

# Meeting Summary

<b>Subject</b>	Equity and Mobility Advisory Committee – Meeting #24
<b>Date and Time</b>	October 4, 2023 / 2:30 p.m.
<b>Location</b>	Virtual via Zoom; recording available via <a href="#">YouTube livestream</a>

## Attendance

Committee Members	Organization	Attendance
Ismael Armenta	At-large member; Oregon Walks	
Tangerine Behere	Ride Connection	
Paul Burgess	Fourth Plain Forward	Virtual
Jeff Christian	At-large member; Columbia Distribution	In person
LaQuinta Daniels	Clark County Juvenile Court	Virtual
Germaine Flentroy	Beyond Black/Play, Grow, Learn	
Amanda Garcia-Snell	Washington County Community Engagement	In person
John Gardner	TriMet	In person
Fabian Hidalgo Guerrero	At-large member; Oregon Food Bank	
Olivia Kahn	At-large member; City of Vancouver	In person
Duana Johnson	At-large member	
James Paulson	WorkSystems, Inc.	In person
Adam Torres	Clackamas County Public Health	
Rachel Winslow	At-large member	
Dr. Philip Wu	Oregon Environmental Council	In person
Commissioner Alicia Chapman	Oregon Transportation Commission (OTC) Liaison	In person

Name	Meeting Role	Name	Meeting Role
Jessica Stanton	Facilitator	Nick Fazio	Project team
Rochelle Brahalla	Project team	Perla Solis	Project team
Mandy Putney	ODOT, Presenter	Logan Cullums	Project team
Garet Prior	ODOT, Presenter	Jodi Mescher	Project team
Zoie Wesenberg	ODOT, Presenter	MJ Jackson	Project team

## 1 Welcome, Introductions, and Objectives

Jessica Stanton welcomed meeting participants, reviewed meeting logistics, and reminded EMAC members that this meeting is public. She reviewed EMAC’s working agreements and discussed the meeting agenda and objectives.

## 2 Low-Income Toll Options

Jessica reviewed a history of EMAC's involvement in developing the Low-Income Toll Program (LITP). EMAC's work has included forming the committee charter, developing the equity framework, establishing foundational statements, providing recommendations to the Oregon Transportation Commission (OTC), and developing the Low-Income Toll Report. EMAC members have been discussing the importance of considering a smaller discount option for individuals up to 400 percent of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). EMAC members have also indicated that transportation costs as a percentage of income and a broad spectrum of income types and sources should be considered.

James Paulson provided an analysis of the workforce that would likely be enrolled in the LITP, particularly looking at the workforce sector that would fall into the 200 – 400 percent FPL. He noted that an individual at the 200 percent FPL would be someone making minimum wage. James commented that people making living wage jobs typically work in the service sector or in jobs that require them to be in-person and therefore require them to use the transportation system to get to work.

- An EMAC member asked to consider the portion of income goes to housing and transportation for people in the low-income range that are dependent on the transportation system.
- An EMAC member noted that the analysis is projecting for the future workforce but does not reflect future wages and suggested adding the projected wage growth to the analysis.
- An EMAC member said that another element to consider is the impact on diversion and identifying the tipping point that would encourage people to shift to public transit. The system should not be set up to price low-income users out of the system.
- An EMAC member commented that the analysis needs to consider commuters origin and destination because the existing transportation system is not adequate for commuters. They added that the 200 – 400 FPL range does not accurately represent the low-income population in the region considering the high cost of living.

Garet Prior, ODOT, discussed the LITP development process and reminded EMAC members that STRAC is focused on the enrollment and verification process while EMAC is focused on the level of benefit, benefit types, enrollment process, and long-term community involvement. Garet shared that ODOT is committed to implementing a LITP for up to 200 percent FPL and to determine options for a 200 – 400 percent FPL program to analyze in greater depth to allow the OTC to make a decision in 2025. The OTC will identify the geographic extent that will be eligible for the LITP.

One aspect for the LITP to consider is the customer benefit level. Garet shared that basing the LITP on the 200 percent FPL is a common practice, would allow the program to rely on existing service providers for income verification, and would support people facing challenges to pay for basic survival needs. Adding an additional benefit level up to 400 percent FPL would reach customers earning minimum wage and attempt to not further transportation cost burden on households. Garet discussed the trade-offs to consider with adding an additional benefit level, including administration costs and increasing enrollment rates. Further analysis is needed to understand the additional benefits up to 400 percent FPL. ODOT could be the first tolling program in the county to offer a 400 percent FPL benefit level.

ODOT has conducted research about the efficiency of a self-certification program that would allow users to self-report their income and enroll in the LITP. ODOT has found that in similar programs fraud has

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been minimal and there are processes in place to address potential fraud. Even when self-certification is offered, customers will provide documentation to verify their income or eligibility for the program.

Garet reviewed key findings for the I-205 Toll Project, projecting the value and enrollment rates for a 100 percent discount, 50 percent discount, and credit options for 200 and up to 400 percent FPL. The analysis also projects the impacts to revenue and traffic for each benefit level. Garet noted that the assumptions were used for modeling and analysis work, and they do not reflect actual enrollment. Once the tolls are in place, ODOT will implement a monitoring program to show the actual impact of the program and recommend adjustments as needed.

- An EMAC member asked how the analysis for the I-205 Toll Project projected a 23 percent enrollment rate.
  - The analysis looked at 17 different low-income programs and found that a higher benefit level correlates to a higher enrollment rate. Garet noted that the analysis makes some assumptions from transit and housing programs, so the actual enrollment rates may vary.
- An EMAC member asked to clarify what the 100% discount would be. Garet clarified that the 100% discount would be free travel for individuals that qualify. The analysis shows that this benefit level would result in a 6.9 percent reduction in revenue and a 5 percent increase in traffic at this benefit level.
- An EMAC member shared that TriMet's low-income program offers a benefit level up to 200 percent FPL and there is not a free option.
- Commissioner Chapman asked if the projected 23 percent enrollment rate for a 100 percent discount reflects all drivers or all low-income drivers.
  - Garet clarified that the analysis shows a 23 percent enrollment rate for all low-income drivers. He added that further analysis is needed to understand commuting patterns for low-income drivers.
- An EMAC member asked for clarity about the disparity between enrollment rates at the 100 percent and 50 percent discount level.
  - The analysis used assumptions from 17 different programs to project the enrollment rates. In general, the analysis found that people will use the facility more than they have the option of 100 percent free travel.
- An EMAC member commented that the analysis seems to show a minimal impact of adding the 200 to 400 percent FPL benefit level.
  - Garet commented that adding the additional benefit level would have high administrative costs. There is not an existing program at that benefit level, so ODOT would need to do a lot of work to income verify.

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**Discussion question: What feedback do you have for ODOT about tradeoffs between implementing a 0-200% FPL option and getting a 400% FPL option off the ground? Should everyone pay something or is it important for there to be a free option? What low-income options should be studied in the toll rate setting process?**

- An EMAC member commented that the program should consider credits instead of discounts because people may be more likely to do a mode-shift if they know they have limited credits to use, whereas a discount may not have an impact on the volume of traffic.
- An EMAC member asked how a credit could be applied for SW Washington residents.
- An EMAC member commented that a goal of the toll program is to reduce congestion, so the LITP needs to consider any impacts that would encourage driving.
  - Gareth responded that the LITP will need to consider trade-offs between increasing coverage for low-income individuals and spending time/money on community engagement and increasing enrollment for drivers in the 200 percent FPL range.
- An EMAC member commented that there are other organizations that offer transportation resources that should be used in conjunction with the LITP to off-set the cost of tolling.
  - Another EMAC member agreed and suggested reaching out to CBOs to have them be involved in the administration of the LITP rather than ODOT spending more time to develop administrative processes.
- An EMAC member said that the program needs to consider that there will likely be an increase in low-income population in the future.
- An EMAC member commented that self-verification should be used because that would reduce administrative expenses and the analysis shows limited cases of fraud.
  - Gareth reiterated that there are no other programs doing income verification up to the 400 percent FPL, so ODOT would need to establish a new system for income verification for individuals at this level.
- An EMAC member noted that Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) is a federal program that uses a self-verification to offer benefits up to 250 percent FPL. They asked if the LITP should consider that benefit level to make use of existing systems.
  - Gareth responded that ODOT has been discussing the 400 percent FPL based on recommendations from the Low-Income Toll Report, but the LITP may end up at a lower income level. The 200 percent FPL would be encompassing of WIC.
  - Another EMAC member reinforced that the 400 percent FPL benefit level is important to consider because of the current cost of living. They stated that they would not be comfortable moving forward with only a 200 percent FPL benefit level.
  - An EMAC member responded that the LITP needs to consider trade-offs between offering support, administrative costs, and political buy-in to support the LITP.
- Commissioner Chapman reiterated that the overall toll program goals are to generate revenue and reduce VMT. If there is a 100 percent discount for the LITP, that would encourage people to drive more which is counterintuitive to the purpose of the program.

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- An EMAC member commented that the easiest approach may be to focus on the workforce because there are already organizations that can support the operation of the program and incentivize people to mode shift.
- An EMAC member commented that they would prefer a slide-scale benefit level over increasing the benefit up to 400 percent FPL.
- An EMAC member commented that the analysis should include income levels for youth because they will be accessing the system.
- An EMAC member asked if there has been any analysis about including vehicle-dependent industries, such as ride-share, medical transport, and independent contractors.
  - Dr. Wu, STRAC liaison, responded that the STRAC is considering rules for exemptions for vehicle-dependent industries and the distinction between public and private agency vehicles. Categories for exemptions and enforcement of the program will be further discussed by the STRAC.
- Jessica asked EMAC members if they felt that everyone should pay something to use the system (i.e., no free toll option). All EMAC members in person agreed, however EMAC members attending virtually commented that they are supportive of a free option for low-income drivers.
  - EMAC members clarified that they support no free options with the assumption that other programs would be available for supplemental assistance.

Garet discussed the benefit types under consideration, free trips, discounts, or credits. He shared that ODOT has not received clear direction on the preference in benefit type. There are general concerns about the ability to maintain a balance in accounts for a credit system.

***Discussion question: What is the type of benefit (free trips, discounts, or credits) we should move forward? What should ODOT consider making this decision?***

- Commissioner Chapman asked about the proposed implementation of the LITP and whether eligibility would be tied the user of the registered vehicle.
  - Garet responded that the LITP account would be tied to the vehicle.
  - An EMAC member commented that was an important point to consider, because a family sharing one vehicle would use the credits more frequently, whereas an overall discount would all multiple users of car to receive the benefit.
  - Garet commented that the rules proposed state that up to 3 vehicles per household can be registered to receive the benefit, with the monthly benefit spread across those vehicles through a joint account. The benefit level would be based on the household income, but the program would be administered through the registered vehicles for each household. For example, the registered owner of the vehicle would receive the credit, and any dependents would also receive that credit.

EMAC members discussed that they would like additional information and definition of a credit and discount system before providing direction on which type of benefit is preferable. EMAC members also requested additional information about the administrative costs and ease of access for each benefit type.

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- An EMAC member requested data about the number of trips people make under the 200 percent FPL compared to 400 percent FPL.
- An EMAC member asked if a credit system could be rolled over month-to-month so that users aren't encouraged to make additional trips.
- An EMAC member commented that there will be a need for a process for CBOs to provide credits.
  - Another EMAC member agreed and added that there should be close coordination with organizations to implement the LITP and effectively reach the workforce.

Another LITP option to consider is the appropriate geographic scope of the LITP. ODOT is currently considering making the LITP available for all Oregon residents. Additional work is needed to understand if and how that can be extended to Washington residents because that will be a bi-state process and may have a legality issue to address. ODOT is seeking EMAC's input on what the geographic extent should be to provide a recommendation to the OTC.

***Discussion question: What is an appropriate geographic scope/extent for the low-income toll program?***

- An EMAC member commented that limiting the geographic extent to historically under-represented neighborhoods would not accurately represent the low-income population and demographics today. Instead, the LITP should look at workforce and commute patterns. For example, east Portland has a higher percentage of commuters because of limited job opportunities.
- An EMAC member noted that TriMet's low-income program is available to all Oregon residents. They suggested making the LITP available to all Oregon and Washington residents.
  - EMAC members agreed that the program should be applicable to Washington residents.
  - An EMAC member noted that there is a large portion of the workforce in Vancouver commuting from Idaho, so the program should also consider those users.
  - Commissioner Chapman agreed that it would be lower administrative burden to include all Oregon and Washington residents.
- An EMAC member suggested making the program available to anyone that pays income tax in Oregon.
  - Another EMAC member responded that this would exclude non-residents trying to access health care and social services.
  - EMAC members agreed that there needs to be more consideration and discussion about the inclusion of SW Washington.

### 3 Public Comments

One person provided public comment in person:

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- Dean Surr, founder of vote before tolls, provided input based on what he has heard from the community. He said that tolling is a very confusing topic for the general public and noted that the timeline and legislative direction has not been clear to follow. He said that ODOT wants to directly confuse the public so they can implement tolls before construction projects are paid off. He summarized a message at the Tualatin Chamber of Commerce briefing about the commuter-equity consideration for individuals commuting between West Linn and Oregon City. Meanwhile, east-west commuters would not have to pay a toll, so that is an inequitable system.

No participants joined online to provide public comment.

## 4 Updates on Advancing Equity

Dr. Wu provided an update on the STRAC. STRAC has been discussing rules and processes that would implement a user-friendly system while keeping the toll fees as low as possible. There are a several questions about accessing the LITP benefits that need to be addressed.

- An EMAC member said that it would be administratively easier for enrollment to be on a set date.
- Another EMAC member recommended the LITP enrollment period to last for two years to remove the administrative burden for income verification.

James provided an update on RTAC, noting that the committee will be meeting less frequently going forward to have more time between meetings for a deeper analysis on projects.

## 5 Going Forward

The next EMAC meeting will be held virtually on Wednesday, November 8th at 12:00 pm to preview the implementation reports, discuss tribal consultation and indigenous community engagement processes, and propose updates to the Equity Framework.

## 6 Action Items

The project team heard the following requests for action items:

- Further analysis of how youth will access the system.
- Further define credits, discounts, or a free system to provide clarity to the conversation.
- Provide more information about the administrative costs and ease of access for each benefit type.
- Provide data on the number of vehicle trips people under 200 percent FPL make compared to 400 percent FPL.