

To: Joint Committee on Transportation  
From: Douglas R. Allen  
Subject: HB 3065-8 amendment  
Hearing Date: May 11, 2021

Co-Chairs Beyer and McLain, and Committee Members:

In 2017, I watched this committee put forward the final version of HB 2017, which mandated an historic and far-sighted program of congestion pricing for freeways in the Portland region. It had tight deadlines for implementing pricing on I-5 and I-205, and permitted the Oregon Transportation Commission to investigate and adopt a much wider program if that made sense. This congestion pricing program was an important part of the compromises that were made in order to pass HB 2017, and it was supported by a range of business, local government, and environmental interests working through The Nature Conservancy.

Unfortunately, this concept -- variable tolling at the lowest levels needed to reduce peak period congestion -- has come under attack by proponents of freeway widening projects that were not fully funded by HB 2017. Initially, they persuaded ODOT to move slowly on congestion pricing, and look at tolls on I-205 between Stafford Road and Oregon City in order to move that unfunded expansion ahead.

Now these proponents, including ODOT, want to institute much higher tolls, 24 hours a day, in order to fund multiple freeway expansions, when the lower tolls required for congestion management would make much of that expansion unnecessary.

So we get not only higher tolls, but more traffic diversion to local streets, and no remaining revenue to fund transit projects that would provide travel alternatives to people, especially those who are elderly, low-income, or have disabilities, who find travel by personal automobile physically or financially challenging.

Even worse, the expenditures are initially financed by debt, with the driving public paying it back through high tolls, with no chance to re-think whether this was the right approach to our climate change crisis.

HB 3065-8 has some improvements over the -5 version, but the central message is still the same: **Borrow money, expand freeways, and charge high tolls to pay back the bonds.**

The alternative? **Charge low tolls now, only during peak times, and spend the revenue on transit, pedestrian, bicycle, and safety projects as it comes in. Adjust tolls downward or to zero at appropriate times of the day in order to maximize existing freeway capacity, and only spend revenue on roadway expansion where a clear need remains that cannot be served by alternate modes of travel. Do not put us in debt for a perceived short term benefit to a few peak period commuters when much wiser choices are available.**