

**Comments to Special Subcommittee on Transportation planning  
December 17, 2023**

**Honorable Co-Chairs Nathanson, Frederick, and Mannix**

I provided testimony verbally on behalf of Metro at the recent Subcommittee hearing in Wilsonville( December 14). I expressed Metro's concerns for improving transit options and for reducing diversion. My testimony focused on Metro's concern for regional values. The broad range of testimony at this meeting reflected the plethora of concerns and also that lack of a consistent information basis for the critical decisions facing local stakeholders, the legislature, ODOT and the OTC.

The following written testimony is representative of my personal position as Metro Councilor but does not necessarily reflect the general opinion of the Metro Council

**Tolling**

Tolling needs to be considered in the context of the revenue need and other options. ODOT has not managed to articulate this consideration. Tolling needs be compared to VMTax and other potential sources of revenue given the need of our transportation systems, especially in light of a potentially diminishing gas tax. A VMTax may be a reasonable partial solution to long term funding, at least on a statewide basis, since it can be graded by vehicle weight and size and applied statewide. Its problem is that is useless in managing congestion, presents some difficulties in revenue allocation, and may be perceived by some as an invasion of privacy.

Tolling, in my opinion, is the only mechanism that can be adjusted to the special regional needs of the Metro region, managed to reduce congestion and GHG emissions, and structured to balance both regional and economic equity.

The problem with HB 2017 was that it did not authorize tolling as a mechanism for general, fair, and varied revenue distribution, but focused instead on specific locations and projects. ODOT interpreted this, perhaps incorrectly, as a limiting philosophy that reduced the need for a broader regional approach.

It is my observation that both statewide and regional approaches may be necessary, but they are not the same.

For a statewide system, a VMTax may be a viable option compared with increases in licenses and other fees, but I have not seen that analysis. However, with or without a VMTax, I would suggest that some form of regional tolling is needed as a supplement in the Metro area and not only on select interstate routes (I-5 and I-205). The Metro area presents unique challenges due to a high population, high intra-regional mobility, and the large number of personal trips as well as commercial/service and industrial vehicle passage. Most throughway corridors carry about 100,000 vehicles per day, in each direction, far in excess of traffic levels in other regions. These traffic volumes also have a higher proportion of large and heavy freight vehicles. Hence, the Metro area may need additional resources to maintain the system, replace bridges, manage

congestion and diversion, and provide for special projects. The Metro area comprises a unique regional system with distinct challenges and it seems inappropriate for the state to manage it in the same manner as a statewide system.

From conversations with many parties, it seems that the need to toll major bridge construction projects is understood, but what is not well understood or explained is the fact that regional tolling may be needed to provide for a higher level of maintenance, provide regional equity, manage (reduce) congestion and diversion, and provide for rational allocation of revenues.

My proposals are simple in concept but would take substantive legislative initiative to accomplish. It is comprised of the following elements:

#### Legislative Actions

- 1) Pass legislation that establishes a regional tolling authority that explicitly provides for input and decision sharing with local jurisdictions and other stakeholders, including specifically Metro. This legislation could also identify revenue allocation priorities for transit, diversion mitigation, safety, and local options.
- 2) Commission an economic revenue and economic impact forecast for different tolling levels of (e.g. \$1, \$2, \$3, and \$4 per gantry - assuming 15 -17 locations) for private vehicles with higher levels for freight and commerce. The IBRT may require separate evaluation and higher tolls. This would be, essentially a "rate elasticity" study.

#### ODOT/OTC Commitments

- 3) Commit to a tolling system overhead of no more than 15%...everyone knows 40% is unacceptably high.
- 4) Recognize that tolling levels matter and that 15-16 tolling stations @ \$1 may be more effective and have fewer economic impacts than 3 locations at \$5 each.
- 5) Make a commitment that a way will be found to protect the residents of Charbonneau from punishing tolls for local trips to downtown Wilsonville.
- 6) Identify potential tolling locations on all regional thoroughways including 99W, OR 217, US 26 and US 30, OR 212-213/224 as well as I-84, I-405, I-205, and I-5. Locations should consider optimization to prevent diversion and provide regional equity (i.e. all travels going approximately the same distance would pay similar tolls).
- 7) Identify the potential gantry locations that are highest priority for congestion control and for potential diversion impacts.

For the Metro region, logic would seem to dictate that a special revenue generation system is needed because of complexity and high traffic loads. This system may need to rely on tolling to fund especially large projects and manage congestion and VMTs. Logic also demands regional equity so that impacts are felt fairly throughout the region. In particular, a system (Regional Tolling Authority and Plan) is needed that avoids the constitutional limitation on use of revenue, provides for substantive local and regional input into the decision-making process, and ensures recognition that lower tolls at more locations are potentially a better economic and political option than higher tolls at a few locations.

### Economic Equity

The equity committee is currently considering a fee structure that offers discounts based on relative income levels. Although this might work, it would seem more rational to establish a standard such that no-one would be paying more than about 3-5% of their monthly income in tolls based on recent tax records. The problem with the discount formula is that it requires active participation (and a lot of public outreach) whereas a tax-filer based system would be more inclusive. Active sign-up might be necessary only for new residents. The Committee should also realize that exemption of "off-peak" vehicles from tolling constitutes an equity violation since off-peak users are more likely to have flexible incomes and schedules.

Comments submitted:

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