

Overview: Pricing Policy in the Metro Region

Traffic Relief Options Study (1996-99)

Metro conducted this 3-year study in partnership with the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) to determine the feasibility of value pricing as a congestion relief option for the Portland metropolitan area. The study was funded by the USDOT as a federal demonstration project. Several pricing strategies were considered, including spot pricing a single location, partial and whole facility, corridor pricing and area pricing.

Travel modeling showed that pricing could bring real travel time-savings to commuters, increase corridor capacity and reduce congestion. However, gaining public and political support was the largest barrier to implementing a project. Focus groups held during the study were firmly opposed to value pricing, although public outreach as part of the project built some support for the concept. Metro also worked with the Urban League of Portland to evaluate the equity impacts of different strategies that were tested, and found that low-income groups would disproportionately experience costs associated with pricing.

The project Task Force ultimately concluded that the region was not ready for value pricing on existing facilities and declined to advance a pilot project to test pricing on the ground. Instead, the task force recommended that value pricing be considered whenever major new highway capacity is added. This recommendation was incorporated into the 2000 Regional Transportation Plan.

2000 Regional Transportation Plan

The Metro Council and JPACT adopted a peak period pricing policy and policy direction for future corridor refinement plans and studies, as recommended by the TRO study. This action was reflected in a new RTP policy on peak period pricing and specific provisions for pricing to be considered as part of several upcoming corridor studies, including the Sunrise Highway, I-5-99W Connector, Sunset Highway, Interstate-5, Interstate-205, Highway 99E/224 and Highway 217.

Oregon Innovative Partnerships Program (2005-07)

From 2005-07, ODOT worked with the Oregon Transportation Improvement Group, a Macquarie-led consortium, to explore the feasibility of public-private partnerships and tolling to help fund highway projects on Interstate-205 (South), Sunrise Highway, and the Newberg-Dundee Bypass. The study found that the I-205 (South) Project could be self-supporting and delivered as a public-private partnership, while the Sunrise project could not at that time. In January 2007, the Oregon Transportation Commission (OTC) made a decision to step back from this effort and defer to other regional planning processes to continue exploring public-private options.

Oregon Tolling Policy Development (2006-12)

In 2006, the OTC adopted policies to support the consideration of tolling in Oregon as a means to improve the capacity and operational efficiency of the state highway system. The 2007 Oregon Legislature further directed the OTC to develop tolling policy recommendations and directed ODOT develop and implement one or more congestion pricing pilot programs in the Portland metropolitan area by September 2012. In response, the OTC commissioned a series of white papers that were completed in 2009 and adopted in July 2012 as policy amendments to the Oregon Transportation Plan and Oregon Highway Plan. ODOT identified two highway pricing projects and one parking pricing project for further consideration.

2010 Regional Transportation Plan

As part of a major overhaul of the RTP to become an outcomes-based plan, the Metro Council and JPACT adopted a significant revision of RTP policies and a significantly narrowed set of corridor refinement plans. No changes were made to the policy direction for remaining corridor plans.

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Oregon Road Usage Fees

In 2001, the Oregon legislature authorized a study of options to replace existing state fuel taxes. After two pilot programs and extensive ODOT study, Oregon's Road Usage Charge Program (OReGO) became operational on July 1, 2015 in an initial phase that will allow up to 5,000 subscribers to participate in the program. While not designed as a congestion pricing program, OReGO does represent a departure from the past for how roads might be funded at the state level in the future, and tests technologies that could incorporate pricing.