

# Oregon Toll Program

## Problem Statement for Regional Mobility Pricing Project



To design a successful project, we need your help improving our “Problem Statement” that will guide future work. Read more and please share your thoughts by emailing the project team at [OregonTolling@odot.state.or.us](mailto:OregonTolling@odot.state.or.us). Please put “Problem Statement” in the subject line and send us your comments by July 30, 2021.

### **PURPOSE OF THE “PROBLEM STATEMENT”**

The purpose of this document is to outline the transportation problems that the Regional Mobility Pricing Project would address. The “Problem Statement” provides input for the important “Purpose and Need” statement, which will guide development of the project through the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process.<sup>1</sup>

The Regional Mobility Pricing Project alone will not solve issues identified in the “Problem Statement,” but it will inform how the project can be built to contribute to the solution.

### **PROBLEM STATEMENT FOR REGIONAL MOBILITY PRICING PROJECT**

#### **Daily traffic congestion and rerouting is negatively affecting the quality of life in a growing region.**

Traffic congestion creates long vehicle backups traveling at slow speeds—a scenario that many people experience daily while traveling during the morning and evening rush hours. Four of the most significant bottlenecks in our region occur on northbound I-5 where overlapping queues that last more than 7 hours (Interstate Bridge, Rose Quarter, Marquam Bridge/I-84, and Terwilliger Curves). Between 2015 and 2017, these queues increased 1 hour (ODOT, 2018). Free-flow travel time is typically 25 minutes on the I-5 corridor. In 2017, PM peak travel time on southbound I-5 was 100 minutes—a four-fold increase versus free flow. In 2017, PM peak travel time on northbound I-205 was 80 minutes—a more than three-fold increase versus free flow (ODOT, 2018).

Congested conditions on I-5 and I-205 can result in traffic rerouting to other local and arterial streets. This rerouting results in additional traffic congestion and creates potential safety conflicts. The conditions caused by this traffic congestion and rerouting also make travel

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<sup>1</sup> As defined by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA, 1990): “A clear, well-justified purpose and need section explains to the public and decision-makers that the expenditure of funds is necessary and worthwhile and that the priority the project is being given relative to other needed highway projects is warranted.”

unreliable such that drivers and transit riders can't predict how long it will take them to get to work, home, services, or childcare arrangements.

Forecasts for the Portland metro area show that population and employment will continue to steadily grow. The metro area population is expected to grow from approximately 2.5 million residents from 2018 to more than 3 million by 2040 (23%) and more than 3.5 million by 2060 (43%) (Census Reporter, 2018; Metro, 2016). Job growth continues to outpace the nation: Portland grew at an average annual rate of 2% compared to the U.S. average of 1.6% (Portland Business Alliance, 2020). By 2039, the number of vehicles travelling along the I-5 corridor is projected to be between 127,200 and 192,900, depending on the corridor segment (ODOT, 2020), which is an approximate increase of 18% from 2017 traffic counts. Planned roadway projects, improvements in transit, and increased use of active transportation modes across our region will not fully address the increase in daily trips and hours of traffic congestion (Metro, 2018).

**Post-COVID-19 Pandemic**

Traffic volumes decreased significantly during the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic and rush-hour traffic congestion has not been as severe as it was before the pandemic. With the economy reopening, vehicle numbers are increasing quickly and as of March 2021 are already near 90% of pre-pandemic levels. We anticipate traffic congestion to quickly return as people resume commuting to work and school.

**Traffic congestion is hampering economic growth.**

Traffic congestion affects the Portland metro region economy through slow and unpredictable travel times for freight, services, employers, and employees. From 2015 to 2017, drivers in the Portland metro region experienced an 18.5% increase in the hours of traffic congestion. In 2015, the daily cost of traffic congestion in the Portland metro region was \$1.7 million, which increased to \$2.0 million in 2017. These numbers reflect the economic burden of trucks and cars being delayed on the roadway but do not reflect the environmental and health costs related to motor vehicles, such as vehicle collisions, air pollution, and roadway noise (ODOT, 2018).

**Our transportation system must become more efficient to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.**

Climate change poses one of the most significant threats to Oregon's economy, environment, and way of life (Gov. Kate Brown, 2019). To reduce the negative effects of climate change, Oregon has committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions by at least 45% below 1990 levels by the year 2035, and by 80% by 2050 (EO 20-04, 2020). The transportation sector—particularly personal cars and light trucks—creates approximately 36% of greenhouse gas emissions in Oregon (Oregon Global Warming Commission, 2020). To meet the state's goals for greenhouse gas reduction, numerous tools and solutions are needed. For transportation sector emissions, total tailpipe emissions must be reduced by decreasing the number of hours that vehicles spend stuck in traffic and the number of miles traveled by motor vehicles in the state.

**The gas tax and other traditional revenue sources are not sufficient to fund transportation infrastructure needs.**

Available funding for transportation has not kept pace with the costs of maintaining Oregon's transportation system or constructing new transportation and traffic congestion relief projects. ODOT revenue comes from a mix of federal and state sources. The Federal Highway Trust Fund provides states with roughly 25% of public spending for federal highway and transit projects and is funded primarily by the federal fuel taxes (Sargent, 2015). The federal gas tax has not been adjusted since October 1993, and the share of federal contributions to state transportation projects has greatly decreased resulting in near- and long-term funding constraints. On the state level, escalating expenditures to maintain aging infrastructure, the need to perform seismic upgrades for the state's bridges, and rising construction costs have greatly increased financial needs.

Compounding this problem is a substantial increase in travel demand as the state experiences strong population growth, particularly in the Portland metro region. ODOT must explore every possible method for getting the most out of its existing infrastructure, funding traffic congestion relief projects to ease traffic congestion, and planning for increased earthquake resiliency.

**The Portland metro region's transportation networks have resulted in inequitable outcomes for historically and currently excluded and underserved communities.**

Many urban interstate highways and major civic centers were deliberately built through Black neighborhoods, often requiring the destruction of housing and other local institutions (Federal Register, 2021). In Central Portland during the 1950s and 1960s, construction of I-5, the Veterans Memorial Coliseum, Emanuel Legacy Hospital, the Portland Public School Blanchard site, and urban renewal programs divided and displaced communities in North and Northeast Portland, affecting and burdening communities of color, especially African American communities, in the historic Albina neighborhood (Gibson, 2007). In the eastern Portland metro region, the construction of I-205 exemplifies these outcomes as well where the route of the highway alignment was changed due to political motivation and public protest (Fackler, 2009). The alignment was moved away from Lake Oswego, farther east and south into Clackamas County and farther east in Portland, away from majority white and wealthier cities, reinforcing social and economic inequity (Invisible Walls, 2019).

Because of these discriminatory transportation policies and politics, a geographic mismatch exists between job locations, essential resources, community services, and housing that is affordable (Oregonian, 2012). This disproportionality affects communities of color, immigrant communities, people experiencing low income, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, gender non-conforming, and queer (LGBTQ+) individuals and people living with a disability (Federal Register, 2021). Members of these communities have fewer transportation options and travel farther between destinations, which increases transportation costs, dependence on unreliable travel options, and adds significantly more time in traffic congestion. Collectively, these transportation and land use decisions have resulted in discrimination, leading to trauma and

continued effects of inequitable public planning practices for these historically and currently excluded and underserved individuals and communities.

*Consistent with the requirements of 23 U.S.C. 168, the information in this document, and the public and agency input received, may be adopted or incorporated by reference into a future environmental review process to meet the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act.*

### **Americans with Disabilities Act and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964**

Si desea obtener información sobre este proyecto traducida al español, sírvase llamar al 503-731-4128.

Nếu quý vị muốn thông tin về dự án này được dịch sang tiếng Việt, xin gọi 503-731-4128.

Если вы хотите чтобы информация об этом проекте была переведена на русский язык, пожалуйста, звоните по телефону 503-731-4128.

如果您想瞭解這個項目，我們有提供繁體中文翻譯，請致電：503-731-4128。

如果您想了解这个项目，我们有提供简体中文翻译，请致电：503-731-4128。

For Americans with Disabilities Act or Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 accommodations, translation/interpretation services, or more information call 503-731-4128, TTY (800) 735-2900 or Oregon Relay Service 7-1-1.

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Memo: Problem Statement for Regional Mobility Pricing Project  
Updated June 25, 2021

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