

Transit and Multimodal, Neighborhood Health and Safety, and Affordability – Preferred Options

Key Statements

The following key statements are from the EMAC [DRAFT] Recommendation to the Oregon Transportation Commission dated August 25, 2021.

In developing recommendations for the Oregon Transportation Commission to consider at your November 2021 meeting, we [EMAC] want to make sure we are communicating the following:

- **The following recommendations are based off of our personal expertise and experience in the community, Toll Program community engagement input, review of research on case studies and best practices, and extensive and meaningful discussions on the Committee.** These recommendations provide a snapshot in time. New information is continually being added as the Toll Program develops that may alter these recommendations.
- **Our work to date has focused on the I-205 Toll Project area, not tolling on I-5 and I-205 (Regional Mobility Pricing Project).** No assumptions should be made about the transferability of recommendations from one project to the other.
- **Further work needs to be done to determine what will advance equity in the I-205 Toll Project.** A key step in this process will be to examine the findings of the impacts analysis that ODOT is currently conducting, which should be coming in late 2021 to early 2022. Proposed investments will need to be taken to the Equity Framework-identified communities that will be impacted to ask them what will best advance equity.
- **The Regional Mobility Pricing Project requires the same degree of expertise, experience, research, and engagement that has gone into the I-205 project (if not more).** For example, since there will be important project-level decisions on the Regional Mobility Pricing Project from 2022 to 2024, we recommend that an equity oversight committee. The application of recommendations for the I-205 area should not be applied to the regional system without careful evaluation, analysis, and community input. We want to make sure that ODOT applies the same level of rigor answering key equity questions regarding the Regional Toll Program, as well as interactions between the two toll systems once both are operational.
- **Tolling impacts all users in the greater Portland region which includes Oregon and Washington. It is important that equity and mobility benefits not end at the state line.** Therefore, EMAC wants to ensure that advancing equity includes anticipating the needs of Equity Framework communities from the entire region.

Transit and Multimodal, Neighborhood Health and Safety, and Affordability – Preferred Options

Dedication of toll revenues for investment

- Dedication of (%) of toll revenues or (\$) annually toward a combination of transit and active transportation investments. Funneling revenue to transit does not address the fundamental concern that pricing harms poor drivers. Furthermore, bus riders are disproportionately low-income and may be impacted if rerouting increases congestion on local streets, making travel slower for buses on those streets. Bus riders may also benefit if less congested highways make bus travel faster. Transit investments should be informed by identified needs and strengths of Equity Framework identified communities and these investments need to accurately address how bus riders could be impacted.
- Dedicate (%) of toll revenues or (\$) annually to Community Based Organizations to invest in programs or projects that improve transit and active transportation options, neighborhood health, local/small businesses, address impacts of climate change, or improve safety.
- Dedicate (%) of toll revenues or (\$) annually to address diversion off of the highway created by tolling, especially for communities identified in the Equity Framework. Investments would address the following health and safety needs:
 - a) Access to human needs: providing (or inhibiting) access to means of livelihood (e.g., jobs), essential goods (e.g., food, fuel and water), and essential services (e.g. health care, mental health services health promoting activities, and education)
 - b) Neighborhood livability: facilitating movement of people and goods, physical activity, and social engagement, and limiting crime and disorder in one's immediate neighborhood surroundings
 - c) Safety: preventing injuries and fatalities in the transportation system
 - d) Environmental quality: preventing emissions of environmental pollution (noise, air, water) related to system operation and associated health impacts

Exemptions, credits, or discounted toll rates

- Public transit vehicles should be exempt from paying tolls.
- Provide exemptions for registered vanpools and carpools to promote ride sharing.
- Provide credits, exemptions, or discounts for public emergency response vehicles, non-emergency medical transportation, and to support social service or non-profit health organizations recruit and retain volunteer drivers.
- Provide credits, exemptions, or discounts for drivers who are people experiencing low-income.

Transit and Multimodal, Neighborhood Health and Safety, and Affordability – Preferred Options

Defining the location (corridor) for investments from toll revenues

- A balanced approach of focusing on highway and areas farther from the highway that will be affected is needed. Consider a wider area of impact to include rural areas where Equity Framework-identified communities live not a limited distance from the highway.

Toll project analysis and development of an equitable toll program

- Improve the Oregon Toll Program’s impact on health and safety through the development of the toll project environmental review process that complete the following actions:
 - a) Design the toll system to lessen congestion on the highways to improve the lives of those living near or traveling on them, which are disproportionately people from Equity Framework-identified communities.
 - b) Analyze the benefits to neighborhood health and safety to determine what investments are advancing equity, not just maintaining the status quo.
 - c) Provide detail about local air quality monitoring and conditions, which is beyond a look at the regional impact.
 - d) Take additional steps than what is traditionally measured in the federal review process to connect transportation planning to health outcomes; integrate a Health Impact Assessment (HIA) or elements of an HIA into the process.
- Analyze impacts to affordability by the percentage of household income for lower- income drivers compared to middle and higher-income drivers.
- Find the right balance between discounts and or exemptions and revenue generation. Analyze the tradeoffs between exemptions, credits, or discounted rates based on income versus collecting the toll revenues and investing them into equity and mobility strategies. Equity Framework identified communities should be involved in the analysis and decision-making process on determining what would best advance equity.
- Look beyond the standard definition of low-income. When establishing the definition for “low-income” for the income-based toll rate, include a range that encompasses more than the federal definition for poverty. For the toll projects federal environmental review process (NEPA), a measure of 200% of the federal definition for poverty was assumed. This should be the baseline for future consideration. The reality is that people move below and above the federal definition for poverty in a short span of time.

Toll rate setting and future oversight

- ODOT should implement an income-based toll program that is progressive in nature. Meaning, that higher-income drivers will pay a larger share or percentage of household income than lower-income drivers.

Transit and Multimodal, Neighborhood Health and Safety, and Affordability – Preferred Options

- ODOT will produce annual reports for the Oregon Transportation Commission on a set of measures that track the progress of policies and strategic-investments in transit and multimodal transportation options, neighborhood health and safety, and impacts to affordability to understand whether actions are achieving their intention.
- When setting the toll rates, consider setting price caps on increases to the lower-income toll rate.
- Build into the system where voices from Equity Framework identified communities are included in the decision-making process.
- Establish a monitoring and communications system to understand whether the actions are taken to address affordability in the planning stage actually reach low-income drivers' needs. Ensure that people experiencing low income who struggle to meet basic needs (food, shelter, clothing) will have a path forward to travel toll-free.

Toll system design that recognizes historic and current barriers and plans to address them

- Include a baseline for Disadvantaged Business Enterprise investment that goes beyond what is federally required
- Create an integrated and easy-to-use fare system. Coordinate between Oregon and Washington, as well as across different types of mobility (for example, bike, scooter, carpooling, car sharing)
- Provide a cash-based option for paying tolls.
- Offer additional time to pay a toll bill without incurring fines.
- Work directly with community-based organizations to establish fair enforcement policies for Equity Framework identified communities. Tolling should not contribute to more financial indebtedness for people experiencing low income, nor should it lead to criminal penalties.
- Design the system to be clear and easy to use for everyone, including non-English language speakers. Collaborate with trusted organizations and individuals within Equity Framework communities to overcome historical and current barriers of trust, language, and financial impacts to obtaining a transponder and understanding the toll rates for location and time of day.
- Transponders should be free or should come pre-loaded with credits to cover the cost of the purchase.
- Set a no- or low minimum balance requirement for loading or maintaining transponders.
- Design and implement an interoperable system to accept transactions from transit, parking, and other modes of travel.

Transit and Multimodal, Neighborhood Health and Safety, and Affordability – Preferred Options

- Ensure the process of applying for exemptions, discounted rates, or credits considers varying degrees of technological competency and access. Internet reliability in rural areas and how that could affect their ability to access services online (load transponders, apply for exemptions, etc.).
- Design and implement an interoperable system that provides benefits equally in Oregon and Washington. Look at Rideshare Online as an example of rideshare and vanpool services that serve Oregon and Washington. Likewise, TriMet’s HOP card is an example of a system that accommodates users in Oregon and Washington.

Transportation needs in the I-205 Toll Project area

- Pursue a regional vision for bus-on-shoulder service (in coordination with mobility hubs) that considers the following:
 - a) Improvements to support existing transit and expanded transit (e.g., park-and-ride)
 - b) Mobility as a service – vanpools, telework, car sharing, walkability, scootering, ridesharing, electric vehicle charging stations, ride-hailing, real-time technology, etc.
 - c) First and last 5-mile connections off the highway to jobs, school, home, and healthcare
 - d) Americans with Disabilities Act access and safety
 - e) Transit Oriented Development coordination with affordable housing and jobs development

Addressing the impacts of diversion

- Prioritize capital investment to improve transit and multimodal safety in areas affected by diversion.
- Analyze whether a credit system or discounted rate to lower-income drivers who are local residents of the I-205 area in the time between when I-205 tolling starts and the regional I-5 and I-205 toll system (Regional Mobility Pricing Project) comes online would advance equity. Credits provided after a certain number of trips could lead to more cars on the road.

Work with transit agencies to support equitable investments with toll revenues. Identified needs and strengths of Equity Framework identified communities should inform Transit investments.

- Transit agencies often have a process for where investments are most needed – ODOT should leverage this process by incorporating this information in its planning.
- Acknowledge that transit investments help enhance alternatives to driving and give people better choices but not everyone will be interested or able to take transit as an alternative to tolling.

Transit and Multimodal, Neighborhood Health and Safety, and Affordability – Preferred Options

- Transit efficiency, reliability, and convenience is key, so people have a good user experience.
- ODOT should study whether tolling will result in increased transit demand on existing routes that may lead to overcrowding, as well as other potential impacts.
- Before day one, transit investments may be needed in certain corridors to ensure transit agencies can accommodate an increase in riders or avoid impacts to travel speeds.