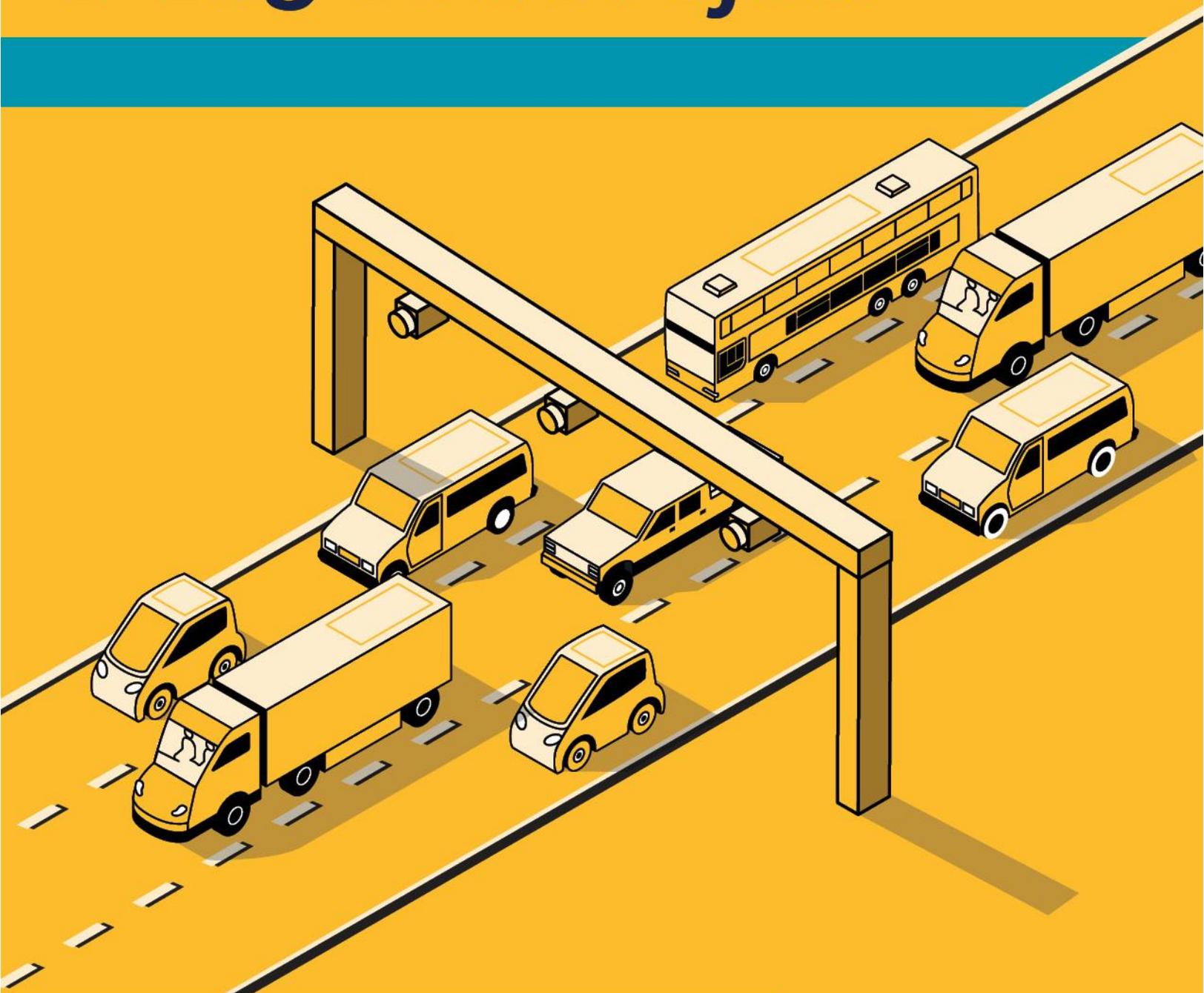


I-205 Toll Project



Engagement Summary – Executive Summary

SUMMER – FALL 2020

December 2020

I-205 Toll Project



Draft

ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY – EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

SUMMER – FALL 2020

DRAFT

Prepared for:



Prepared by:



DRAFT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Project Context

In summer 2020, the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) launched an education and engagement period for the Interstate 205 (I-205) Toll Project (Project). The agency sought input at the beginning of the environmental review process to help refine the draft purpose and need for the Project, the toll alternatives to be studied, and key issues for analysis as required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). This report summarizes public input received from more than 4,600 survey responses, letters, emails, voicemails, and comments at meetings and briefings between August 3 and October 16, 2020. ODOT values these comments; they will help the agency move ahead with the Project with an understanding of community concerns and how to best address them. ODOT will respond in a separate document to the comments received during this engagement to show how input is being incorporated into the NEPA process and Project development.

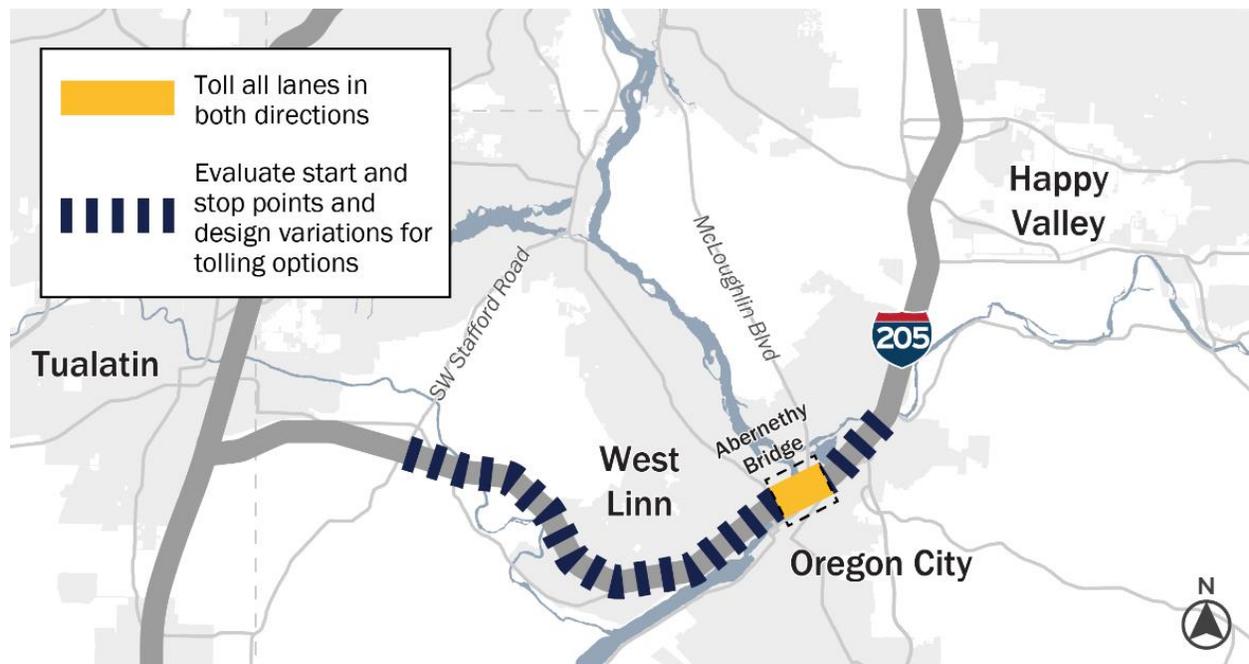
Planning and environmental review for the Project builds on direction from the Oregon Legislature and the results of a feasibility analysis. In 2017, Oregon House Bill 2017 (“Keep Oregon Moving”) was passed to improve area highways; enhance transit, biking, and walking facilities; and use technology to make the transportation system work better. As part of this comprehensive transportation package, the Oregon Transportation Commission was directed to study tolling on I-5 and I-205 in the Portland metro area. In response, ODOT initiated the Portland Metro Area Value Pricing Feasibility Analysis (Value Pricing Feasibility Analysis) to explore toll options, determine how and where tolling could help improve congestion on I-5 or I-205 during peak travel times, and discuss potential benefits and impacts to travelers and adjacent communities.

The Value Pricing Feasibility Analysis concluded that tolls could be used to help improve travel on I-5 or I-205 during peak times and raise revenue for congestion relief projects. Three consistent issues became apparent for ODOT’s tolling program to address:

- Impacts to communities experiencing low income due to a toll.
- The need for improved transit and other transportation choices.
- The potential for freeway pricing to cause traffic to divert to local streets.

The Value Pricing Feasibility Analysis recommended moving forward with further analysis based on Concept E—tolling on or near the Abernethy Bridge—for the I-205 corridor (Figure ES-1). Based on this recommendation, the Oregon Transportation Commission then directed ODOT to meet the Oregon Legislature’s directive and proceed with the NEPA process for tolling on both I-5 and I-205 while addressing the three priority issues that emerged from the public process.

Figure ES-1. Project Area



The I-205 Toll Project’s proposed purpose is to manage congestion between Stafford Road and Oregon Route 213 (OR 213) and raise revenue for congestion relief improvements. Revenue generated by these tolls could help pay for planned roadway improvements on I-205 in the same area while helping to manage the more than 6 hours of daily congestion in this portion of the I-205 corridor (pre COVID-19 pandemic).

An electronic toll collection system would be used to automatically collect tolls from vehicles traveling on the corridor. Electronic toll collection systems connect to prepaid accounts by reading a transponder in the vehicle or by reading a license plate while maintaining travel speeds. An electronic toll collection system eliminates the need for tolls booths and users needing to stop to pay the toll.

Engagement Approach

This engagement ran from August 3 to October 16, 2020. During this time, ODOT hosted numerous education and engagement activities to reach a broad audience.¹

¹ A few engagement activities occurred in July 2020 prior to the start of the formal comment period. At these presentations, participants were notified of the starting date for the formal comment period, and the launches of the online open house and online survey, which were August 3, 2020.

This engagement was an opportunity for agencies, community groups, corridor travelers, and the public to provide their input on the following:

- Draft Purpose and Need Statement, including Project goals and objectives.
- Recommended alternatives as potential tolling strategies to study in depth.
- Concerns and potential impacts to consider during the environmental review.

Because of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, all engagement activities were conducted virtually to maintain physical distancing and protect public health. The Project team actively sought out comments from local, regional, and regulatory agencies; residents and businesses that rely on or are located next to I-205; and members of communities who have been historically and currently underrepresented in planning processes and underserved by the transportation system. Methods used for outreach and engagement are summarized in Table ES-1.

Table ES-1. Engagement Outcomes: By the Numbers

Connections			Number of Comment Submittals Received*	
7,600	English online open house unique users		3,743	Completed English surveys
2,000	Spanish online open house unique users		79	Completed Spanish surveys
127	Webinar attendees		68	Completed Vietnamese surveys
27	Presentations given		110	Completed Chinese surveys
2,638	People who clicked on English Facebook ads		72	Completed Russian surveys
4,304	People who clicked on Spanish Facebook ads		239	Emailed comments
38K+	Views on ODOT social media posts		22	Letters
4,500	Recipients of Project emails		2	Voicemails
2.3M	Digital advertising impressions through local news outlets		309	Comments from briefings, webinars, and committee meetings
90K+	Readers reached with Spanish newspaper print ads			
9	Multilingual community engagement liaisons			

* All survey responses, comment letters, emails, or comments at a webinar or meeting are collectively referred to as “comment submittals” throughout this report. Some comment submittals identified multiple ideas, each of which is considered individually as a comment.

Engagement Outcomes

The primary method used to provide comments was an online survey, which was made available in five languages. Based on survey data, many respondents live in Clackamas County (54%) and use an automobile as their primary mode of transportation (82%). Of those who provided their demographic information, 651 (16% of total respondents) identified as Black, Indigenous or People of Color, which is similar to the population of the largest four counties of the Portland metro area as reported by the U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey data (2014 to 2018). People who identified as Hispanic or Latin American were likely underrepresented in the survey responses. About 7% of survey respondents completed the

survey in a non-English language, which is lower than the percentage of people who speak a language other than English at home across the Portland metro area. In addition, about a quarter (23%) of respondents reported their income as less than \$50,000, which is a lower percentage than the region as a whole.²

Key Takeaways and Themes

ODOT specifically asked for feedback on the Project’s draft purpose and need, goals and objectives, recommended alternatives, and key issues of concern. While these were the topics ODOT asked about, respondents provided comments on other topics as well.

The Project team analyzed all comments received to identify key takeaways and themes between various types of comments and demographic groups to inform decision-making for this and future phases of the Project. The results are not statistically representative, meaning the respondent sample is not predictive of the opinions of the Portland metro area population as a whole.³

This section summarizes overarching themes heard during this engagement. The full report provides more detail on the findings below:

- A majority of respondents across all demographic groups and commenting methods expressed strong opposition to tolling in general or to the specifics of the I-205 Toll Project as it is currently proposed.
- Submitted comments and questions reflect respondents’ need and desire for additional information as well as misunderstandings with the proposed tolling system. Partner agencies and members of the public asked how toll revenue would be spent and provided expenditure recommendations.
- Respondents requested clarity on the relationship of the I-205 Toll Project to the I-205 Improvements Project.
- Commenters expressed numerous concerns with potential effects to quality of life, safety, and air quality from I-205 traffic potentially rerouting onto local roadways to avoid a toll.
- The perceived lack of fairness of tolling I-205 was one of the top areas of concern identified across all demographic groups, but particularly among residents of West Linn, Oregon City, and other parts of Clackamas County.
- Commenters expressed concerns that tolls would be a financial hardship for their households or for households experiencing low income, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic.

² In a 20-mile radius around Portland, about 38% of households have incomes less than \$50,000 per year, according to the 2017 U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey. In the I-205 corridor near the Abernethy Bridge, about 34% of households have incomes less than \$50,000.

³ The survey and comment period were open to anyone who wanted to participate. Respondents do not represent a random sampling of households in Clackamas County or the Portland metro area and therefore are not statistically representative of the population as a whole.

- Recommendations for the environmental review process centered on adding Project alternatives, including consideration of a “no toll” alternative, which is required.
- Toll discounts, maintaining functional toll-free routes and enhancing multimodal transportation options were among the top ideas to address the potential for negative impacts from tolls. These ideas closely mirror the findings from the Value Pricing Feasibility Analysis.
- Distrust of government in general, as well as ODOT in particular, was expressed.
- The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic was mentioned by commenters, and appeared to underlie identified concerns about traffic and economics.

Next Steps

The comments received will be considered by ODOT and the Federal Highway Administration. Decisions on the alternatives to study in depth and the finalization of the Project’s Purpose and Need Statement will be made in early 2021. ODOT will also publish a response for how the public comments will be addressed in early 2021.

The Project team will conduct a detailed analysis of the benefits and impacts of tolling on I-205 as the NEPA process moves forward in 2021 and 2022. The results of this analysis will be published for public review in a draft environmental assessment in 2022 and a final NEPA decision in 2023. Tolling on I-205 is expected to begin after 2024.

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