

**Testimony of Metro Councilor Ashton Simpson**  
**Joint Committee on Transportation Special Committee on**  
**Transportation Planning**  
**December 2, 2023**



Metro is the elected regional government that serves nearly 1.7 million people in the 24 cities and three counties of the Portland metropolitan area. We provide a broad range of public services that includes land use and transportation planning, solid waste and recycling operations, housing and homeless services, management of parks and natural areas, and operation of major visitor facilities like the Oregon Convention Center and the Oregon Zoo.

I want to thank the committee for making it their top priority to come to the region and hear directly from community. I am going to focus my comments on trust and accountability and the impacts to low-income people. My Metro Council colleagues will also be offering additional feedback on other important topics such as diversion, congestion pricing, and climate at other hearings of this committee.

Metro has been increasingly disappointed at the tolling program's development. We supported HB 2017 in part because of its inclusion of a tolling program. We accepted an additional tax on our community members because we thought that it would simultaneously manage congestion, provide a revenue source for major projects and address acute community needs. Instead, we've watched as ODOT has developed a program focused primarily on raising revenue for the interstate system with limited regard to other critical goals. Overall, there has been a lack of engagement with directly impacted people, little sense of co-creation with local governments, and a refusal to solve for multiple problems at once. This has left many of us with little to no trust of ODOT.

My constituents tell me all the time that they are worried about their ability to pay for a toll. Many of them rely on 205 to get to work, to school and to the grocery store and don't have other options on when and where to travel. They're already forced to make tough choices between paying rent, putting gas in their cars and providing food for their families. People with low-incomes, people of color, and other historically marginalized groups are also already experiencing greater impacts from climate change. A congestion pricing program in our region is crucial in reducing greenhouse gas emissions from transportation, and any toll program must still have the lowest toll rate possible for people experiencing low incomes to avoid this vulnerable group from feeling a double impact. In addition, strong investments need to be made in transit and other active transportation options for people along the tolled corridor. We need to provide meaningful options for people who cannot afford to pay the toll and those options need to be in place from the beginning of the tolling program.

We are hopeful that the Governor's pause on tolling and the creation of this committee represents a reset and a refocus on the tolling program's critical goals. We are concerned that the current trajectory of the program will not create the outcomes that we need and support for a tolling program in our region. We need clear legislative direction to the agency to deliver on the promises of HB 2017 – to develop a tolling program in our region that implements congestion pricing, that listens to and responds to local resident's concerns around diversion and a lack of transit options, and provides real options for those who cannot afford to pay. Additional direction, more prescriptive direction, is needed from the Legislature to rebuild trust and ensure the success of a future tolling program in our region. We remain open and committed to working with our state legislative partners, the agency, and our region to ensure

that the transportation needs of our state and region are addressed. Thank you for your time and attention this evening.