

# Moving to Our Future:

## Pricing Options for **Equitable Mobility**



**PBOT**  
PORTLAND BUREAU OF TRANSPORTATION



## Frequently Asked Questions

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### Why consider a new approach to pricing now?

Our transportation system today doesn't work for everyone. And with 600,000 new residents expected to live here by 2040, many of the problems we're experiencing now—like worsening traffic, increased risk of crashes and rising carbon emissions—are due to get worse. These challenges disproportionately impact Black, indigenous and communities of color (BIPOC), low-income Portlanders and persons with disabilities.

Regional interest in pricing—sometimes called “congestion pricing,” “value pricing” or “mobility pricing”—has increased in recent years as we grapple with how to combat these challenges and better manage our roads. Pricing refers to strategies that involve charging people for driving or using roadway space. These charges can vary based on different factors, for instance how congested the roads are, the time of day, or what type of vehicle is using the road. By applying a charge and sending a signal of “value” for using that road space, pricing can help people consider the impact of their travel choices and encourage certain behaviors (like carpooling, traveling at off-peak hours, or using other, non-driving options when possible).

Here in Portland, we already put a price on things like parking spaces to help maintain and manage parts of our transportation system. But a lot of our system is unpriced and, to date, we haven't implemented any variable pricing, where charges change based on different factors. Other cities have effectively used pricing to reduce congestion, cut pollution, and manage demand for road space. Pricing can also generate funds to reinvest in a better mobility future.

But pricing can also make driving more expensive, which could disproportionately burden some users of our system. At the City of Portland, we are committed to leading with racial equity and pursuing transportation justice. So, before deciding what role pricing might play here in Portland, we have to explore if and how pricing can help reduce disparities and make our system work better for everyone.

### What is the POEM Community Task Force? Who served on the Task Force?

In summer 2019, City Council directed the Portland Bureau of Transportation (PBOT) and the Bureau of Planning and Sustainability (BPS) to convene a community Task Force to advise if and how new pricing strategies could potentially be used more intentionally to improve mobility, address the climate crisis and advance equity for people historically underserved by the transportation system in Portland, including, but not limited to, BIPOC, low-income Portlanders and people with disabilities.

PBOT and BPS convened the POEM Community Task Force in January 2020, following a two-month, open recruitment process in late 2019. The Task Force was comprised of 19-members representing diverse perspectives, interests, and expertise from across our community. The

group met monthly for two hours and transitioned to virtual convenings in April 2020 following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

All meetings were open to the public, and community members were invited to share comments with project staff at [poemcomments@portlandoregon.gov](mailto:poemcomments@portlandoregon.gov).

### **Where can I view POEM Task Force recommendations?**

All meeting materials and final recommendations adopted by the Task Force can be found on the [POEM website](#). Task Force member bios can be read [here](#).

### **What is “equitable mobility?”**

As the name suggests, the POEM project seeks to explore the relationship between pricing policies and equitable mobility. Defining equitable mobility was a key initial step for the POEM Task Force. Over its first few meetings, the group developed a working draft [Equitable Mobility Framework](#). The Task Force used the Framework throughout its process to guide conversation and analysis, explore tradeoffs, and inform decision making.

The Equitable Mobility Framework was inspired by and adapted from the [Greenlining Institute’s Mobility Equity Framework](#). It is considered a living document and will continue to be refined by PBOT as it is used in future projects.

### **What pricing strategies were explored through the POEM project?**

Transportation pricing can take many forms. The POEM project explored five types of pricing strategies:

- Prices on parking
- Prices on vehicle-based commercial services (e.g., private for-hire trips and urban delivery)
- Highway tolling
- Cordons or area pricing
- Road usage or vehicle miles traveled (VMT) charges

While transportation charges are sometimes designed to raise revenue or cover programmatic costs, the POEM project focused on the role of pricing as a tool to manage travel demand or to better capture the true costs and impacts of a trip. The project also focuses on exploring new pricing policies and ideas, not reviewing existing prices in place today.

### **How can pricing make our transportation system more equitable?**

Past transportation decisions and historic disinvestment have disproportionately harmed BIPOC Portlanders, low-income individuals and persons with disabilities. This has resulted in demolition of neighborhoods, gentrification, longer travel times, unequal access to transportation options and increased traffic and personal safety risks. In order to achieve a more equitable system, we must improve outcomes for these communities. This includes outcomes related to not only multimodal mobility, but also climate, health, safety, and economic opportunity.

Pricing has the potential to address the inequitable benefits and burdens of our current system, both through reducing traffic on our roadways and supporting investment in other improvements that improve equitable mobility. Around the world, pricing systems have been designed to

maximize benefits and minimize impacts on those who are most vulnerable, such as through income exemptions and fee assistance programs. Research shows adequate travel choices are key to ensuring pricing systems don't have disproportionate impacts.

For more information on how pricing can lead to more equitable outcomes, read the recent [TransForm report, "Pricing Roads, Advancing Equity."](#)

### **How can pricing help us move toward our climate goals?**

Approximately 42% of our local carbon emissions come from the transportation sector and these emissions have increased in recent years, despite cars becoming more fuel efficient. To meet our climate goals and avoid the worst effects of the climate crisis, we all need to find more sustainable ways of getting around the city. The existing strategies we have tried have not done enough to reduce transportation emissions. Pricing is a strategy proven to help encourage more sustainable, efficient traveling behavior, such as carpooling, taking transit, biking, walking, or rolling as a pedestrian. Pricing may also be used to encourage zero or lower emission vehicles. Many cities that have implemented pricing strategies have seen significant reductions in greenhouse gases—Stockholm, London, Singapore, and Milan all reduced CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by 14% or more due to congestion pricing!

### **Can pricing alone advance equitable mobility?**

No, pricing is only one tool in the toolbox. In order to combat vehicle congestion and improve mobility for people and goods throughout the city, we will need to use a combination of transportation tools. This includes:

- *Efficiently allocating road right-of-way:* Giving space and priority on our streets to modes of transportation that move more people equitably and sustainably
- *Building safe and accessible infrastructure:* Constructing projects and maintaining assets to keep our community moving
- *Directly providing mobility services and options:* Expanding non-auto travel choices, like transit, bikeshare and micro-mobility services
- *Offering incentives and programs:* Helping encourage efficient and climate-friendly travel options through financial incentives and educational programming
- *Equitable pricing and reinvestment:* Applying costs and price signals to capture impacts, encourage certain behaviors, and support mobility investments

These strategies reinforce one another, and all play an important part in making our system work for everyone.

### **How are you engaging the community in this conversation?**

The POEM Task Force, comprised of 19 community members, was convened to advise the City on if and how pricing should be used to advance our goals. The Task Force met monthly between January 2020 and July 2021. Task Force meetings were open to the public, and public comment was gathered throughout the Task Force process.

The POEM project was the start of a conversation. PBOT and BPS staff will utilize the lessons gained from this process to guide future work around pricing, and the Task Force's recommendations will be shared with City Council in fall 2021. As we move toward

implementation of these recommendations, more public engagement and community input will be critical to further shape and design pricing options that truly advance equitable mobility.

### **What will you do with any revenue generated from new pricing strategies?**

The POEM Task Force helped identify priorities for revenue generated through potential pricing policies. The City of Portland's Transportation System Plan and other planning documents, like the PBOT Strategic Plan and Climate Action Plan, set out targets and goals related to equity, mode shift and carbon emissions. These strategic priorities and public input will be carefully considered in determining how revenue from a particular pricing strategy could be invested.

### **How are you coordinating with other regional partners?**

The City of Portland, Metro and the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) are all working on projects that consider ways to price transportation to address challenges related to equity, climate change, congestion, and safety. Each agency makes decisions for different parts of our region's transportation system.

Each has separate projects underway to help address issues specific to those geographies. The three agencies are coordinating their efforts to leverage each other's work, learn from one another and share findings. Learn more about [ODOT's Tolling Projects](#) and [Metro Regional Congestion Pricing Study](#).

### **How can I learn more?**

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