



MEMORANDUM

TO: Southwest Washington Regional Transportation Council Board of Directors
FROM: Matt Ransom, Executive Director 
DATE: January 28, 2020
SUBJECT: ODOT Tolling Program Update

AT A GLANCE

Oregon Department of Transportation will present a briefing regarding the ongoing project development studies related to a proposed freeway tolling program on I-5 and I-205 in Oregon.

BACKGROUND

In July 2017, the Oregon State Legislature passed a \$5.3 billion transportation package that included tax increases to fund major interstate expansion projects (ex. the I-5 Rose Quarter project) and authorized a Traffic Congestion Relief Program. The stated purpose of the Traffic Congestion Relief Program (tolling) is to reduce traffic congestion. The legislation directed the Oregon Transportation Commission (OTC) to seek Federal approval to implement Value Pricing (tolling) on Interstate 5 and Interstate 205, from the Washington state line south to where these roadways intersect. Specific study of Value Pricing concepts was completed as part of the Portland Metro Area Value Pricing Feasibility Analysis (Feasibility Analysis).

The OTC established a Policy Advisory Committee (PAC) to advise them regarding the type, location, and potential mitigation strategies for value pricing during their Feasibility Analysis. The PAC was a regional stakeholder committee and included three representatives from government entities in Washington State. Those representatives include: Mayor (*elect*) Anne McEnerny-Ogle, City of Vancouver; Councilor Eileen Quiring, Clark County; and Kris Strickler, Regional Administrator for Washington State Department of Transportation.

The [ODOT PAC process concluded with recommendations](#) to the Oregon Transportation Commission to implement a tolling program and proposed specific project concepts for I-5 and I-205. The [Oregon Transportation Commission authorized an application](#) for tolling concept/project review with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). [FHWA provided a written response](#) to ODOT with recommendations for further corridor studies, prior to final decision making.

ODOT staff will present an update pertaining to the additional studies now underway in fulfillment of FHWA’s guidance for implementing tolling projects along segments of I-5 and I-205 in Oregon.

RTC REGION CONTEXT

The RTC Board of Directors and RTC staff were engaged in various stages of the ODOT PAC process, and RTC technical staff is currently involved in a traffic modeling technical committee

consulting to ODOT's current study efforts. The following synopsis provides a high level recap of RTC's past and current consultations with ODOT and a brief regional context discussion.

ODOT PAC Process

Beginning in January 2018, and monthly through June 2018, RTC staff briefed the Board of Directors with status reports in regards to the ODOT PAC study efforts. That culminated with the [Board of Director's adopting formal comments and input](#) to the ODOT PAC study process at the June 5, 2018 Board meeting. A letter with the Board's input was transmitted to the co-chairs of the PAC and the Chair of the OTC, and the Executive Director attended a public hearing of the OTC held on July 12, 2018, to provide testimony and to submit the RTC letter into the hearing record. (A copy of the June 13, 2018 letter from RTC is attached.)

Current Status

ODOT has convened a technical committee of regional traffic modeling experts from Metro and RTC, to provide input on methods and techniques for estimating regional traffic impacts. This technical working committee is presumed to continue to provide ad-hoc support to ODOT and their consultants as ODOT's studies proceed. The technical committee provides no policy, project development or oversight function.

RTC Region Historical Context and Tolling

Beginning with a [memorandum presented at the January 2018 Board meeting](#), RTC staff has informed the Board of Directors of relevant historical context of how tolling has been used in Washington State to fund major bridge and corridor improvement projects. Further, RTC staff shared current Washington State legislative policy related to the use of tolling and provided examples of the five currently authorized toll corridors administered by the [WSDOT tolling program office](#).

Within the RTC region, the historical record finds that five of the six bridges connecting Washington and Oregon have been built and or currently utilize tolls for financing purposes. The record finds that the I-5 (Interstate Bridges), US 197 (The Dalles Bridge) and US 97 (Sam Hill Memorial Bridge) were each funded utilizing tolls as a finance strategy. Tolls were removed after the costs of project construction were repaid in each of those cases. In the cases of the Bridge of the Gods and the Hood River Bridge, tolls are currently in effect, and toll revenues are utilized in part to fund ongoing operations and maintenance functions. The only state/state connecting bridge in the RTC region that did not use tolls for construction financing was the I-205 (Glenn Jackson Memorial Bridge). Lastly, it is presumed (from prior studies and current state and federal funding assumptions) that the planned replacement of the I-5 Interstate Bridges will include tolling as a component of the final construction financing strategy.

Attachment: June 13, 2018 Letter from RTC to: Co-Chairs of the Portland Region Value Pricing Policy Advisory Committee and Chair of the Oregon Transportation Commission



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Member Jurisdictions

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City of Ridgefield
City of La Center
Town of Yacolt
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Port of Skamania County
Port of Klickitat
Metro
Oregon DOT
14th Legislative District
17th Legislative District
18th Legislative District
20th Legislative District
49th Legislative District

June 13, 2018

Mr. Sean O'Hollaren
Mr. Alando Simpson
Co-Chairs of the Portland Region Value Pricing Policy Advisory Committee
Oregon Department of Transportation Region 1
123 NW Flanders Street
Portland, OR 97209

Ms. Tammy Baney
Chair, Oregon Transportation Commission
355 Capital St. NE
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Salem, OR 97301-3871

RE: Portland Metro Area Value Pricing Study and Traffic Congestion Relief Program

Dear PAC Co-Chairs and Chair of the Oregon Transportation Commission:

The Southwest Washington Regional Transportation Council, which is the federally designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for Clark County Washington, is providing the following Input (Attachment I) as you consider the potential locations for implementing Value Pricing through a Traffic Congestion Relief Program as mandated by the Oregon Legislature in HB 2017.

As the MPO serving southwest Washington state constituencies within this bi-state region, we recognize the immense burden that deteriorating highway performance and forecast population growth will impose on this bi-state region. Keeping pace with those pressures will require innovations in how we collectively fund and implement a coherent regional transportation strategy. We need to work together to implement the Regional Transportation Plans which position this region for economic prosperity and creation of a seamless multi-modal bi-state transportation network.

With those goals in mind, we have been monitoring the development of your Value Pricing Feasibility Study. Our observations about toll program implementation, drawn from Washington State, find that tolling highways is a complex technical and political endeavor. We believe that the traveling public will expect funded projects and corridor performance enhancements as a result.

June 13, 2018

We comment that a future Value Pricing program incorporate the following elements: identify and fund specific planned regional system improvements, establish a comprehensive and *bi-state* mitigation program, and define the outcomes you intend to achieve *prior to* program start. We believe incorporating those elements into a program best promotes regional progress, corridor performance, and transparency of strategy along the immensely valuable bi-state transportation corridors.

We request that you notify us regarding your intentions and solicit our feedback. Please contact me and our Executive Director for follow-up. We look forward to hearing from you and providing our insights and perspectives as we pursue regional transportation system improvements.

Sincerely,

SOUTHWEST WASHINGTON
REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION COUNCIL



Ron Onslow
Chair of the Board



Matt Ransom
Executive Director

Attachment I

Southwest Washington Regional Transportation Council (June 5, 2018)

Input to the Oregon Transportation Commission Value Pricing Application and Project Development Process

Partnership and Consultation: Metropolitan area and bi-state planning and project coordination has resulted in many beneficial regional infrastructure improvements over many years. It is expected that continued partnership on projects of mutual bi-state interest will occur and that ODOT will engage in consultation with affected partner agencies. RTC will request consultation as part of future NEPA project evaluation processes in order to assess bi-state and regional transportation system and policy impacts.

Regionally Significant Project Implementation: A regionally significant project improvement plan should be prepared identifying the planned regional and bi-state bottleneck removal and corridor projects (e.g., highway, transit, *other* modal) that will be funded from toll proceeds. Implementation of value pricing should financially support construction of those projects. Most notable among the planned bi-state bottleneck removal projects is replacement of the existing I-5 Columbia River bridges. I-5 corridor value pricing strategies should support (financial or otherwise) a future I-5 Columbia River bridge replacement project, thereby advancing the project priority and funding plans of the respective metropolitan area Regional Transportation Plans.

Regional Mitigation: Identify and mitigate at the bi-state level, direct and indirect impacts created by a value pricing project. Mitigation responses should be tied to the corridor of impact and should be proportional. Legislative remedies need to be pursued to enable project mitigation actions in Washington State, in order to fairly address bi-state impacts, or avoidance of non-mitigatable impacts should be pursued. *(For example: a mitigation response to an I-5 value pricing project could be expanding bi-state express bus transit services provided by C-TRAN, thereby providing an alternative and improved regional transit for affected Clark County stakeholders.)*

Regional Systems Monitoring: Regional corridor outcomes and performance metrics should be defined prior to beginning a value pricing pilot project. Through monitoring, propose corridor specific project mitigations and programs to ameliorate social/economic impacts created by a value pricing project. Corridor monitoring and mitigation towards the outcomes should be continuous for the duration of a pilot project.

Decision Making: RTC intends to remain involved in monitoring and providing input into the development and implementation of a value pricing project upon the regional transportation network. Disclosure of future project decision-making milestones and input opportunities should be communicated to regional and bi-state governmental agencies and the public at large.