

Regional Mobility Pricing Project

Memorandum



Date December 13, 2021
To Gareth Prior and Tia Williams, ODOT
From WSP and Kearns & West
Subject RMPP Workshops Summary
CC Hannah Williams, ODOT

1 Summary Overview

This summary outlines the purpose, format, and content of the Regional Mobility Pricing Project Workshops in November 2021.

This memorandum is structured with the following sections:

- Introduction
- Key Takeaways
- About the Workshops
- What We Heard

2 Introduction

2.1 Purpose of the workshop

In November 2021, the Oregon Department of Transportation Urban Mobility Office hosted two virtual workshops focused on finding solutions to managing congestion in a way that is equitable and addresses climate change while providing needed funding for critical infrastructure and safety improvements. Elected officials, business and community leaders, and local and regional agency staff explored congestion pricing in the Portland Metro area, and the project team presented the results and findings of past engagement efforts and considerations for project planning. A total of 53 people attended the workshops held on Nov. 9 and Nov. 10, 2021, and dozens more followed along with a livestream on YouTube.

2.2 Workshop objectives

- Provide an interactive venue for focused dialog about the Regional Mobility Pricing Project, to elevate the level of dialog to a conversation from “whether or not to implement tolling” to “how can we make congestion pricing a success in our region.”

- Offer an overview of the Regional Mobility Pricing Project, to provide history and context for the project.
- Raise awareness and understanding of modern congestion pricing systems.
- Share key results from prior public engagement activities and information regarding future opportunities for involvement, show progress, validate where we are
- Gather feedback to inform the development of the draft Purpose and Need and initial congestion pricing concept.
- Show progress, validate work to date, and confirm the project is on the right path.

3 Key Takeaways

Several key themes emerged from workshop participants and public input received from the survey and are highlighted below.

Participants and respondents said that equity should be central to the project. Many workshop attendants and survey respondents indicated that equity is an important consideration of congestion pricing and expressed concerns regarding the possible positive and negative impacts of congestion pricing on historically excluded and underserved communities. Specifically, there were comments from workshop attendees about the importance of maintaining access to I-5 and I-205, and that the project should not cause further harm or create additional barriers to resources. Workshop participants also noted that the benefits and revenue generated throughout the course of the project should be dispersed in ways that address historical disadvantages. Survey respondents also stated concerns that members of the working class, seniors, and those without alternative route options would be disproportionately impacted.

Traffic congestion in the Portland metropolitan area is a challenge for many individuals and businesses. Participants voiced that the project's success should in part be measured by reduced travel times, and increased travel predictability. Many participants also indicated that a positive outcome of the project would be fewer vehicles on the road, which could also result in less idling and greenhouse gas emissions from vehicles.

There is great interest in how revenue generated by tolling will be spent. Participants and survey respondents shared concern about how and where toll revenue generated would be spent. Many participants stated that funds should be invested in developing transportation options, including bus routes, bike lanes, and walkways. Improved road conditions and maintenance, particularly in the areas that may experience diversion, was also a priority. A minority of participants indicated that revenues should be spent on addressing highway congestion. Many participants also stated it was important to include impacted and underserved communities in decisions about how and where the revenue is spent. Survey

respondents stated a concern about ODOT's transparency in demonstrating how toll revenue is spent.

Traffic diverting into communities and neighborhoods is a concern. Participants and survey respondents expressed concern about traffic diversion, if drivers avoid paying tolls by instead using local streets. Many participants worried that increased traffic may result in public safety impacts for pedestrians, bicyclists, and other drivers. Other participants noted that there is already diversion occurring in their communities, and hope that decreased traffic on I-5 and I-205 will help minimize diversion.

The financial impact of tolls on individuals, families, and businesses is a primary concern. Several of the survey respondents questioned why tolling is proposed, since they are already paying taxes for infrastructure. Many were concerned about the increased travel costs due to tolling. Others stated that the cost of tolls may be prohibitive to individuals, families, and businesses that rely on travel along I-5 and I-205.

4 About the Workshops

4.1 Workshop overview

ODOT hosted two workshops to explore congestion pricing in the Portland metropolitan area and invited over 300 elected officials, business and community leaders, and local and regional agency staff. The workshops were designed as invite-only to allow for focused conversations with stakeholders who are deeply engaged and have a direct link to the Project through their agency or community organization. In response to Governor Brown's safety and health protocols, the workshops were held virtually. The virtual workshops were livestreamed, and viewers were able to provide feedback through an online survey. ODOT also offered two workshop options to encourage participation. The workshops were held Nov. 9, 2021, 9 a.m. to 12 p.m., and Nov. 10, 2021, 3 p.m. to 6 p.m.

Before the workshops the project team conducted broad engagement to help inform the questions and information presented at the workshops. This included online surveys with over 6,500 responses, meetings with the five Oregon Toll Program work groups, multi-lingual discussion groups with historically underserved populations, and virtual briefings with technical and policy committees, elected officials, community-based organizations, and business groups through fall 2021.

4.2 Workshop format and agenda

At the workshops, participants could provide input in multiple ways. Interactive, real-time polls were held throughout the meeting using an online tool called Menti, participants were invited to participate in small group discussions led by a facilitator from the project team, and they were invited to complete an evaluation survey following the workshops.

In addition to inviting feedback, the workshops served to provide background and information about the project. ODOT staff and the project team provided presentations about the history of congestion in the region, the need for congestion pricing, ODOT’s commitment to equity, key themes from community engagement, and the purpose and need for the project. The workshops also featured the following panel discussions:

- A panel discussion with Equity and Mobility Advisory Committee members about opportunities and challenges to implementing congestion pricing equitably. The panel was moderated by Chris Lepe, project team member, and each day featured two EMAC members: Kari Schlosshauer, Safe Routes Senior Policy Manager and Dr. Philip Wu, Oregon Environmental Council President (Nov. 9), and James Paulsen, WorkSystems Inc. Board member and Bill Baumann, Human Services Councilperson (Nov. 10).
- A panel discussion about how tolling and congestion pricing has worked in other parts of the country. The panel was moderated by Gareth Prior, ODOT Toll Program Policy Manager and featured: Lucinda Broussard, ODOT Tolling Program Director, David Ungemah, WSP Managing Director of Transportation Operations Strategy, and Brad Larsen, Minnesota Department of Transportation E-ZPass Policy and Planning Program Director (Nov. 9 only).

Image 4-1 Centering Equity: EMAC and Equity Framework



Image 4-2 Stories: Experiences of tolling and congestion pricing across the nation.



4.3 Advertising and notifications

The project team sent targeted emails and reminders to invited interest groups, agencies, organizations, elected officials and individuals. Additionally, public notices were sent out through the Oregon Toll Program eNews to invite the general public to listen in to the workshops via livestream. Updates and information were maintained on the Regional Mobility Pricing Project website.

4.4 Participants

The workshops were attended by participants representing key state agencies, staff and elected officials from local governments, and members of community organizations and interest groups.

Table 4-1. Workshop participants

Workshop Date	Workshop Participants	Public Livestream Viewers
Nov. 9, 2021	23	28
Nov. 10, 2021	30	19

Figure 4-1. Survey Question: Which Workshop did you listen to? (n=18)

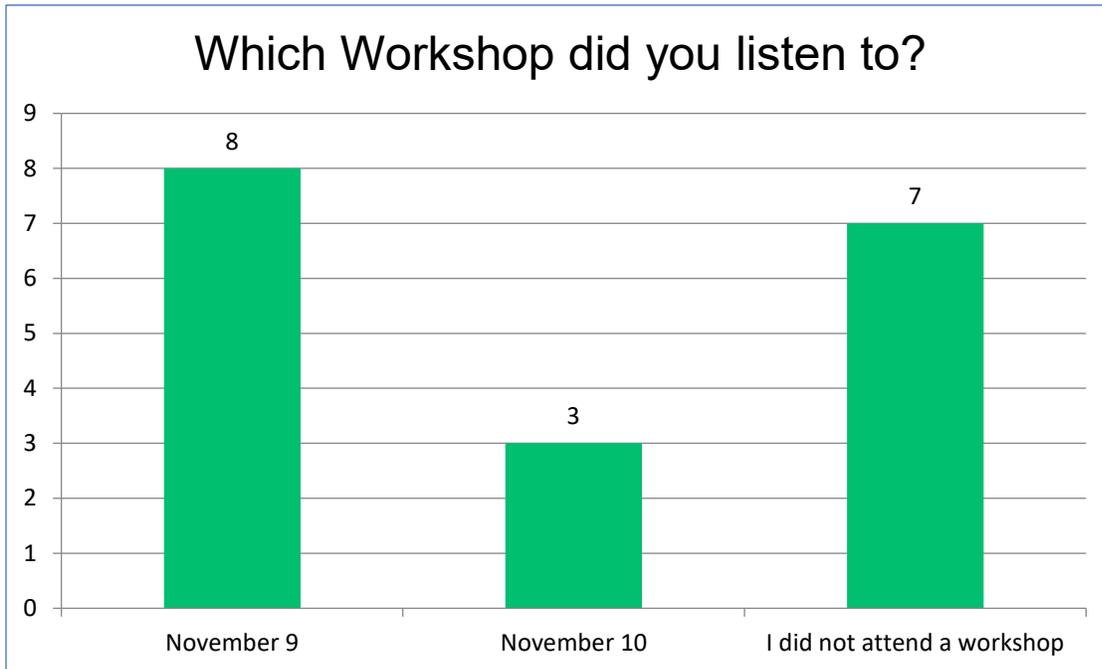
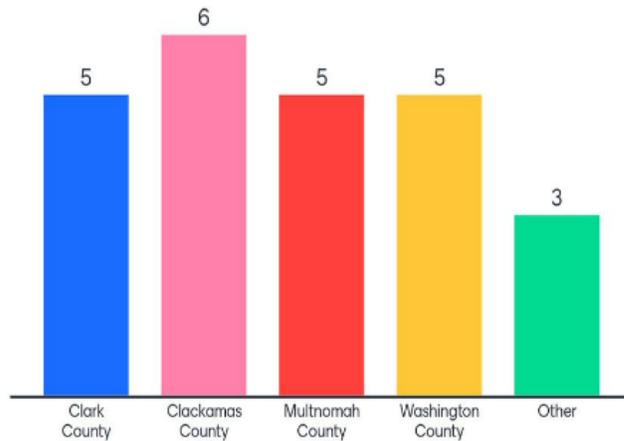


Figure 4-2. Interactive Poll Question: What part of the Portland Metro region do you most connect with?
Nov. 9, 2021 Workshop (n=24)

What part of the Portland Metro region do you most connect with?



Nov. 10, 2021 Workshop (n=13)

What part of the Portland Metro region do you most connect with?

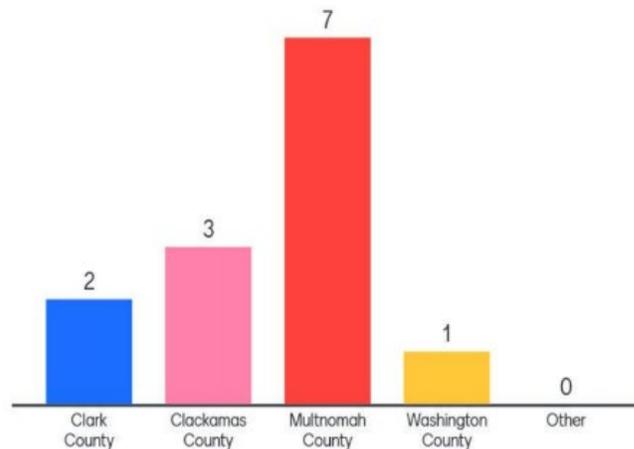
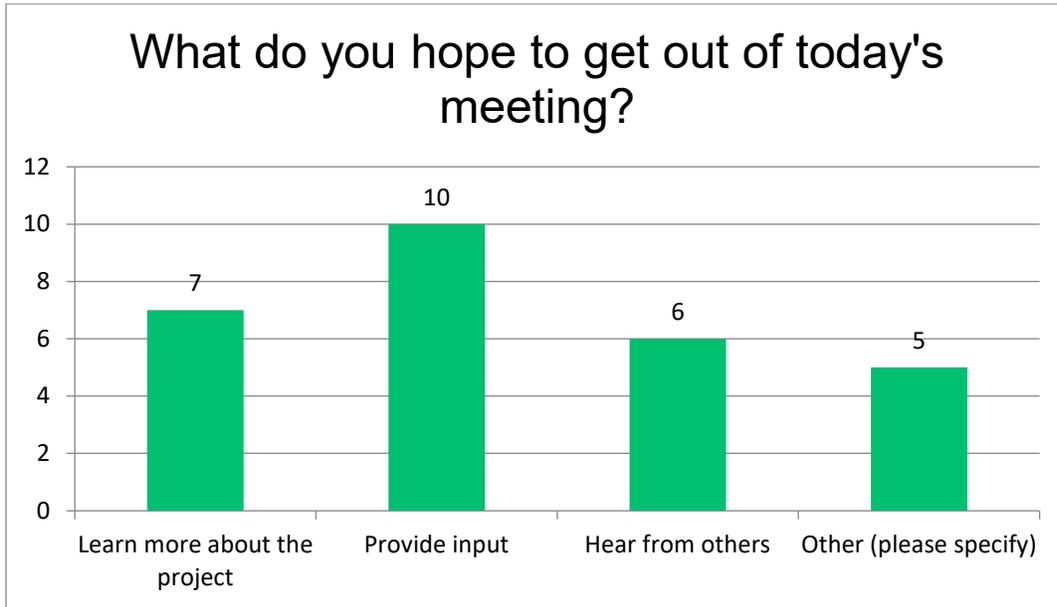


Figure 5-2. Public Survey Question: What do you hope to get out of today's meeting? (n=28)



The following are verbatim, written responses for the “Other” option.

- “Learn as to why the other money that we pay in taxes, tags, etc. isn't going back into the infrastructure instead of tolling people who already can't afford to live.”
- “To hopefully gauge how many people are willing to keep this horrible unfair situation from ever occurring.”
- “To express my disapproval of the tolls. They are regressive and hurt the working class more and will clog up side roads of folks trying to avoid tolls.”

5.1.2 Familiarity with Oregon Toll Program

Survey respondents and workshop participants were asked at the beginning and end of the workshop about their familiarity with the Oregon Toll Program. Seven survey respondents indicated they did not attend either workshop.

Figure 5-3. Interactive Poll Question: How much do you feel you know about the Oregon Toll Program? Nov. 9, 2021 Workshop (n=25)

How much do you feel you know about the Oregon Toll Program ?

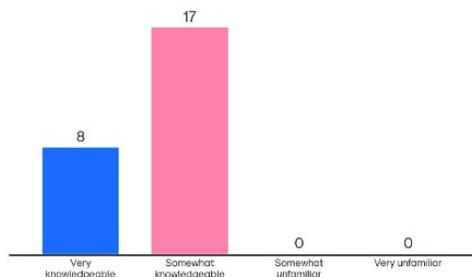


Figure 5-4. Interactive Poll Question: After participating in the workshop today, how much do you feel you know about the Oregon Toll Program?

Nov. 9, 2021 Workshop (n=16)

After participating in the workshop today, how much do you feel you know about the Oregon Toll Program?

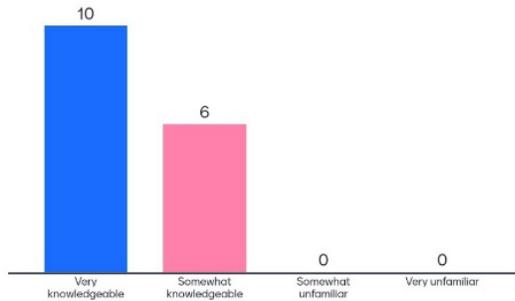


Figure 5-5. Interactive Poll Question: How much do you feel you know about the Oregon Toll Program?

Nov. 10, 2021 Workshop (n=10)

How much do you feel you know about the Oregon Toll Program ?

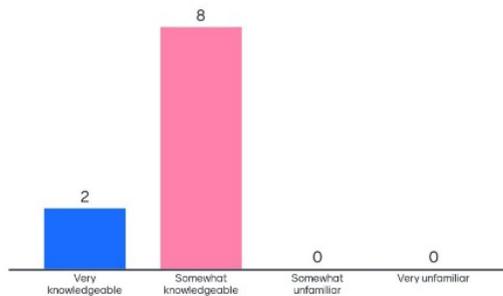


Figure 5-6. Interactive Poll Question: After participating in the workshop today, how much do you feel you know about the Oregon Toll Program?

Nov 10, 2021 Workshop (n=2)

After participating in the workshop today, how much do you feel you know about the Oregon Toll Program?

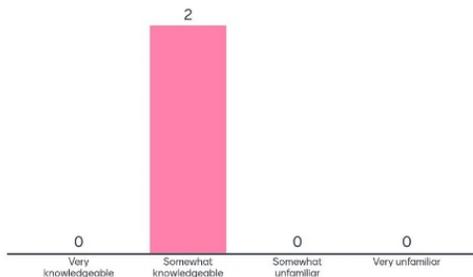


Figure 5-7. Survey Question: How much do you already know about the Oregon Toll Program? (n=16)

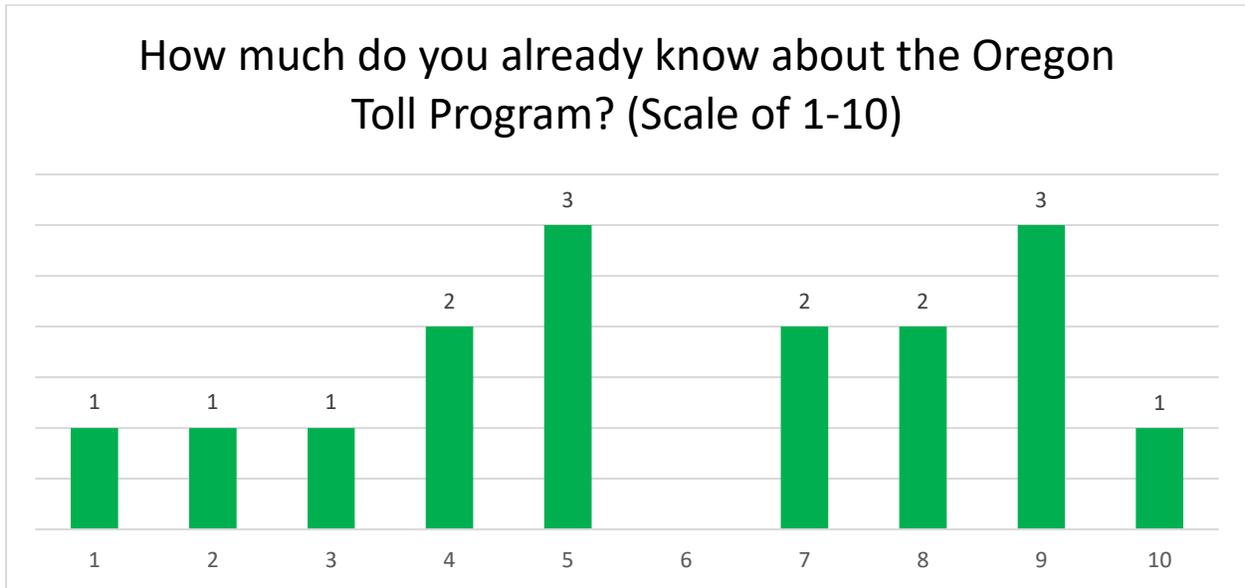
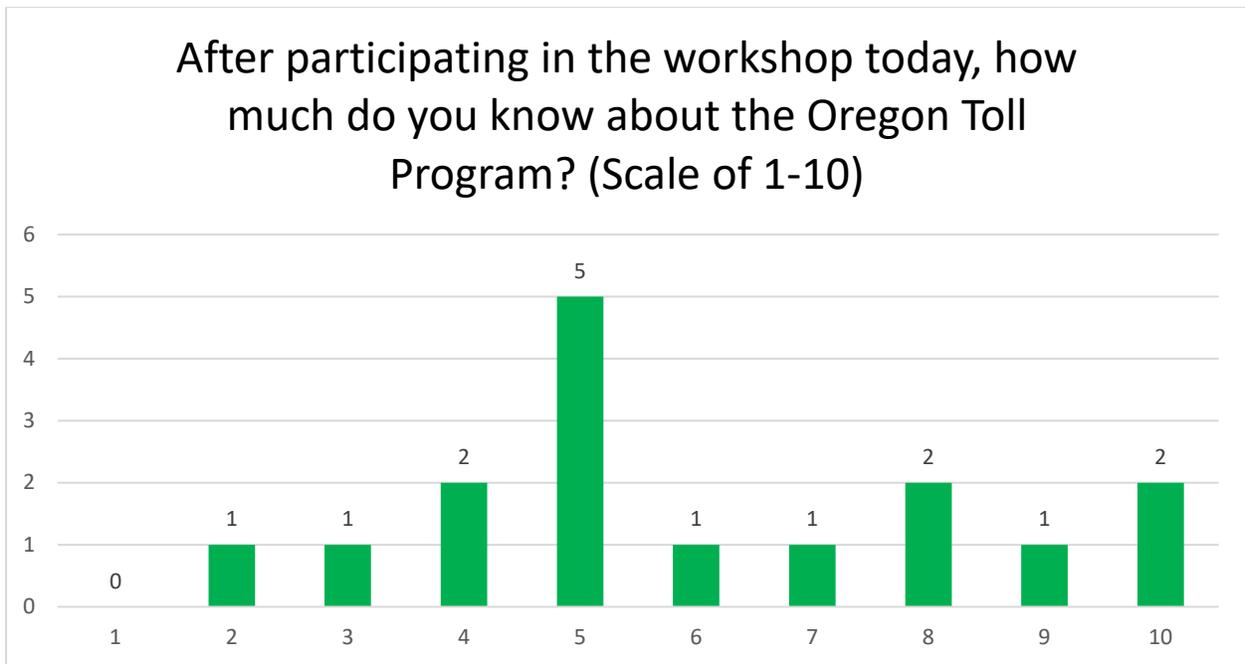


Figure 5-8. Survey Question: After participating in the workshop today, how much do you know about the Oregon Toll Program? (n=16)



5.1.3 Tolling concerns

Workshop participants were asked to respond to what concerns they have heard in their communities. Participants could select more than one concern. Most responses identified diversion onto local streets, impacts on drivers experiencing low-incomes, and how revenue will be spent. For survey responses, the top two concerns were diversion and how revenue will be spent. Several respondents also responded with “other” and listed their top issues.

Figure 5-9. Interactive Poll Question: What concerns have you heard in your communities?

Nov. 9, 2021 Workshop (n=53)

What concerns have you heard in your communities?

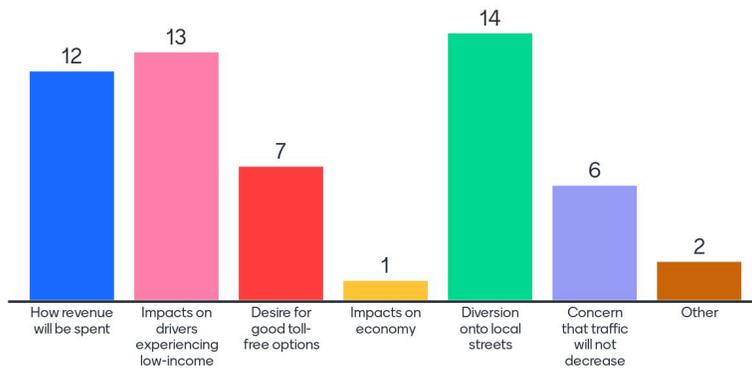


Figure 5-10. Interactive Poll Question: What concerns have you heard in your communities?

Nov. 10, 2021 Workshop (n=34)

What concerns have you heard in your communities?

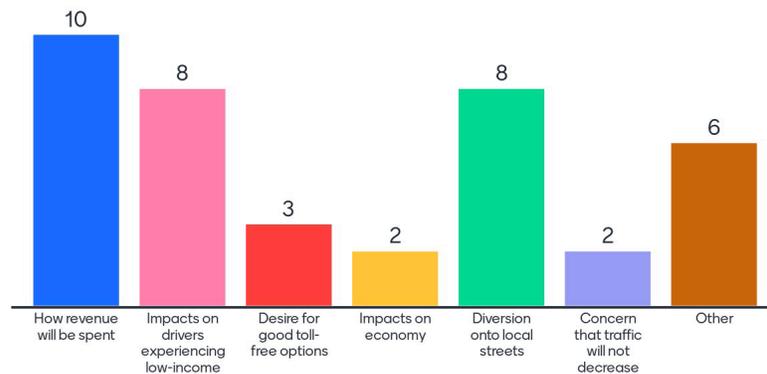
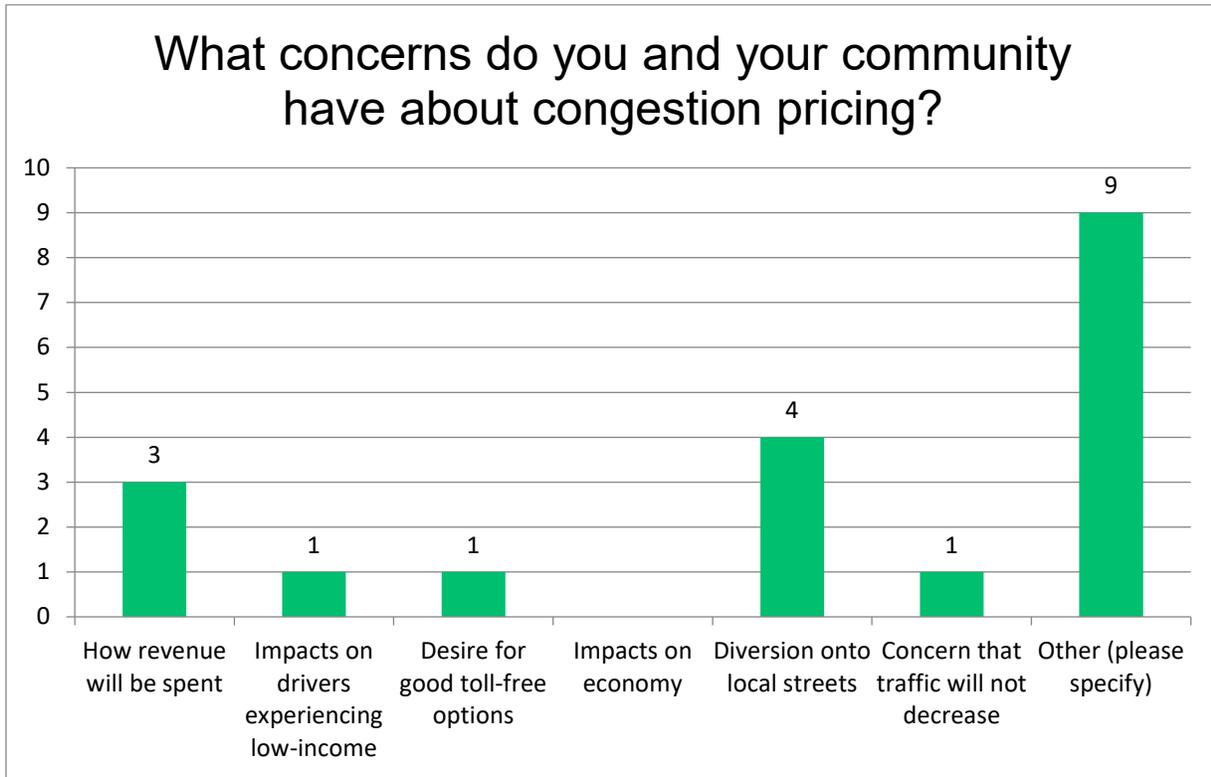


Figure 5-11. Survey Question: What concerns do you and your community have about congestion pricing? (n=19)



The following is a summary of top concerns from written responses received:

- **Concerns about equity.** Several respondents shared concern that tolls will disproportionately effect people experiencing low incomes. Concern was shared for people experiencing fixed income, Clackamas County residents and businesses, seniors, rural residents, and people with a fixed commute time during peak congestion hours.
- **Concerns about diversion.** Several respondents shared their concern that tolls will cause increased diversion onto neighborhood streets. One comment noted that keeping diverted traffic off of local streets will be critical for project success and public support.
- **Support for behavior change and alternative transportation options.** A few respondents shared that congestion pricing could encourage commuters to consider additional transportation options. Comments suggested that revenue raised from tolling should be used to improve transportation options in the region.
- **Concerns about accountability.** Several respondents shared concerns that ODOT will not be transparent with toll revenue expenditures. A concern was shared that tolls will not work.

5.1.4 Reflections and values

Survey respondents and workshop participants were asked to submit three words that described an ideal transportation system. The results were displayed in a word cloud. The larger the word appears, the more frequently it was submitted. The two most frequently submitted words for both the workshops and the survey were “efficient” and “safe.”

Figure 5-12. Interactive Poll Question: What three words describe an ideal transportation system?

Nov. 9, 2021 Workshop (n=20)

What three words describe an ideal transportation system?



Mentimeter



Nov. 10, 2021 Workshop (n=13)

What three words describe an ideal transportation system?



Figure 5-13. Survey Question: What three words describe an ideal transportation system? (n=5)

What three words describe an ideal transportation system?

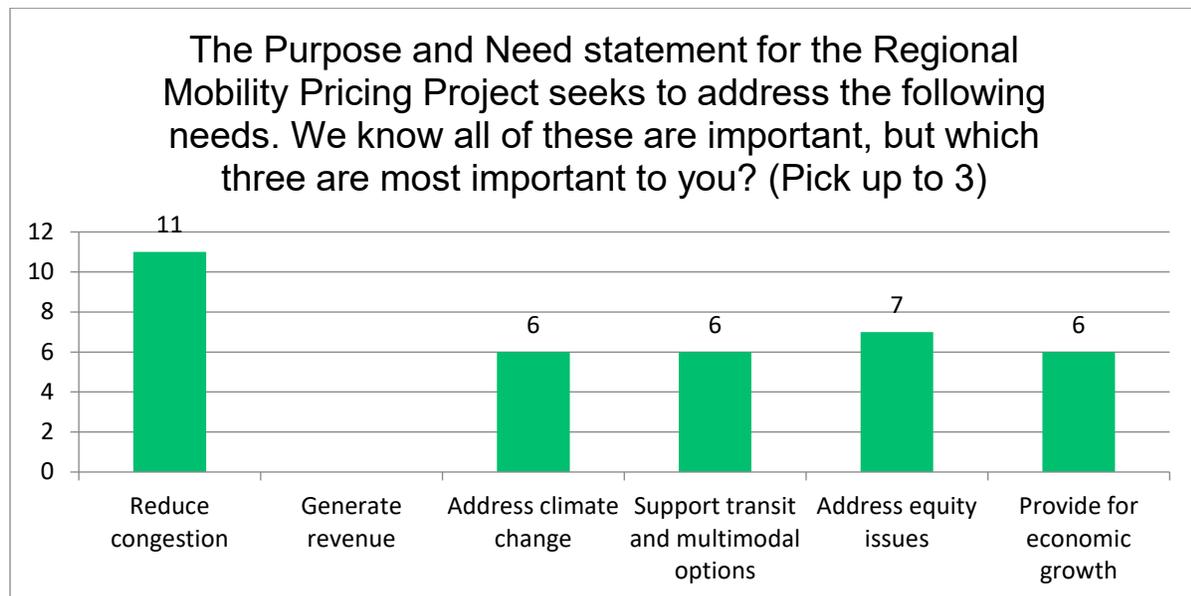
Mentimeter



5.1.5 Project Purpose and Need

To help inform the Project Purpose and Need statement, the project team asked survey respondents to indicate their highest priorities for the Regional Mobility Pricing Project. Survey respondents were also asked an open-ended question to provide feedback on the Purpose and Need statement. Workshop participants were not polled on this question because their feedback regarding the Purpose and Need Statement was collected during the small group discussion.

Figure 5-14 Survey Question #10: What are your highest priorities? (n=36)



The following is a summary of responses to comments received about the Purpose and Need:

- **Support for electric vehicles.** Several survey respondents shared that they support ODOT focusing on electric vehicles as the primary means of reducing greenhouse gas emissions.
- **Concern around cost.** A few survey respondents noted concerns around the financial impacts of tolls on community members, most notably those experiencing low income. Several survey respondents shared their concerns about ODOT's management of current revenue sources and suggested looking at other funding opportunities including the federal infrastructure package.
- **Need for behavior change.** Several survey respondents identified that car centered transportation is the principal contributor to Oregon's transportation sector greenhouse gas emissions. They stated that the issue is high vehicle miles traveled in the region and not simply congestion.
- **Disproportionate impact to car-dependent people.** A survey participant shared concern that tolls will disproportionately impact residents who are currently experiencing a lack of transportation options.

5.1.6 Additional questions

Survey respondents were asked about any other questions they may have that were not addressed in the workshop. The following is a summary of key questions received:

- What will voters' role be in approving or shaping the Oregon Toll Program?
- How and why was the decision made start with the I-205 Tolling Project?
- Will there be additional transportation options for areas effected by tolls?
- What will tolling exemptions look like and when will they be decided?
- Will there be additional opportunities to provide input and feedback on the Oregon Toll Program?
- What will success metrics look like and who will have input in them?
- How long will the toll program be in place?

5.2 Workshop small group discussions

Following introductory presentations and panel discussions, participants were divided into groups of 5-7 participants for 50 minute small group sessions. Each group had a project staff facilitator that helped frame the questions and manage the dialogue, and a notetaker that captured the discussion. The groups also used a Jamboard, which is a virtual sticky note wall. An additional staff member summarized each comment from the participants and added them to the Jamboard, visible to all participants.

Below are some of the discussion questions that facilitators presented to the groups, followed by a summary of common themes and topics that were recorded on the Jamboards. Note that the discussions were designed to promote a dialogue and comments may refer to other topics in addition to the question posed. This summary organizes comment themes under the questions that are most relevant.

For each of the topics the small group facilitators provided context on the topic, and then posed a series of questions related to the topic.

5.2.1 Topic 1: Managing congestion

Context: Managing congestion is half of the purpose statement for the project. We heard that most people think traffic is a problem on I-5 and I-205, it's affecting our quality of life and our economy. People want fewer hours of congestion and faster, more reliable travel. We also heard people are concerned about diverting traffic to local streets.

Question: ODOT's goal is to provide more efficient and predictable trips with congestion pricing, without overwhelming the local road system. What does "getting congestion pricing right" look like to you?

- **Efficient use of roadways.** Several participants noted that the most important aspect of pricing is reducing congestion. Participants mentioned the importance of creating predictability in travel times as well more free-flowing traffic. Some participants brought up that this efficiency could help improve air quality by reducing idling as well as potentially reducing the amount of drivers diverting to local streets to avoid the congestion.
- **Alternative transportation options.** Several participants noted that a good congestion pricing system would mean a system that provides travelers with a myriad set of travel options, including robust transit, biking and walking infrastructure.
- **Supports climate goals.** Several participants noted that a successful system would help our state reach our climate goals. Participants mentioned both the reduction of stop-and-go traffic, causing less idling, as well as fewer overall vehicle miles traveled as ways to measure climate improvements.

- **Coordinated system.** Several participants brought up the importance of aligning the congestion pricing with the larger regional transportation system. Participants noted coordination with:
 - The Interstate Bridge Replacement and I-205 Projects, which both include tolling elements.
 - Other revenue streams for transportation, such as the gas tax.
 - Regional and local planning efforts.
 - Transportation planning in Southwest Washington.
- **Public support.** Participants noted that success would mean that the public clearly understands how the system works and that there is fiscal transparency about how the revenues generated are being used. Several participants articulated that the public needs to be able to see and feel that they are benefiting from the tolls that they are paying; participants mentioned improved traffic flow, improved roadways, or investments in alternative transportation options as potential benefits from the program.
- **Accommodating various groups.** Participants discussed that the pricing system should be responsive to the various needs and requirements of different types of road users. Several participants discussed this in the context of equity, noting that many people experiencing lower incomes have been displaced to areas that have fewer alternatives to driving available to them and a toll could be a challenging financial burden. Participants also discussed workers who have to drive as part of their jobs, with several mentions of truck drivers.
- **Future-forward system.** At least one participant discussed that the system should be responsive to anticipated changes in our transportation systems that are coming in the next few decades, particularly the expectation of more widespread use of autonomous vehicles.

Question: What are some of the consequences if we don't get congestion management right?

- **Equity concerns.** Numerous participants brought up concerns about equity, noting concerns that the system could exacerbate existing inequalities, particularly for people with lower incomes and vulnerable communities. Several participants noted that these problems would arise without viable transit options, which are critical for historically marginalized communities.
- **Diversion concerns.** Numerous participants were worried about the possibility of diversion. While some noted that congestion pricing could potentially reduce diversion by making it easier to travel on the freeways there were still concerns that if the toll rate was too high, many people might divert to local streets in an effort to avoid the toll.

- **Public support concerns.** Numerous participants voiced concern that without the right communication with the public, and without the right toll rate, many people would only experience the costs of tolls, paying the rates, and would not experience or understand the benefits. One participant noted that this could be particularly bad for ODOT's reputation.
- **Climate concerns.** Several participants said that they were concerned about the revenue from the tolling program solely funding additional road capacity, which they felt would make it hard to reduce GHG emissions because it would encourage more driving.
- **Negative economic impacts.** At least one participant said that they were concerned that negative consequences could lead to fewer job opportunities due to businesses relocating out of the region and potential tourism impacts.

5.2.2 Topic 2: Generating revenue

- **Context:** Generating revenue is the other half of the project purpose. Revenue would be used to pay for the toll system itself, maintenance of I-5 and I-205, the Urban Mobility Office core projects, as well as other improvements off the highways needed to make congestion pricing work well. We also recognize that community members want to know how their toll payments will be used and want a voice in how toll payments are used.
- **Question:** What investments of this revenue would make people in your community more likely to support congestion pricing?
- **Alternative transportation options.** Several participants mentioned the importance of investing in better transportation options such as transit, biking, and walking. Participants noted that it was imperative for transit service to be improved, and one participant mentioned that "frequent" transit needed to be more frequent to be a viable alternative. Several participants noted that transit improvements were a key part of meeting equity goals.
- **More roadway improvements.** Several participants mentioned that toll revenue should be used to improve roadways either through road maintenance or increasing capacity in congested areas. Some participants voiced concern about using revenues on other options as a way to "social engineer" transportation choices.
- **Local priorities.** Several participants mentioned that local communities should have a say about where the revenue is allocated. Some noted that the revenues should be invested in local transportation projects that have been identified, but lack local funding. They noted that investing locally could help mitigate concerns about diverted traffic in local communities.
- **Equity priorities.** Several participants said that the revenues should be invested in ways that improve equity outcomes. This included support for people that have been priced out

of the region, investing in transit for people who can't or don't drive, and accommodating people that can't afford tolls but have no alternatives for their travel patterns.

- **Climate priorities.** Several participants noted that revenues should be invested to help achieve climate goals. One participant offered the idea of using the revenues to provide an “environmental kicker” that creates an incentive to use more sustainable options.

Question: Should ODOT charge higher tolls to generate additional revenue for other improvements or should the toll fees be lower?

- **Lower toll fees.** Several participants preferred starting with lower toll fees. They noted that this would be better for garnering public support for the program. A few participants agreed that they did not want the state to become reliant on high revenues to fund a long list of projects.
- **Higher tolls fee.** Several participants preferred starting with higher toll fees. Some agreed that it would be more challenging to communicate toll increases to the public once they were already used to a certain rate. Several participants noted the gas tax as an illustrative example of a tax that has not increased on par with needs.
- **Clarity on goals.** Several participants did not answer the question directly and instead noted that the program needed clear goals beyond revenue generation and that the rates needed to be set to achieve these other goals. Potential goals cited included reducing congestion, smoothing out traffic over the day, and reducing vehicles miles traveled (VMT).

5.2.3 Topic 3: Group choice

After the first two topics, participants were asked to choose between several topics for the final discussion. Most of the small groups did not have enough time for this topic. Two groups discussed equity and one group discussed transit and multimodal options. The comments from these discussions were relevant to the two topics above and the common themes have been incorporated above.

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