months of Automated Vehicle Location (AVL) records on McDonnell's vehicle, RE-1, from Senior Manager of Fleet Assets [REDACTED] and General Manager of Fleet Operations [REDACTED]. Deputy Chief wanted to get a better idea of McDonnell's vehicle use and to see if McDonnell had a history using the vehicle inappropriately. [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] assisted Deputy Chief in reviewing the AVL records. Deputy Chief said he reviewed about three months of those AVL records, and determined that McDonnell had not used his vehicle for personal use. Fleet agreed with his AVL assessment.

[REDACTED] and Deputy Chief reviewed asset history reports<sup>3</sup> and vehicle logs. [REDACTED] said the AVL updates every thirty seconds, so they looked at those records and mileage locations. They looked for anything out of the ordinary. [REDACTED] stated there were a couple peculiarities, but they only reviewed one to three months of records. Deputy Chief did not request specific records, but Deputy Chief and [REDACTED] went back through the records for RE-1 together to see if any anomalies were found. [REDACTED] brought some anomalies to [REDACTED] attention. Deputy Chief asked if there was any way they could prove for certain McDonnell's location. [REDACTED] said they could not, which limited [REDACTED] ability to include those anomalies in any recommended discipline.

In addition to reviewing the AVL records, [REDACTED] and Deputy Chief reviewed six months of the vehicle logs. There were also discrepancies on McDonnell's vehicle logs. These discrepancies included missing logs for trips on the AVL records, including use of the vehicle after work hours, on weekends, and on holidays. [REDACTED] is not sure what Deputy Chief did with the information after they met.

4. July 24, 2024 Deputy Chief and Chief discuss discipline

Deputy Chief reported to Chief that McDonnell had not previously used his vehicle for personal use and the incident was a one-time occurrence. According to Deputy Chief, there was discussion about suspension and possible loss of a take home vehicle. Deputy Chief did not have a precedent to look towards in recommending discipline, as this was the first time he had had an employee drive a Tollway vehicle after consuming alcohol. He said that if there had been other instances of improper vehicle use by McDonnell – such as off duty personal use – that would have been grounds, in his opinion, for termination. Deputy Chief waited 24 hours to process the information and review the facts before making a discipline recommendation.

5. July 25, 2024 Recommendation for Suspension

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<sup>3</sup> Asset history report is a report run through AVL that shows time, date, and location of events related to a specific Tollway vehicle.



Ultimately, Deputy Chief recommended a 10-day suspension, and he directed Manager 1 to draft the memorandum to [REDACTED]. Manager 1 emailed Deputy Chief a memorandum entitled "Recommendation for Ten-Day Suspension /Violation of Drug-Alcohol Policy/Assigned Vehicle Usage." The recommendation states that McDonnell was observed, and admitted to consuming an unspecified amount of alcohol, and thereby violated the Drug and Alcohol Policy and the Unauthorized use of a Tollway Vehicle policy. Manager 1 did not challenge Deputy Chief on the suspension recommendation because he thought maybe Deputy Chief had more information than Manager 1 or received other direction. Manager 1 stated that Deputy Chief always preaches consistency and that drugs are no different than alcohol, so using his prior experiences, he thought the same discipline guideline would be issued. Manager 1 stated there has never been another incident where an employee consumed alcohol and drove a Tollway vehicle. Manager 1 did not feel McDonnell received sufficient discipline. "In my opinion, he put, like I said, himself, the motoring public and he put the Tollway in a very liable position." (Manager 1 interview recording 22:19). Manager 1 said he felt termination was warranted.

Deputy Chief forwarded Manager 1's memorandum to Chief on July 26, 2024. Chief was not aware of any other recommendations other than the ones made by Manager 1 and Deputy Chief. Chief based his disciplinary recommendation on his review of witness statements, a statement from McDonnell, the AVL records, Manager 1's suspension recommendation, and [REDACTED] analysis of the vehicle records. Chief asked if the AVL records could establish a pattern of vehicle misuse, and Deputy Chief told Chief that they could not. Chief said he reviewed the portion of the AVL records that Deputy Chief highlighted, but acknowledged that he did not perform a thorough review, and he relied on his subordinates' assessment. Chief would have included termination as a discipline option if McDonnell denied using the vehicle or denied drinking. Chief also did not want to make a disciplinary recommendation without consulting other departments. Chief said he felt the actions taken in this case would set future precedent for discipline.

Chief never considered reporting the incident to OIG because he felt like it wasn't his place to determine where the matter needed to be referred.

6. July 26, 2024 Email from Chief to [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]

Chief emailed a 10-day suspension recommendation to Deputy Chief of HR Administration [REDACTED], [REDACTED] and Deputy Chief of HR Services [REDACTED], and copied Chief of Administration [REDACTED], EEO/AA/ADA Officer [REDACTED], Former Chief of Maintenance and Traffic [REDACTED] and Chief of Facilities and Fleet [REDACTED], which provides in relevant part:

In essence, Mr. McDonnell used the Tollway vehicle off hours to attend a retirement party, and from what we understand, consumed 2 bottles of beer before driving home. He did not provide a reason for utilizing the vehicle, but questions arose when his shift ended at 3 p.m., but the retirement party began at 6 p.m. When this was brought to our attention, we took the liberty of looking through AVL (Automated Vehicle Location), and we did not find any other instances where he used the vehicle without permission. We understand that this is merely a recommendation, and we are cognizant that the discipline can be escalated to

termination, given the series of events, and not wanting to set a precedence for future occurrences. Please let us know your thoughts on the recommendation, and from a Legal and/or Risk Management standpoint if the recommendation should be amended to reflect termination.

7. July 30, 2024 Administration discipline recommendation

█████ responded to Chief's █████ email, recommending McDonnell receive a 15-day suspension.

8. August 2, 2024 Suspension Memo to McDonnell

On August 2, 2024, Chief and █████ issued a 15-day suspension to McDonnell. The suspension letter states, in relevant part:

On July 19, 2024, you were observed consuming alcohol at a private event while also being in possession of a Tollway issued vehicle. Your authorized use of the Tollway vehicle ended at the end of your shift which was 3pm on that day. The event started hours after the end of your shift. When inquiry was made regarding this, you admitted to taking the Tollway vehicle to this private event after your work shift ended without first receiving the necessary approval to do so. Additionally, you admitted to consuming alcohol at the event, then getting into the Tollway vehicle and driving it home. You failed to take safe and appropriate measures while operating the vehicle which could have led to serious harm for you, the Tollway vehicle, and other patrons on the road. Your actions were irresponsible and dangerous.

As a result, you are being issued a 15-day suspension without pay.

The letter cites the Illinois State Toll Highway Authority Employee Policies and Procedures Manual, Chapter 7 Employee Conduct and Discipline: Section A: "Employee Conduct" and the Illinois Tollway Vehicle Operators Manual Chapter 1. Vehicle Operation: Section: "Vehicle Use" and "Transportation, Possession, or Consumption of Alcoholic/Illegal Substances" as the bases for suspension.

9. August 6, 2024 – Suspension

Kronos records reflect McDonnell served his 15-day suspension from August 6, 2024, to August 27, 2024.

**E. McDonnell's Version of July 19, 2024 events**

On October 8, 2024, OIG interviewed Roadway Lighting Manager Joseph McDonnell (McDonnell) after providing him, both orally and in writing, Administrative Advisements for Non-Union Employees, which he signed and acknowledged understanding. McDonnell was asked, both orally and in writing, for consent to audio record the interview to which he consented. In summary, McDonnell stated the following:

McDonnell has worked for the Tollway for two years and three months as a Roadway Lighting Manager. He manages a team of thirteen, five of whom are division electricians. He and his crew are responsible for approximately 21,000 lighting poles over 300 miles of highway. They maintain the lighting poles and the power to those poles. Some of the Tollway lighting and Intelligent Traffic Systems (ITS) cameras are on the same power supply, so occasionally, they fix the power for the ITS cameras.

Prior to working at the Tollway, McDonnell worked for multiple other electrical contractors. McDonnell resides in Arlington Heights. He has a personal vehicle at his residence that he has access to use.

McDonnell is assigned take home vehicle RE-1, which is a white Chevy Equinox with Tollway markings. He understood the take home vehicle rules to be, “take home vehicles are to be used for Tollway obligations only. Tollway obligations only. To and from, um, and that’s it. You park the car, you park the vehicle at home. You don’t drive it anywhere on the weekends and, um, that’s my understanding.” (McDonnell recording 10:22). McDonnell learned those rules from the Tollway Policy and Procedure Manual as well as the Tollway Vehicle Policy Manual.

McDonnell knew approval was needed for use of the vehicle outside of Tollway work, such as doctor’s visits. During his Tollway tenure, Deputy Chief approved McDonnell three times to visit [REDACTED] Hospital in Downers Grove and then travel home. McDonnell sends requests to use the vehicle for doctor’s visits to Deputy Chief, Manager 1, and Executive Secretary [REDACTED]. McDonnell thinks that for stops that are on the way home and not “totally out of the way” or “reasonable,” then it is okay to stop without approval. He has twice stopped at Target to pick up prescriptions and once stopped at Staples to pick up a photo and TSA card. McDonnell knew vehicle logs need to be updated daily, including use after work hours or on the weekends. Any time the vehicle is moved, it needs to be logged. McDonnell stated there were times when he was called out to work and did not punch in but updated his vehicle log.

McDonnell acknowledged that one time he did not seek approval to use the vehicle to travel to a doctor’s appointment and said he is very remorseful for it. That was the day of the retirement party. That day, McDonnell took the vehicle to a doctor’s appointment at [REDACTED] Hospital without obtaining approval. He knew he would not have received approval to use the vehicle, so he did not request it. McDonnell did not think he had enough time to go home first before going to his appointment and the party. He thought his wife would pick him up at the hospital and drive him to the party while she went to the library, but that did not happen. “Then I made a dumb mistake. I drove the Tollway Vehicle to the [REDACTED], without getting permission from Mr. Deputy Chief, and then went to the party and consumed alcohol and then went home.” (McDonnell Recording 14:50).

McDonnell learned about the party through an email that was sent from the retirement committee, which included a link to purchase tickets for \$45. He was not familiar with the Tollway culture, but heard that employees should go to the party. He decided to go because he thought no one else from his department would attend.

On July 19, 2024, McDonnell's day started at 6:00 a.m. when he left his house, arriving at M-2 between 6:35 and 6:40 a.m. He punched out at 3:00 p.m. and drove to [REDACTED] Hospital in Downers Grove, an approximately 15-to-20-minute drive. He arrived early for his appointment and sat in the parking until 4:00 p.m. His appointment concluded at 4:30 p.m. and he went back to the vehicle. He sat in the vehicle and called his wife for about 20 minutes. His plan for that night was to have his wife pick him up at the hospital and take him to the party while she went to a library. He was going to leave the vehicle in the hospital parking lot. During the phone call, he found out his wife would not be able to pick him up. He drove to a McDonalds near the retirement party, arriving around 5:15-5:20 p.m. He arrived at the retirement party at 6:00p.m.

At the event, McDonnell talked to other "Blue Shirts," which are Tollway managers. He ate dinner and consumed four Stella Beers. He left the party around 7:45 p.m. in his Tollway vehicle (RE-1). He initially said he went directly home, but later thought he may have stopped at M-2 in Hillside for gas.

McDonnell reviewed his July 19, 2024 vehicle log entry, in which he wrote "[REDACTED]." He then reviewed his RE-1 GPS records for July 19, 2024, which aligned with the timeline he gave for that date – reflecting the hospital visit, stop at McDonald's, and the retirement party location.

#### **F.      **OIG's Review of McDonnell's Prior Personal Use of Tollway Vehicle****

OIG reviewed McDonnell's AVL records from March 9, 2024, to September 11, 2024. These records showed non-commuting trips and non-Tollway related stops outside of working hours on March 11 and April 13. Most of these trips are not reflected in McDonnell's handwritten vehicle logs.

##### **1.      Monday, March 11, 2024**

- AVL records shows extended post-work activity near a shopping district
  - 3:34pm- 1700 E. Rand Rd., Arlington Heights, Illinois 60004. OIG's search of the address revealed that a Target store is located at the address.
  - 4:12 p.m. – 1612 E. Rand Rd., Arlington Heights, Illinois 60004. OIG's search of the address revealed that Lola's Tiki Bar and Pizza is located at the address.
  - 4:50 p.m. – 1 Randhurst Village Dr., Mount Prospect, Illinois 60056. A Hampton Inn and Suites is located at that address.
  - 7:03 p.m. – Again at 1 Randhurst Village Dr., Mount Prospect, Illinois 60056.
- RE-1 Vehicle log
  - 3:00 p.m. – left M-2 Hillside
  - 3:48 p.m. – arrived home
  - There is no log after that for March 11, 2024.
- Tollway Kronos Records show that McDonnell swiped out at 3:01 p.m. at M-2

McDonnell confirmed no one else in his home uses his Tollway vehicle. McDonnell could not answer why his vehicle was not at his residence that day as reported on his vehicle logs. McDonnell

denied going to a bar or a hotel, and stated “Well I don’t have an answer to this right now. I don’t know. Um, I would just say I would like to see where this is at. But you know, my initial statement is this is not me. There’s got to be a mistake here. Because I do not take this vehicle out. It sits in front of my house.” (McDonnell Recording 1:01:14).

But McDonnell subsequently conceded that there have been times where he has used the vehicle without first obtaining approval, such as trips to Target or Staples on his drive home from the M site. He provided no explanation for why these trips are not included on his vehicle log.

Later in the interview, McDonnell stated he believed that next to the Lola’s Tiki Bar and Pizza shop is a Thorntons Gas station and next to the Hampton Inn and Suites is a Costco. McDonnell initially denied he took the vehicle to the Costco.

Eventually, McDonnell told the OIG that he got a nail in RE-1’s rear tire when he left Target and pulled over at the Thorntons Gas Station to change the tire. He then drove RE-1 to the Costco and had a new tire put on the vehicle. McDonnell said he could provide the receipt for the tire. He did not tell Fleet he put a new tire on the vehicle, and he did not submit for reimbursement for the tire. At this time OIG showed McDonnell that his vehicle logs reflect he was at M-2 at 6:40 a.m. on March 12, 2024, for a “flat tire.” McDonnell claimed he also had a tire fixed at M-2 that day.

a. March 11, 2024 Costco Receipt

McDonnell provided OIG with a receipt from Costco Tire Center located at 999 N. Elmhurst Road, Mount Prospect, Illinois. The receipt shows the purchase of 1 tire “Item #1600170 BFS Alenza AS Ultra All Season CUV/SUV 225/65R17/102H BL.”<sup>4</sup> The member information listed is “Joseph McDonnell, [REDACTED] Arlington Heights[sic], IL 60005. The vehicle information is listed as a “2022 Chevrolet Equinox LS, color: white and license: U35941.”

2. Sunday, April 13, 2024

- AVL records show extended non-work related activity
  - 1:55p.m. – 2:07 p.m. 2100 S. Arlington Heights Rd., Arlington Heights, Illinois. OIG’s search of the address revealed that a Driven Car Wash is located there.
  - 2:31 p.m. – 3:24 p.m. – [REDACTED] Rolling Meadows, Illinois 60008, which is a residence in Rolling Meadows.
  - 3:27 p.m. – the vehicle returns to McDonnell’s residence.
- Vehicle log
  - 2:30 p.m. – the destination code is “H to \*.” The comments section states “car wash.” There is no end time for the April 13, 2024 entry.
  - There is no other entry for this date.
- Kronos Records show that this is a regular day off for McDonnell and he did not report to work

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<sup>4</sup> Bridgestone Alenza All Season tire.



McDonnell did not understand the Rolling Meadows residence address. McDonnell stated “I don’t deny the carwash. But I didn’t go anywhere else, I don’t normally go anywhere else.” He stated he does not know anyone personally who lives in Rolling Meadows. McDonnell had no explanation for why the vehicle was at the residence in Rolling Meadows.

McDonnell said, “I would never take the vehicle on any personal matter on a Saturday or Sunday.”

In an October 18, 2024 email to investigators, McDonnell stated that the home in question is directly across the street from a reservoir named “Sunset Meadows” where he has walked in the past. OIG confirmed there is a park named “Sunset Meadows Park” across the street from the Rolling Meadows address.

## **V. ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

OIG’s investigation confirmed the basic, uncontroverted facts that led to McDonnell’s suspension: on July 19, 2024, nearly three hours after clocking out, McDonnell drove his Tollway vehicle to several non-Tollway, locations including an off-site retirement party for [REDACTED] without approval, where he drank some beers and then drove that vehicle to his residence. Most critically, this investigation has uncovered further information that shows that Chief’s [REDACTED] recommendation to suspend McDonnell for 10 days, and the Tollway’s ultimate decision to impose a 15-day suspension, was based on incomplete and inconsistent information.

OIG interviews found that the Roadway Maintenance Department completed their own investigation into the incident and obtained written statements from two [REDACTED] and McDonnell. Manager 1 collected the statements and provided them to [REDACTED]. In the email to Deputy Chief, Manager 1 recommended termination because “this is a very serious infraction.” Two days later Manager 1, after discussions with Deputy Chief, provided a formal suspension memo in which he recommended a ten-day suspension. Manager 1 told OIG that, although he still felt that termination was warranted, he drafted the suspension memo at the direction of Deputy Chief, to whom he deferred because Deputy Chief had more experience in these types of matters.

Chief told OIG that he considers many factors and relies on information he receives from his subordinates when assessing an incident and recommending discipline. This investigation reveals that Chief, and as a consequence Administration, did not have all available information. First, Chief was not told that Manager 1, McDonnell’s direct supervisor, initially recommended termination. Second, Chief was told that McDonnell drank “two beers,” and that is what he included in his recommendation to Administration, but it is unclear where that number originated. McDonnell told Manager 1 and OIG that he drank four beers. Given that McDonnell was only at the party for about an hour and forty-five minutes, the difference between 2 and 4 beers is not insignificant. Third, Chief was told that there were no other AVL violations found for McDonnell. Chief told OIG that his disciplinary recommendation would have been different if McDonnell had prior other incidents of unauthorized, off-duty vehicle use. In fact, OIG’s review confirmed that there were several variances from the AVL and McDonnell’s written Vehicle Log, a fact that [REDACTED] also identified, but Deputy Chief discounted because the records did not prove violations.

██████ reluctance to rely solely on AVL and GPS to identify violations is understandable. But these variances should have been further investigated, especially since both Chief and Deputy Chief told OIG that prior unauthorized vehicle use was a significant factor in their disciplinary assessment. As detailed in this report, OIG's further inquiry revealed at least two instances where McDonnell used his Tollway vehicle for unauthorized trips and stops that he failed to note on his Vehicle Log, and established other policy violations.

OIG reviewed all of the six months of AVL records that Deputy Chief and ██████ accessed, and found numerous incidents of potential vehicle misuse. Two anomalies were more significant than the others.

The first anomaly was on March 11, 2024. In his manually created Vehicle Log, McDonnell indicated that he parked RE-1 at home at 3:48 p.m. after his evening commute. However, AVL records place RE-1 at several businesses on Rand Road in Rolling Meadows well after McDonnell's shift ended, and not at his home until 8:02 p.m. After initially telling OIG that he never made unauthorized trips, McDonnell eventually conceded that he actually stopped at Target at 3:44 p.m. that day to pick up a prescription and got a flat tire on RE-1 while leaving the parking lot. McDonnell then said that he stopped at a nearby Thorntons Gas Station at 4:12 p.m. located at 1600 N. Rand Road, Prospect Heights to change the tire and put the spare tire on the vehicle. Again after denying that he took the vehicle to Costco. McDonnell admitted that he did go to the Costco at 999 North Elmhurst Road, Mount Prospect at 4:50 p.m. and had the tire replaced. AVL records reflect that RE-1 was at Costco until 7:45 p.m.

In addition, during his interview McDonnell said that he paid for the tire out of his own pocket, never informed the Fleet Department the tire was replaced, and never submitted the receipt for reimbursement. He provided OIG with receipts for the tire and a bank statement showing how much he spent on the tire. McDonnell's actions violated Tollway Vehicle and Equipment Operation Policy Manual, which clearly requires such actions to be reported to the Tollway.

The second anomaly was on Saturday, April 13, 2024, a regular day off for McDonnell. On that day AVL records show RE-1 leaving McDonnell's residence at 1:40pm. McDonnell recorded taking the vehicle for a car wash at 2:30 p.m. AVL records confirm that the vehicle was at the car wash from 1:55 p.m. to 2:07 p.m. However, AVL records also place the vehicle in a neighborhood outside a residence in Rolling Meadows from 2:31 p.m. to 3:24 p.m. McDonnell denied visiting anyone and further stated that he never used the vehicle on Saturdays or Sundays for personal trips. However, he emailed OIG after his interview and said that the residence was across the street from a reservoir where he walked in the past. AVL records show RE-1 arrived back at McDonnell's residence at 3:31pm.

OIG's investigation of discrepancies between the AVL and Vehicle Logs shows that McDonnell clearly has used his Tollway vehicle in the past for unauthorized personal trips, which he initially denied.

This investigation demonstrates what can happen if disciplinary decisions are based on incomplete and inconsistent information. Supervisors and managers should not be expected to conduct

complex investigations of potential misconduct that involve data interpretation and interviews. OIG recommends the Tollway reiterate to all employees, especially supervisors, that OIG should be notified in the event there are allegations of misconduct, especially ones that require interviews.

In addition, the OIG recommends that the Tollway review the findings regarding McDonnell's prior unauthorized personal use to determine if further disciplinary or administrative action is appropriate.



**OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL**  
*Illinois State Toll Highway Authority*

**RESPONDENT SUGGESTED REDACTIONS/PUBLIC RESPONSE**

**OIG Case # IG-24-006**

**Respondent:**  
**Joseph McDonnell**

Pursuant to 605 ILCS 10/8.5 (e)(3), the attached Response of Joseph McDonnell is being made public at his request.



**OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL**  
*Illinois State Toll Highway Authority*  
**Theodor J. Hengesbach – Inspector General**

August 7, 2025

**PUBLIC RESPONSE/REDACTION SUGGESTIONS**

Re: Joseph McDonnell, OIG Case #IG-24-006

As indicated in the cover letter, you have the option to provide a response that will be made public. Please use the space below, or attach additional pages.

Public Response: Please see attached Response.

You also may suggest redactions to the report. These suggestions will be reviewed by the Inspector General to determine if they should be adopted and incorporated when the report is published. If these suggestions are not adopted, you may request that they be made public. Please use the space below, or attach additional pages.

Suggested Redactions: REDACT ROLLING MEADOWS ADDRESS

I wish these suggested redactions to be made public. Yes ☒ No ☐

J. McDonnell  
Signature

Date 8/18/2025

Return this form and any attachments to the attention of Theodor J. Hengesbach by August 21, 2025.

Theodor J. Hengesbach

August 18, 2025

Inspector General – Illinois Tollway

2700 Ogden Avenue

Downers Grove, IL 60515

RE: Joseph McDonnell, OIG Case # IG-24-006

**Public Response / Redaction Suggestions**

Mr. Hengesbach,

In consideration of your letter dated August 7, 2025, regarding Public Response / Redaction Suggestions I am offering this reply for your review:

**1. (F) - OIG's Review of McDonnell's Personal Use of Tollway Vehicle**

This entire section of the report is replete with misinformation, distortions, one-sided interpretations, jaded conclusions, and assumptions of an employee's whereabouts based on AVL (GPS) coordinates. In summary, this portion of the report is prejudicial, libelous and seeks to foster the narrative of wrongdoing, this statement is false and is lacking in the truth. Please consider:

**Monday, March 11, 2024**

**Anomaly (1)**

I drove Tollway Vehicle (RE-1) into the Thorntons Gas Station to attend to a "low tire".

I tried to fill the tire with air – the tire would not hold air.

I changed the tire and replaced the tire with the spare.

Since this was the third time I had lost air pressure in this tire, I decided to go to Costco.

Once at Costco I asked the attendant to see if he could repair the tire.

When I returned the attendant indicated the tire could not be repaired.

I did not go to Lola's Tiki Bar for Pizza on Rand Avenue.

I did not go to the Hampton Inn in Randhurst – However the Hampton Inn is immediately adjacent to Costco in a northern direction.

**The OIG Report has the following assertion: (paragraph 4- page 13/16)**



*“Later in the interview, McDonnell stated he **“believed”** that next to the Lola’s Tiki Bar and Pizza shop is a Thornton’s Gas station and next to the Hampton Inn and Suites is a Costco.”*

It must be noted this statement is not true, I had no idea where the Lola’s Tiki bar was located until I looked it up on Google after the interview. That evening, I drove my personal vehicle to the Thornton Gas Station and found Lola’s Pizza directly next door to the north, I took a picture of the juxtaposition of the gas station to the pizza place and sent the picture to Investigator II (via email).

This is a contrived statement included to “fit the narrative”- lacking credulity and is simply NOT TRUE! Both allegations by the OIG Report are based on faulty AVL (GPS) readings.

**Sunday, April 13, 2024- “Residence in Rolling Meadows” (paragraph 6- page 13/16)**

**Anomaly (2)**

I took the RE-1 vehicle for a car wash to keep the vehicle clean inside / out.

While returning home I stopped at a park for a (3) mile walk at Sunset Meadows in Arlington Heights, IL – a park which is located on my return from the car wash where I walk most days.

I never went to the Rolling Meadows address – I never parked the vehicle (RE-1) near the address in Rolling Meadows. Most likely, this is another instance of relying on AVL (GPS) coordinates to allege the location of an employee. I was parked at Sunset Meadows off Wilke Ave. (GPS MIS-READ LOCATION).

**It is important to note the following in both alleged situations:**

- a. I was attending a flat tire in Thorntons Gas Station.
- b. I never entered Lola’s Pizza
- c. I went to Costco to fix the flat tire.
- d. I never entered Hampton Inn in Randhurst.
- e. I went to a car wash with RE-1.
- f. I never went into the Rolling Meadows neighborhood.

This was communicated via email to the OIG Investigator II, I am surprised this has been left out of the report.

2. Please consider:

***“OIG reviewed all of the six months of AVL records that Deputy Chief accessed and found “numerous” incidents of potential vehicle misuse. Two anomalies were more significant than the others.” (paragraph 2 – Page 15/16)***

At this point, in the interest of a “fair and impartial OIG report”, these “numerous incidents” should be identified and investigated.

Considering the numerous times I was called out by Tollway Dispatch to assist with a Roadway Lighting situation during work hours and many times after hours & weekends. Could these times below be included in the OIG inquiry:

- a. To assist the Illinois State Police on I-90 for the measure device (engineer).
- b. To drive a Division Electrician home at 1 am, who was involved in an accident after a drug test at Elmhurst Hospital.
- c. To disconnect a downed light pole, in a snow storm, at Barrington Road after a Division Electrician called me to say he just arrived home after a 12 Hour shift of snow plowing and was exhausted.
- d. To help with the Target Truck Roll-Over on I-355. Confirm RE-21 (Crane) delivery.

Perhaps, these incidents were recorded as “potential vehicle misuse.”

Nonetheless, this onerous statement of **“numerous incidents of potential vehicle misuse”** needs to be clarified and / or supported, without clarification the statement wreaks of bias and pre-judgment. It is important to understand, none of the supervisor’s found **“potential of vehicle misuse”**.

3. Please consider:

***In addition, the OIG recommends the Tollway review the findings regarding McDonnell’s “prior unauthorized personal use” to determine if further disciplinary or administrative action is appropriate.”*** (paragraph 2 – page 16/16)

I certainly would welcome a review of this alleged “prior unauthorized personal use” of the Tollway vehicle.

As mentioned before, I sent via email to Investigator II, a detailed response with clarification regarding “Anomaly (1) and Anomaly (2)”.

Apparently, it was decided to leave this information out of the report and include the OIG version which supported their narrative.

**In Summary please consider:**

- a. I am at a loss to understand how the narrative regarding “Anomaly (1) and Anomaly (2)” would stand up to the scrutiny of an unbiased observer.
- b. This “mystery” could have been easily remedied by placing the vehicle (RE-1) at the Thorntons Gas Station on Rand Road, directly in front of the “air pump” and take an AVL (GPS) location. Then take the vehicle to COSTCO (tire garage) in Mount Prospect and take another AVL (GPS) location. Then take the vehicle to “Sunset Meadows” Park (west parking lot) and take another AVL (GPS) location.
- c. It should be noted that AVL (GPS) location readings are not reliable.  
***“...reluctance to rely solely on AVL and GPS to identify violations is understandable.”*** (paragraph 1 – page 15/16).
- d. It is further important to note, Mr. McDonnell was denied access to interview recordings and emails exchanged with the OIG Investigators while responding to this report – a definite informational disadvantage.
- e. Also important to consider, is the “tone and tenor” of the report writing (specifically from page 12 through and including page 16). The reader is treated to a “presumed guilt” rendition of the occurrences. This is incredibly biased and lacking in truth and veracity.
- f. **Finally**, the narrative regarding “Anomaly (1)” (Gas Station v. Lolas Tiki Bar) and (Costco v. Hampton Inn) along with “Anomaly (2)” (Sunset Meadows vs. Rolling Meadows neighborhood) were debunked and sent to OIG, therefore should not be the predicate for my termination, a termination without settlement or severance, *since both are false and have never been verified!* Additionally, it must be noted, I received very high review ratings over the last two years, with my supervisor indicating “You are doing a great job.” Hopefully, this situation can be remedied soon without further action necessary.

Respectfully,



Joseph McDonnell

DATE: 8/18/2025

On July 19, 2024, McDonnell's day started at 6:00 a.m. when he left his house, arriving at M-2 between 6:35 and 6:40 a.m. He punched out at 3:00 p.m. and drove to [REDACTED] Hospital in Downers Grove, an approximately 15-to-20-minute drive. He arrived early for his appointment and sat in the parking until 4:00 p.m. His appointment concluded at 4:30 p.m. and he went back to the vehicle. He sat in the vehicle and called his wife for about 20 minutes. His plan for that night was to have his wife pick him up at the hospital and take him to the party while she went to a library. He was going to leave the vehicle in the hospital parking lot. During the phone call, he found out his wife would not be able to pick him up. He drove to a McDonalds near the retirement party, arriving around 5:15-5:20 p.m. He arrived at the retirement party at 6:00p.m.

At the event, McDonnell talked to other "Blue Shirts," which are Tollway managers. He ate dinner and consumed four Stella Beers. He left the party around 7:45 p.m. in his Tollway vehicle (RE-1). He initially said he went directly home, but later thought he may have stopped at M-2 in Hillside for gas.

McDonnell reviewed his July 19, 2024 vehicle log entry, in which he wrote "[REDACTED]." He then reviewed his RE-1 GPS records for July 19, 2024, which aligned with the timeline he gave for that date – reflecting the hospital visit, stop at McDonald's, and the retirement party location.

#### **F.      **OIG's Review of McDonnell's Prior Personal Use of Tollway Vehicle****



OIG reviewed McDonnell's AVL records from March 9, 2024, to September 11, 2024. These records showed non-commuting trips and non-Tollway related stops outside of working hours on March 11 and April 13. Most of these trips are not reflected in McDonnell's handwritten vehicle logs.

##### **1.      Monday, March 11, 2024**

- AVL records shows extended post-work activity near a shopping district
  - 3:34pm- 1700 E. Rand Rd., Arlington Heights, Illinois 60004. OIG's search of the address revealed that a Target store is located at the address.
  - 4:12 p.m. – 1612 E. Rand Rd., Arlington Heights, Illinois 60004. OIG's search of the address revealed that Lola's Tiki Bar and Pizza is located at the address.
  - 4:50 p.m. – 1 Randhurst Village Dr., Mount Prospect, Illinois 60056. A Hampton Inn and Suites is located at that address.
  - 7:03 p.m. – Again at 1 Randhurst Village Dr., Mount Prospect, Illinois 60056.
- RE-1 Vehicle log
  - 3:00 p.m. – left M-2 Hillside
  - 3:48 p.m. – arrived home
  - There is no log after that for March 11, 2024.
- Tollway Kronos Records show that McDonnell swiped out at 3:01 p.m. at M-2

McDonnell confirmed no one else in his home uses his Tollway vehicle. McDonnell could not answer why his vehicle was not at his residence that day as reported on his vehicle logs. McDonnell

██████ reluctance to rely solely on AVL and GPS to identify violations is understandable. But these variances should have been further investigated, especially since both Chief and Deputy Chief told OIG that prior unauthorized vehicle use was a significant factor in their disciplinary assessment. As detailed in this report, OIG's further inquiry revealed at least two instances where McDonnell used his Tollway vehicle for unauthorized trips and stops that he failed to note on his Vehicle Log, and established other policy violations.

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2

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