

## Understanding regional congestion pricing options

*Metro addresses the transportation challenges faced by people in greater Portland. It isn't clear whether congestion pricing could help meet the region's needs — this study aims to find out.*

People in greater Portland are suffering the consequences of more traffic. Heavy, rush hour traffic increases pollution, delays and unpredictable travel times for everyone. Time spent stuck in traffic reduces time with family, community and at work.

Heavy traffic impacts other regional concerns like climate, equity and safety. It disproportionately affects communities of color and people with lower incomes who often need to travel long distances between their homes and their jobs. Busy streets affect not only those in cars — buses get stuck in traffic, too.

The study will specifically explore how congestion pricing could improve mobility, equity, and safety, and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

This is a regional problem and solutions tried in any one jurisdiction will reverberate across the region. Metro's involvement is needed to make sure that regional impact and regional priorities are considered.

### **Congestion pricing**

Congestion pricing involves charging drivers directly for their use of busy roads, bridges, or parking during the busiest times.

Not everyone has the ability to change their work schedule or use transit to avoid congestion or save money by not paying fees for the road. Congestion pricing can encourage people with flexibility to drive at different times or use transit to help reduce congestion for everyone.



Proceeds can be used to expand transit service, repair aging infrastructure, or provide subsidies for low income drivers. Travelers in cars and buses gain predictability when roads flow more freely, and fewer cars on the road leads to overall safety improvements. When cities grow, getting the most out of existing roads is important because there is limited space and money to build more.

Congestion pricing is a relatively new way of addressing heavy traffic that has been successful at improving mobility and reducing pollution in high-traffic cities around the world. Metro is exploring whether this approach could relieve traffic congestion here.

### **Equity**

Historically, decisions about the transportation system did not consider or prioritize the impact on communities of color. Metro's approach to this study is to understand the racial equity impact of options for regional congestion pricing, examining how congestion pricing can reduce congestion without worsening racial inequality or safety. The study will also explore if and where congestion pricing could be used as a tool to proactively improve racial equity and safety in greater Portland.

## Climate change

Congestion pricing has the potential to help Oregon address climate change. Transportation is the greatest contributor to greenhouse gas emissions in Oregon. Statewide goals have been set to decrease them by 2050. However, current trends show that the goals are not likely to be met unless new policies are implemented. (Information from the 2018 Oregon Global Warming Commission report). Congestion pricing has been shown to improve air quality in polluted areas. Metro wants to know if it could make a difference here.

## Pricing options

The study will evaluate four types of congestion pricing to understand how they might be able to improve congestion, climate, equity and safety in our region.

1. Cordon Requires drivers to pay to enter a section of a city, like downtown (and sometimes to drive within that area)
2. Vehicle miles traveled/Road user charge Drivers pay a fee per mile traveled during busy times of day
3. Roadway A fee or toll for using a particular road, bridge or highway
4. Parking Requires payment for parking in certain areas

## Project overview

Metro will evaluate these different types of congestion pricing for their potential effectiveness in greater Portland.

The study will consider priorities established in Metro's Regional Transportation Plan: congestion, equity, climate and safety. Understanding the impact of congestion pricing on communities of color, people with disabilities, and people with lower incomes is crucial in determining potential usefulness of pricing strategies. Metro staff will seek feedback on study methods from equity experts.

While the study is underway, Metro will provide updates and seek feedback from Metro advisory committees and Metro Council at regularly scheduled meetings. These committees include the Transportation Policy Alternatives Committee (TPAC), the Committee on Racial Equity (CORE) and the Joint Policy Advisory Committee on Transportation (JPACT). A final report will be presented to Metro Council and JPACT when the study is complete.

## Schedule

This evaluation will take up to a year to complete. Metro staff expects to publish a report summarizing the study findings in late 2020 or early 2021.

The study will not result in specific actions like rule or policy changes or proposed projects. Policy leaders will use what we learn to inform policy, current projects, and decide on next steps.

## Others studying congestion pricing in the region

Other efforts are being made to address congestion, such as investments in the overall transportation system, improving transit and promoting alternate modes of transportation, but additional strategies are needed to address this growing problem. The Portland Bureau of Transportation and the Oregon Department of Transportation are conducting their own studies of pricing, and Metro is coordinating with them, looking at the issue from a regional perspective.