

Moving to Our Future:

Pricing Options for **Equitable Mobility**



PBOT
PORTLAND BUREAU OF TRANSPORTATION



March 9th, 2021

To: Commissioner Hardesty, Commissioner Rubio, Director Chris Warner, and Director Andrea Durbin:

Re: City of Portland advocacy related to ODOT's Toll Program

We are writing with recommendations to the City of Portland related to your involvement and advocacy around the ODOT Toll Program. As a Task Force we have spent a year considering how various forms of pricing may impact mobility, equity, and climate goals. We have created a framework for considering what a more equitable, safe, and sustainable mobility system would look like and have begun to consider how different pricing strategies may or may not help to create such a system. We are not yet done with our deliberations. However, with the ODOT Highway Toll Program moving forward, we want to share these early recommendations with you.

We believe that highway tolling, if implemented intentionally to manage demand on our transportation system (i.e. designed as congestion pricing), has the potential to contribute to more climate-friendly and equitable outcomes. Our current unmanaged highway system contributes to climate change, air pollution, serious and fatal traffic crashes, burdensome transportation costs, and a host of other problems, many of which disproportionately burden Black and Indigenous communities, other people of color, low-income people and persons with disabilities. Rising congestion on our regional highways also poses significant costs to our economy and quality of life. Expanding highways, however, will only make these negative impacts worse.

We do not want to see an increasing reliance on highway infrastructure and instead believe we should use our existing infrastructure as efficiently as possible. We believe tolling has the potential to be a tool to manage our system more efficiently, reducing the need to spend limited resources on expensive highway projects and preserving funds for multimodal investment. However, if the region is to implement tolling for demand management, it cannot do so without an explicit commitment to prioritize the needs of Black and Indigenous people, other people of color, low-income Portlanders, and persons with disabilities.

We respectfully ask the City to consider the following specific recommendations and advocate for these objectives as a key stakeholder in the ODOT Toll Program process:

Tolling goal:

- The primary goal of highway tolling should be managing traffic demand and using the existing system as efficiently as possible to move people and goods in a more

sustainable way. While tolling can also be a revenue generating tool, this should not be the top priority.

- To better align with demand management objectives, we recommend ODOT change the name to a “congestion pricing program.”
- To achieve mobility, climate and equity outcomes, toll prices should be variable based on level of congestion. More analysis and transparency is needed throughout the process about possible toll rates and limits.
- We further recommend additional exploration of policy designs that consider fuel efficiency and vehicle occupancy to support climate goals.

Financial, technology and enforcement impacts on Black and Indigenous people, other people of color, low-income drivers, and persons with disabilities:

- Discounts, exemptions, or rebates must be provided for low-income drivers. More evaluation and community engagement are needed to determine what specific design would be most equitable and would most minimize overall burdens, while still achieving demand management outcomes.
- Technology and payment systems must be designed to reduce barriers for individuals with limited access to bank accounts. These systems should also include strong privacy and enforcement protections. The toll program should build off existing means-testing systems wherever possible to not further burden low-income people and persons with disabilities.
- Tickets and fines for non-compliance should be means-based (i.e. structured by income level) to mitigate disproportionate impacts.
- Local and regional stakeholders must be involved in designing the toll program to ensure equitable outcomes.

Use and allocation of tolling revenue:

- To reduce traffic demand on the highways, we must provide people with robust multimodal travel alternatives. Tolling revenue must be available to create and support this broad multimodal transportation system, not just highway improvements.
- The current Oregon state constitution restricts use of funds generated through taxes on motor vehicles to only capital improvements in the roadway. While capital bike, pedestrian and transit improvements are possible, it does not allow for investments in things like transit service. Given that, we recommend the City advocate for amending the constitutional restriction to allow for these types of non-capital, multimodal investments.
- Tolling revenue must also be available to ensure that traffic diversion from the highways does not make local streets less safe and does not adversely impact transit.
- To address the impacts disproportionately felt by local community members (e.g. congestion, poor air quality, and safety impacts), local and regional stakeholders must have a say in revenue allocation decisions.

We are also aware ODOT has convened an Equity and Mobility Advisory Committee (EMAC) to consider questions around tolling and equity. We request this letter be shared with the EMAC by the City's representative on that body.

Thank you for your consideration and attention to these recommendations. We look forward to advancing further recommendations in the coming months.

Sincerely,

The Pricing Options for Equitable Mobility (POEM) Task Force