Regional Mobility Pricing Project

Discussion Draft
Purpose and Need Statement

August 16, 2021

The Regional Mobility Pricing Project needs your input on this draft Purpose and Need Statement, as well as the included Goals and Objectives. With your input, this draft Purpose and Need Statement will be enhanced over time and will guide the formation of Project alternatives, which will later be refined to advance into NEPA. Read on and please share your thoughts by emailing the project team at OregonTolling@odot.state.or.us. Please put "Purpose and Need Statement" in the subject line and send us your comments by [September 30, 2021].

INTRODUCTION

In 2016, the Governor's Transportation Vision Panel held a series of regional forums across the state to better understand how the transportation system affects local economies. The negative effect of congestion in the Portland metropolitan area was consistently identified as one of the key themes across Oregon. Congestion in the Portland region affects commuters and businesses, as well as producers who move their products across the state.

In response to the input from stakeholders across the state, House Bill (HB) 2017 Section 120 directed the Oregon Transportation Commission to develop a congestion relief fund and to seek approval from the Federal Highway Administration to implement congestion pricing (also referred to as value pricing or tolling) on the I-5 and I-205 corridors to reduce traffic congestion in the Portland metropolitan area.

In 2018, the Oregon Transportation Commission and the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) conducted the Portland Metro Area Value Pricing Feasibility Analysis to study how and where congestion pricing could be applied. Substantial public input and a Policy Advisory Committee informed the final recommendations

What is a toll?
A toll is a fee imposed to drive on a road or bridge. Bridge tolls and roadway tolls have been used for centuries to pay for construction and maintenance of the facility. Historically, travelers had to stop and pay in cash, but that is no longer necessary with modern technology (FHWA, n.d.)

Is congestion pricing the same thing?
The term congestion pricing describes a type of tolling where drivers are charged a higher price during peak traffic periods. The higher fee encourages some drivers to consider using other travel options such as carpools or transit, or change their travel time to other, less congested times of the day, or not make the trip at all. If a small percentage of drivers choose another mode of travel or time of travel, it can reduce traffic congestion for those who can't modify their trip and improve traffic flow for the entire system. Congestion pricing is a proven tool to manage congestion based on the experience of multiple congestion pricing projects in operation across the country (FHWA 2017).

to implement congestion pricing on all lanes on the I-205 and I-5 corridors in the Portland metropolitan area.[1]

ODOT is currently pursuing three toll projects: the Regional Mobility Pricing Project, the I-205 Toll Project, and the Interstate Bridge Replacement Program[2]. ODOT first initiated the I-205 Toll Project in 2019, which at the time proposed congestion pricing on all I-205 lanes on some or all freeway segments between Stafford Road and Oregon Route 213. During a public comment period for the I-205 Toll Project, many commenters and local agencies expressed concerns about fairness, diversion, equity, climate change, and congestion management associated with planning the I-205 Toll Project. ODOT has incorporated that input into this Regional Mobility Pricing Project (the Project), which proposes to implement congestion pricing on all I-5 and I-205 lanes in the Portland metropolitan area, consistent with the longer-term vision that stakeholders advocated for and the Oregon Transportation Commission adopted in 2018.

PURPOSE

The purpose of the Regional Mobility Pricing Project is to implement congestion pricing on I-5 and I-205 in the Portland, Oregon metropolitan area in order to manage traffic congestion on these facilities and to generate revenue for priority transportation projects.

NEED FOR THE PROPOSED ACTION

Daily traffic congestion is negatively affecting the quality of life in a growing region.

Traffic congestion on I-5 and I-205 creates long backups of vehicles traveling at slow speeds—a scenario that many people experience daily while traveling during the morning and evening rush hours. Some of the most significant bottlenecks in the Portland metropolitan area are found on I-5 and drivers experience traffic congestion through these segments that lasts more than 7 hours each weekday:

- Northbound I-5: Broadway to Capitol Highway (6.0 miles, 7.75 hours each weekday)
- Southbound I-5: The Rose Quarter area from Broadway to Rosa Parks Way (3.0 miles, 9.25 hours each weekday)

Between 2015 and 2017, these queues increased 1 hour (ODOT 2018). Free-flow travel time is typically 25 minutes on the I-5 corridor. In 2017, evening peak travel time on southbound I-5 was 100 minutes—a four-fold increase versus free flow.

[1] Please go to https://www.oregon.gov/odot/tolling/ResourcesHistory/20180705_VP-PAC-Rec-to-OTC.pdf for more information on the recommendations from the Policy Advisory Committee.
[2] In partnership with the Washington Department of Transportation. Please go to https://www.interstatebridge.org/ for more information on the Interstate Bridge Replacement Program.

Reoccurring bottlenecks that occur on I-205 last between 3.5 and 4.75 hours (ODOT 2018):

Northbound I-205: Glenn Jackson Bridge to Powell Boulevard (5.8 miles, 4.75 hours each weekday)
Northbound I-205: Abernethy Bridge to I-5 (8.5 miles, 3.6 hours each weekday)

- Southbound I-205: Division to Glenn Jackson Bridge (5.3 miles, 3.75 hours each weekday)

Congested conditions on I-5 and I-205 result in traffic rerouting to other freeways in the region (I-405, US 26, etc.), local streets, and arterial streets. This rerouting results in additional traffic congestion and creates potential safety conflicts. Accident frequency on both freeways and arterials tends to increase with the congestion levels and stop-and-go traffic. The conditions caused by traffic congestion make travel unreliable such that drivers and transit riders cannot predict how long it will take them to get to work, home, services, or childcare arrangements.

COVID-19 Pandemic Traffic
Traffic volumes decreased significantly during the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, and rush-hour traffic congestion has not been as severe as it was before the pandemic. With the economy reopening, vehicle numbers are increasing. As of July 2021, the Portland metro area state-highway volumes are only 3% to 5% below pre-pandemic levels for weekday traffic and 4% to 7% below weekend traffic. ODOT expects that traffic levels will continue to return to pre-pandemic levels and grow in the future. (ODOT 2021)

Forecasts for the region show that population and employment will continue to steadily grow. The Portland metropolitan area population is expected to grow from approximately 2.5 million residents in 2018 to more than 3 million by 2040 (23%) and more than 3.5 million by 2060 (43%) (Census Reporter 2018; Metro 2016). Since 2011, job growth in Portland has outpaced the nation year over year: In 2019, Portland grew at an average annual rate of 2% compared to the U.S. average of 1.6% (Portland Business Alliance 2020). By 2039, the number of vehicles travelling along the I-5 corridor in the Portland region is projected to be between 127,200 and 192,900, depending on the corridor segment (ODOT 2020), which is an approximate increase of 18% from 2017 traffic counts. Planned roadway projects, improvements in transit, and increased use of active transportation modes (bicycles, walking, etc.) will not fully address the increase in daily trips and hours of traffic congestion (Metro 2018).

Traffic congestion is slowing down economic growth.

Traffic congestion affects the Portland metropolitan area economy through slow and unpredictable travel times for freight, services, small businesses, employers, employees, and low-income earners. From 2015 to 2017, drivers in the Portland region experienced an 18.5% increase in the number of hours of traffic congestion. In 2015, the daily cost of traffic congestion in the Portland metropolitan area was $1.7 million, which increased to $2.0 million in 2017. These numbers reflect the economic burden of trucks and cars being delayed on the roadway but do not reflect the environmental and health costs related to motor vehicles, such as vehicle collisions, air pollution, and roadway noise (ODOT 2018).

Of the interstate freight routes in the region, I-5 carries the highest freight volume, ranging from 10,000 to 19,000 trucks per day, while I-205 carries the second-highest freight volume, ranging from 7,800 to 14,000 trucks per day (ODOT 2018).

Our transportation system must reduce greenhouse gas emissions by managing congestion.

Climate change is a significant threat to Oregon's economy, environment, and way of life (Gov. Kate Brown 2019). To reduce the negative effects of climate change, Oregon has committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions by at least 45% below 1990 levels by the year 2035, and by 80% by 2050 (EO 20-04 2020). The transportation sector—particularly personal cars and light trucks—creates approximately 36% of greenhouse gas emissions in Oregon (Oregon Global Warming Commission 2020). Traffic congestion leads to an increase in fuel consumption and carbon dioxide emissions. During congestion, vehicles spend more time on the road, idling or crawling, and undergoing numerous acceleration and deceleration events that leads to an increase in emissions.

To meet the state's goals for greenhouse gas reduction, total vehicle emissions must be reduced by decreasing the number of hours vehicles spend stuck in traffic, the amount of stop-and-go traffic, and the number of miles traveled by motor vehicles in the state.

Revenues from the gas tax are not sufficient to fund transportation infrastructure needs.

Available funding for transportation has not kept pace with the costs of maintaining Oregon's transportation system or constructing new transportation and traffic congestion relief projects. ODOT revenue comes from a mix of federal and state sources. The Federal Highway Trust Fund provides states with roughly 25% of public spending for federal highway and transit projects and is funded primarily by the federal fuel taxes (Sargent 2015). The federal gas tax has not been adjusted since October 1993, and the share of federal contributions to state transportation projects has greatly decreased. On the state level, escalating expenditures to maintain aging infrastructure, the need to perform seismic upgrades for the state's bridges, and rising construction costs have greatly increased financial needs.

Compounding this problem is a substantial increase in travel demand as the state experiences strong population growth, particularly in the Portland metropolitan area. ODOT must explore every possible method for getting the most out of its existing infrastructure, funding traffic congestion relief projects in the region to ease traffic congestion, and planning for increased earthquake resiliency.

Our transportation system must support multimodal travel to reduce congestion.

Multimodal travel accommodates a wide range of travel methods including walking, bicycling, driving, and public transportation. Multimodal streets can increase transportation system efficiency and accommodate more trips in the same amount of space. When effectively integrated, multimodal travel can help advance various environmental, health, and congestion-mitigating benefits for communities. This can result in a reduction of vehicle emissions, which will improve air quality and reduce greenhouse gas emissions (USDOT 2015). Multimodal

travel provides additional access to populations who do not drive, such as young children, seniors, people with disabilities, low-income residents, and those who do not own a car. (Litman 2021)

The Portland metropolitan area's transportation networks have resulted in inequitable outcomes for historically and currently excluded and underserved communities.

Many urban interstate highways and major civic centers were deliberately built through neighborhoods with concentrations of people experiencing low incomes and communities of color, often requiring the destruction of housing and other local institutions (Federal Register 2021). In the eastern Portland metropolitan area, the construction of I-205 exemplifies these outcomes where the planned highway alignment was changed due to political motivation and public protest (Fackler 2009). The alignment was moved away from Lake Oswego, farther east and south into Clackamas County and farther east in Portland, away from majority white and wealthier cities, reinforcing social and economic inequity (Invisible Walls 2019). In Central Portland during the 1950s and 1960s, the construction of I-5, the Veterans Memorial Coliseum, Emanuel Legacy Hospital, the Portland Public School Blanchard site, and urban renewal programs divided and displaced communities in North and Northeast Portland, affecting and burdening communities of color—especially Black communities—in the historic Albina neighborhood (Gibson 2007).

Because of these discriminatory transportation policies and politics, a geographic mismatch exists between job locations, essential resources, community services, and housing that is affordable (Oregonian 2012). This disproportionality affects communities of color, immigrant communities, people experiencing low income, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, gender non-conforming, and queer (LGBTQ+) individuals and people living with a disability (Federal Register 2021). Members of these communities have fewer transportation options and travel farther between destinations, which increases transportation costs and dependence on unreliable travel options and adds significantly more time in traffic congestion. Collectively, these transportation and land use decisions, and the systems that led to them, have resulted in discrimination and unequal investment in these communities. This leads to lasting trauma and continued economic, social, and health impacts for historically and currently excluded and underserved individuals and communities (Federal Register 2021).

Within denser urbanized areas, there is a greater risk of concentrated air pollutants and heat islands from transportation-related activities. Communities located near major roads can experience increased air pollution from cars, trucks, and other motor vehicles, and can have an increased incident and severity of health problems associated with air pollution exposures (EPA 2014). Higher amounts of traffic, congestion, stop-and-go movement, or high-speed operations can increase the emissions of certain pollutants (EPA 2014).

Managing congestion on the I-5 and I-205 corridors and providing for multimodal transportation options would increase access to valuable community resources for historically

underserved and dispersed communities. It would also improve air quality within concentrated neighborhoods located along the I-5 and I-205 corridors.

The Project will also implement mitigation measures to avoid additional and compounding negative impacts to these communities.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Project goals and objectives are desirable outcomes of the Project beyond the Purpose and Need Statement. The following goals and objectives reflect input collected during the I-205 Toll Project's Summer-Fall 2020 engagement and from the Value Pricing Feasibility Analysis Policy Advisory Committee, partner agencies, the Equity and Mobility Advisory Committee, and other Project stakeholders; these goals and objectives will be considered when comparing potential congestion pricing alternatives to each other against the future No Build (no congestion pricing) Alternative.

ODOT acknowledges that past land use and transportation investments have resulted in negative cultural, health, economic, and relational impacts to local communities and populations and that these investments have disproportionately affected historically and currently excluded and underserved communities. Additionally, ODOT recognizes that these communities have historically been left out of transportation planning and the decision-making process. These practices, along with more recent gentrification in Portland and surrounding cities, have resulted in a mismatch between job locations and housing in areas with few transportation options.

The draft goals and objectives below, along with input from the Equity and Mobility Advisory Committee, will prioritize equity throughout the Project development process. The Project team will engage communities who use or live near the Project area, especially those who have been historically and are currently excluded and underserved, to participate throughout the formation of conceptual alternatives, development and narrowing of alternatives, decision-making, and Project implementation, monitoring, and evaluation process.

- Goal: Provide benefits for historically and currently excluded and underserved communities.
  - Maximize benefits and minimize burdens associated with implementing congestion pricing.
  - Support equitable and reliable access to job centers and other important community places.
  - Support equitable and reliable access to health promoting activities.
  - Design the congestion price system to support travel options for people experiencing low incomes.
- Goal: Limit additional traffic diversion from congestion pricing on I-5 and I-205 to adjacent roads and neighborhoods.

  - Design the congestion pricing system to limit rerouting of trips away from I-5 and I-205.
  - Design the congestion price system to minimize impacts to quality of life factors, such as health, noise, safety, job access, travel costs, and environmental quality for local communities from traffic rerouting.
- Goal: Support multimodal transportation choices to provide travel options and reduce congestion.
  - Support shifts to higher occupancy vehicles (including carpooling) and other modes of transportation (for example, taking transit, walking, biking, teleworking).
  - Collaborate with transit providers to support availability and enhancements to transit and other transportation services parallel to the congestion priced corridors, especially for historically and currently excluded and underserved communities.
- Goal: Support safe travel regardless of the transportation mode.
  - Enhance vehicle safety on I-5 and I-205 by reducing congested conditions.
  - Support safe multimodal travel options (for example, walking, bicycles, transit, and automobiles) on roadways affected by congestion pricing.
- Goal: Contribute to regional improvements in air quality that reduce contributions to climate change effects.
  - Contribute to reduced vehicle air pollutants and greenhouse gas emissions in the Portland metro area by reducing congestion, therefore resulting in more consistent vehicle speeds, less vehicle idling, and fewer overall motor vehicle emission hours on I-5 and I-205 and on local roadways affected by congestion pricing.
  - Reduce localized air pollutants by reducing congestion and improving travel efficiency, particularly in community areas where pollutants may be concentrated due to traffic congestion.
- Goal: Support regional economic growth.
  - Provide for reliable and efficient regional movement of goods and people through the congestion priced corridors.
  - Provide for reliable and efficient movement of goods and people on local roadways affected by congestion pricing.
  - Improve regional access to jobs and employment centers, especially for historically and currently excluded and underserved communities.
- Goal: Support management of congestion and travel demand.
  - Design the congestion price system to improve efficient use of roadway infrastructure and improve travel reliability.

- Goal: Maximize integration with future congestion price systems and other transportation systems.
  - Design a congestion price system that can be expanded in scale, integrated with congestion pricing on other regional roadways, or adapted to future congestion price system applications.
  - Design a congestion price system that is interoperable with other transportation systems in the region and nearby states.

Consistent with the requirements of 23 U.S.C. 168, the information in this document, and the public and agency input received, may be adopted or incorporated by reference into a future environmental review process to meet the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act.

Americans with Disabilities Act and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964

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References

Consistent with 23 CFR 450.212 (a)-(c) and 23 CFR 450.318(a)-(d), the following documents and studies were used in preparation of this Statement of Purpose and Need and are incorporated by reference. These materials are publicly available using the weblinks provided.

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