

I apologize for the late testimony. I just found out about this meeting as it was not well publicized. I hope these comments can be considered for your meeting.

I had the pleasure of serving on the STRAC (Statewide Toll Rulemaking Advisory Committee) this past year. I wanted to give my comments that came out of this committee. I am a minority and women owned small business just blocks away from I-205. I also live within a 0.25 mile of the freeway as well. While I am not completely opposed to tolling in general, I think the current tolling plan is inequitable or unfair to the local community. I understand the need for funding with electric vehicles not contributing via the gas tax anymore. I also have personally lived where managed toll lanes have worked in other parts of the country. However, the current plan to toll only one "bridge" does not take into account the hardship this places on the people and businesses in the immediate area. I have "bridge" in quotes because it is not really a bridge. It is an overpass. I feel it a little disingenuous to use the Federal law for tolling a "bridge" to justify tolling all lanes. It is technically a "bridge" but when you think of a bridge, you think of the St. John's or other iconic architecturally designed crossing. This is just part of the freeway, and in order to toll all lanes, ODOT must call it a "bridge". Also, West Linn residents also have to pay millions to replace the water line that had many years of useful life to improve this "bridge". This "bad PR" is what is making tolling a hard sell to the local community. I do think ODOT could have done a better job of framing tolling from a PR standpoint. There may have not been as much push back from the local community if there was a better attempt to toll in more places than just this one spot by calling it a "bridge".

I also know you need to start tolling somewhere, but rolling out just one toll "bridge" which impacts only one community is just not fair. For instance, my business used to be in Lake Oswego. If I was still in Lake Oswego, customers would not have to pay a toll to patronize my business. However, since I'm now in West Linn, customers are going to have to pay a toll or be re-routed off the freeway just to come to my business. How is this fair? Do you think a customer will come to visit my business knowing they have to pay a toll to get here? Or will they go to one of my competitors where they don't have to pay a toll to patronize? This is an unfair competitive advantage my competitors have just because it was decided only to toll one place in the whole metro area. Likewise if I lived just a few miles away in Tigard and commuted to Portland I wouldn't have to pay a toll to go to work every day. But just because I live in West Linn, I now have to pay a toll just to go to work. Again, it is unfair to start tolling in just one location. Tolling should be rolled out to the whole metro area to be equitable.

I'm also concerned with how local businesses will be able to compete for employees. I was the former President of Historic Willamette Main Street so I know the hardships our local business have. Most of our local businesses are restaurants with lower wage workers. Most of them also have a hard time keeping staff with the current employment environment. Also, the cost of living is such in West Linn that these employees usually don't live locally, and thus would likely have to pay a toll, or find alternative roads which could add to their commute time just to go to work. Again, why would someone choose to work at a place where they have to pay a toll (or leave early) to go to work, versus another restaurant where they don't have to pay a toll? This is a competitive disadvantage for local businesses when a worker can work anywhere else in the metro area and not have to pay a toll. Again, if tolling was going in at the same time for all the metro region, this would not be a problem.

The other option is to toll all but one lane. I know that ODOT looked at having a "managed lane" which is one lane tolled. But I don't believe the option to toll all but one lane was looked at. Having at least one "free" lane alleviates all the equity issues. Customers can use the free lane to come to my business. Commuters have the option to use the free lane to go to work. Employees of local restaurants can come to work and not have to pay a toll. Those with lower incomes have the option to sacrifice a longer commute time in exchange for saving money on the toll. It is the simplest solution I believe to make tolling equitable for the local communities and businesses.

The Environmental Assessment (EA) stated that traffic on Willamette Falls Dr. (where my business is located, and my home is adjacent to) may have traffic increase 100%. Diversion is already a problem at rush hour. Having traffic increase 100% would make it impossible for customers to come in and out of

my business, and for me to run errands like going to the grocery store (which requires a car because the closest one is a few miles away and up a steep hill, with no local transit options). I believe this too could be alleviated by tolling all but one lane.

While I appreciate ODOT is no longer considering 24 hour tolling, I-205 is only an issue during rush hour. The rest of the time it is a wide open freeway (again, I look out onto it all day from my office window). I understand the argument that tolling all lanes has worked in other parts of the country, However, ODOT admits that the next closest option to cross the river in those tolled areas is a few miles away. We have a unique scenario in that you can divert less than a 1/8 mile and still cross the river without toll (on what I think of as a "real" bridge, the Oregon City Bridge). Weekends especially, I believe very few people will opt to pay a toll. Instead, they will divert to our local roads and bridges instead. Again, this is an unnecessary burden on the local communities. In one of the ODOT presentations, ODOT stated that only 10% of people will pay a toll no matter what. 40% will not pay a toll at all and will divert. That last 40% will make a "game time" decision on whether to pay a toll or not. If there is no traffic on local roads which is most of the time outside of rush hour, how much revenue is actually going to be generated when people have an easy way to divert and not pay the toll? Having one lane no toll would at least keep these people on the freeway and off our local roads. It will also create some congestion which may motivate that 40% of the people to actually use the toll road at the last minute as they run into traffic in the "free" lane.

If the plan continues to be all lanes tolled and only the one toll gantry for now, then I believe some kind of employee discount for tolling would be the best way to keep businesses competitive for staff. Similarly, West Linn and Oregon City residents who live within a certain distance of the toll road should also get some kind of discount or waiver as they will be dealing with the diversion in their neighborhoods. Again, this only needs to be until more toll roads go into the Metro area. This is the only way tolling will be equitable for businesses and residents. While on STRAC, I emailed the ODOT team several other tollways in the country that offer discounts or waivers to the local residents. This was something the ODOT team took under advisement, but never made it to the STRAC for discussion. Most notably is the Bay City Bridge where tolling is being waived for local residents until 2028. <https://www.baycityarea.com/bay-city-bridges/tolls#:~:text=Bay%20City%20residents%3A%20Free%20through,1%2C%202028>. I think something like this would go a long way to helping locals get used to toll roads, and feel like they are "getting something" for having to be the "guinea pigs" for tolling in the Metro region. I also gave the ODOT team some examples of things like "unlimited crossings" that is also mentioned in this article for Bay City. This would allow people to budget for tolling for each month as the amount of tolling would not change month to month. I proposed \$40 to \$50 a month for an "unlimited pass". This would keep people on the freeway as well, helping to reduce diversion.

I will add that tolling has been going on for centuries. In the modern world, it seems a bit strange to be implementing a system that requires building expensive infrastructure just to collect the toll, and has high administrative costs so very little of every dollar collected will be actually generating "revenue". Charging per mile, or higher registration fees, for instance, seems like a simpler, less infrastructure heavy way to accomplish similar fundraising. But I understand tolling is what we are dealing with right now. I believe the best way to make it fair is to either toll all but one lane, don't charge tolls until they are set up for the entire metro area, or give discounts to businesses and residents affected by the one toll bridge. I hope these ideas are helpful and something you would. Thank you taking the time to read my comments.

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