

METRO 2021 LEGISLATIVE ISSUE IDENTIFICATION

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ISSUE: Transportation pricing

BACKGROUND: The greater Portland area faces multiple transportation challenges, including issues relating to congestion, climate, equity, and safety. Heavy rush hour traffic increases delays and makes travel time unpredictable for everyone; time stuck in traffic makes commutes unreliable and also reduces time with family and community. Additionally, transportation is the greatest contributor to greenhouse gas emissions in Oregon and current trends show that the statewide GHG reduction goals are not likely to be met unless new policies are implemented.

While all residents feel the impacts of congestion, historic inequities in the transportation system amplify impacts on people of color and low-income people. Communities of color and low-income communities have longer commutes, made slower and more unreliable when roadways are congested. Additionally, major roads and freeways often run through these communities, resulting in disproportionately high rates of air pollution and chronic illness.

Safety continues to be a concern in the region's transportation system. While the greater Portland region has one of the lowest crash rates in the country, the number of largely preventable tragedies on the region's roadways remains unacceptable. On average, 62 people die each year on the region's roadways and 420 people experience a life-changing injury.

Depending on how the mechanisms are structured, pricing transportation can work to address many of these challenges. Pricing solutions include vehicle miles traveled fees, congestion pricing, parking fees, and tolling. These methods can reduce congestion and therefore lessen its negative economic, social and environmental impacts. Fewer cars on the road mean less greenhouse gas emissions and better air quality. Revenue raised from transportation pricing can be invested back into the community and into safety, transit and other projects that reduce congestion and aid communities of color and low-income communities.

Depending on how it is structured, transportation pricing can also fall disproportionately on low-income communities and communities of color; without specific interventions, marginalized communities might also pay the most because they often have the longest commutes and the least flexibility about when and where to drive.

The Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) identifies congestion pricing as a high priority, high impact strategy. Metro is currently evaluating the potential effectiveness of various transportation pricing scenarios in greater Portland in relation to their impacts on the four RTP priorities of congestion, climate, equity and safety. A report summarizing this study's findings is expected to be published in late 2020 or early 2021. The Portland Bureau of Transportation and

the Oregon Department of Transportation are conducting their own studies of pricing, and Metro is coordinating with them, looking at the issue from a regional perspective.

Additionally, Metro participates in ODOT's Road User Fee Task Force which focuses on sustainable funding options for Oregon's transportation system, including most recently OReGO, the state's mileage-based road use fee, which is currently optional for drivers.

RECOMMENDATION: Support transportation pricing mechanisms that advance the 2018 RTP goals of reducing congestion, advancing climate smart transportation, advancing equity and improving safety.

LEGISLATIVE HISTORY: In 2001, the Oregon Legislature created the Road User Fee Task Force to examine sustainable funding options for Oregon's transportation system. The Task Force launched two pilot projects (2006, 2012) to test mileage-based charging and since 2015, has focused on OReGO, a road usage charge program that charges per-mile with a credit for gas tax paid at the pump. The Task Force is currently considering legislative priorities that would mandatorily enroll drivers incrementally in the program.

In 2017, the Oregon Legislature passed HB 2017, which directed ODOT to implement tolling on I-5 and I-205 in the Portland region in order to reduce traffic congestion and improve mobility for regional and longer-distance travel.

OTHER INTERESTED PARTIES: Many of our local and state governmental partners, and specifically ODOT and PBOT, are interested in advancing transportation pricing solutions. Pricing is called out as a high priority, high impact strategy in the 2018 RTP. Business and community groups are also engaged in conversations around transportation pricing.

IMPACT IF PROPOSED ACTION OCCURS: Depending on how it is structured, transportation pricing can reduce the number of vehicles on the road, improve traffic flow, enhance travel reliability for people and freight, encourage ridesharing, decrease emissions and improve air quality. Revenue raised can fund safety improvements that benefit pedestrians, cyclists, transit riders and drivers. If those investments are made in historically marginalized communities and are structured in ways that mitigate the cost for those communities, transportation pricing can advance racial equity.