

## **Appendix G: Focus Group Reports**

# **Summary Findings**

## **RUFTF – Mileage Fee Pilot Study Focus Group**

**August 31, 2004**

### ***Focus Group Overview and Process***

On Monday, August 16 the Road User Fee Task Force sponsored a Focus Group facilitated conversation to troubleshoot the mileage fee pilot program in the pre-field test stage. Lane Council of Governments assisted in identifying and recruiting participants from the Eugene area. Focus group participants were volunteers but were recruited with the aim of representing population and travel demographics central to the success of the pilot study. Twenty participants met at the Eugene Water and Electric Board Room at 500 East 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue from 6:30 to 8:30 (Attachment A – Group Participant List).

The session began with a project and pilot study overview presentation. A short question-and-answer discussion followed. Participants were then asked a predetermined set of questions through a facilitated conversation process. Topical questions were posed on field test goals, methodology and operations followed by detail stimulus questions as appropriate (Attachment B – Facilitated Conversation – Topics and Stimulus Questions). Responses to the questions were recorded on flip charts and posted for all participants to see for the duration of the session. The conversation was designed to generate ideas on how to make participation in the pilot as attractive as possible to the desired range of personal vehicle users in the Eugene area. Questions were developed to ask for both objective and reflective responses in considering three general pilot study feedback topics:

- Pilot study organization
- Data collection
- Participation benefits

The session concluded with attendees completing individual worksheets (Attachment C – Vehicle Mileage Tax Pilot Study Focus Group Worksheet).

Findings in this report are taken from the meeting flip chart notes and the worksheet compilation (Attachment D – Chart Transcription and Worksheet Spreadsheet). The findings focus on highlighting the group's key issues and concerns about the pilot study and listing ideas for addressing those issues.

### ***Key Issues and Concerns***

Issues and concerns are listed in priority order. Rankings are based primarily on the number of times each issue was mentioned on the individual worksheets. Participants had the entire brainstormed list of issues to review while selecting their top three. The initial ranking by number of mentions (in parentheses) was verified by comparing the number of flip chart notations on each topic and amount of meeting time participants devoted to discussing each issue. Qualitative judgment about how widespread the agreement among the group was on the particular issue was also a factor in determining each item's rank. The resulting ranking represents those issues and items in order of descending order of importance to participants. This list may be interpreted as indicating descending levels of criticality in reconciling concerns and/or revising the pilot study design to maximize participation and results.

#### **Premium Zones/Congestion Pricing (14)**

This was the most prominent and troublesome of the pilot study problems. It was the first issue discussed and participants spent the most meeting time on it of any of the issues. Discussion had to be cut off by the facilitator to move on to preserve time for other topics. Participants kept returning to this item throughout the evening when considering other concerns such as study complexity and mileage fee fairness.

Detailed concerns:

- Zone and hours don't accurately reflect Eugene congestion. Zone is the whole city while congestion is concentrated at a few pinch points. Rush is two hours when the actual congestion period is very short. Study participants would have a difficult time avoiding the premium zone if they had to drive during the rush times. People without discretionary travel timing (taking kids to school or commuting) will be penalized.
- Avoiding premium zones may have several negative economic and environmental impacts. Neighborhoods may see cut-through traffic increase as vehicles use alternate routes. Businesses that depend on passerby customers may see sales fall. Avoidance may result in increased VMT.

Suggested resolutions:

- Identify a more precise premium zone and rush hour time
- Use the technology to notify drivers of an impending premium zone
- Remove premium pricing from the study
- Provide exemptions from premium pricing for drivers who have no choice

#### **Mileage Fee Fairness (10)**

This issue provided the most opportunity for participants to debate the relative merits of the mileage fee vs. gas tax as a revenue source. While group members were asked to focus their comments on the pilot study itself, it was difficult to separate comparison between the two revenue sources during this discussion.

Detailed concerns include:

- The mileage fee penalizes drivers who own low mileage cars. Most participants indicated that they already drive cars that get better mileage than the 19.5 mpg mentioned as the statewide average to be used in calculating the mileage fee charge. They were concerned that high efficiency vehicle owners won't participate. Business may get an advantage since they tend to use lower mpg vehicles and have stop-and-go driving patterns. This was also mentioned as an anti-environmental feature of the fee in general.
- Revenue generated by this switch may be construed as an additional tax. If revenues are greater than gas tax this especially true. Even if the project is intended to be revenue neutral, many may see it as a more obvious collection of fees.

Suggested resolutions:

- Provide a formula for calculating cost comparison for individual study participants
- Develop mileage fees based on vehicle mpg rating categories

### **Privacy (8)**

This issue ranks essentially equal to the Fairness issue above. Concern was widespread throughout the group that collecting pilot study data would be viewed as a potential invasion of privacy. Tracking and record keeping on individual vehicles were the primary privacy issues raised. Participants seemed split over whether the technology was developed enough to pose a privacy threat or not. Most agreed that the potential of a perceived privacy threat was high.

Suggested resolutions:

- Educate participants by comparing technology to GPS.

### **Technology Reliability (5)**

This topic was discussed in conjunction with the Privacy issue. Participants offered a number of views regarding the ability of the technology to perform adequately.

Detailed concerns include:

- Participants were split on the reliability GPS accuracy. The question was raised about drivers being able to see, understand and verify in-car feedback. Some wondered if the technology would record driver use of premium zones accurately.
- Many wondered about the ability to remove or manipulate the technology. Some suggested they suspected that hacking would be fairly easy to accomplish.
- One of the biggest technology concerns was how much alteration would be involved in installing the technology. Would warranties be voided or computer incompatibilities cause problems?
- The cost to install the technology in cars statewide seemed prohibitive.
- Questions were raised about what happens to the technology if the study vehicle is sold or in an accident during the study?

Suggested resolutions:

- Educate participants by comparing technology to GPS.

#### **Economic Loss (4)**

Lower levels of concern were reflected about fear of paying more for the mileage fee would limit interest in the study. Group members felt that the pilot study didn't offer much payback for the risk and hassle involved in participating.

Suggested resolutions:

- Offer flat fee for participating.
- Give participants the option to choose whether to pay the mileage fee or gas tax at the conclusion of the study

#### **Study Complexity (2)**

There were a few group members who felt the study was too complicated. Their concerns centered on organizing the study to both test the mileage fee technology and experiment with congestion pricing. In addition, they felt that the actual fee payment period of six months was too short to test behavioral change regarding premium pricing behavior.

Suggested resolutions:

- Separate premium pricing and mileage fee into two studies

#### **Gas Station Collection (3)**

There was surprisingly low concern about the using gas stations as collection centers. While members brainstormed other location ideas, they did not express great anxiety over this item. One negative worksheet comment about general hassle was offered but not specifically aimed at gas station collection centers.

#### **Study Participant Demographics (2)**

Concern over this issue resided in just a couple of the members. Their concerns were that Eugene was not a good statewide sample, that the full socio-economic cross-section of vehicle private users were not being recruited for the pilot and that motorcycles, RVs and other private vehicles weren't included.

## **Attachment B**

### **Facilitated Conversation – Topics and Stimulus Questions**

#### **Topic 1 - Organizing the pilot study to maximize and maintain participation:**

What concerns might keep YOU from participating? (nothing too trivial)

Are there other obstacles that might make other folks reluctant to participate?

How can we overcome those impediments?

What incentives will most effectively encourage potential participants to join and remain in the pilot study?

#### **Topic 2 - Collecting data efficiently and conveniently:**

Does the requirement that every vehicle in a household needs to be covered cause problems?  
Are there any exceptions that you can think of?

How would you modify or re-organize the suggested data collection system to be most efficient and convenient

Any data privacy issues? GPS “tracking” OR credit information?

#### **Topic 3 - Benefiting from participation:**

What benefits of participating in the program are there? Which are most influential in recruiting and maintaining pilot study participants?

Is the .10/mile premium pricing reasonable?

What program information will be important to communicate to the road user public about the vehicle mileage tax pilot study?

## Attachment C

### Vehicle Mileage Tax Pilot Study Focus Group Worksheet August 16, 2004

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Family size \_\_\_\_\_  
Dependents (under age 23) \_\_\_\_\_

Number of vehicles \_\_\_\_\_  
Number of drivers \_\_\_\_\_

Housing (check one):

\_\_\_\_\_ Single family  
\_\_\_\_\_ Multi-family

Employment status:

\_\_\_\_\_ currently employed full-time  
\_\_\_\_\_ currently employed part-time  
\_\_\_\_\_ looking for a job  
\_\_\_\_\_ voluntarily unemployed

\_\_\_\_\_ I am interested in participating  
in the Pilot Study.

I. List the top three participant concerns or pilot study obstacles that must be overcome. Include any ideas you have for addressing those concerns or obstacles.

1.

2.

3.

II. Knowing what you now know, how has your perception of the vehicle mileage tax pilot study changed?

III. What else would you like to let us know about what you have heard tonight?  
(Please use back of page if needed).

## **Attachment D**

### **Flip Chart Transcription**

➤ **Concerns:**

- Premium area is whole city—participants live in the city
- No two-hour rush hour in Eugene
- Notification of impending premium zone.
- Business impact of premium
- Premium bypass through neighborhoods, etc.
- Cheaper to drive farther
- Revenue generated is > gas tax—perceived as additional tax
- No choice to avoid
- Premium pricing and mileage fee study (technology)—separate them
- Will this hurt me economically?
- Too short a test to change behavior—6 months for pricing behavior
- High efficiency vehicles won't participate
- Fuel economy—penalize high efficiency vehicles
- Basing on “average” doesn't resolve this
- Credit for not using premium
- Sample needs to fit economic x-section—predominance now in families (2 car)
- Motorcycles, RVs, included?
- How do we know the technology is accurately reflecting premium pricing—use log?
- Display needs to be visible, understandable
- Full disclosure of study purpose
- Need to educate participants—compare to GPS in car
- How much will you alter my car?
- Void warranty?
- Sale during pilot?
- Accident?
- Removing device; user manipulation—penalties?

➤ **Incentives Brainstorm:**

- Grant participants a participation grant
- Set loss limit
- Waive gas tax—forgive mileage fee
- Better roads—new roads
- Tax credit—not deductions
- GIS connected to “On-Star”
- Flat card miles, cash back

- Flat fee for participating at the end, caution—skewing behavioral impact
- Cheaper gas—Costco
- Renew registration (multiple options)
- DMV offices—prepaid mailers
- Meter reader
- Drive by centered in study zone (car wash included)
- Cell phone technology
- Grocery store
- Park 'n Ride, bus shelters
- Call in; on line input