

Issue Brief: Community Meetings on Tolling

LPRO

DATE: February 2, 2024

Overview

The Joint Committee on Transportation, Special Subcommittee on Transportation Planning (SSTP) convened a total of four in-person community meetings and one virtual meeting during the 2023/24 legislative interim to hear from community members about the effects and tradeoffs of proposed tolling in the Portland Metro region.

Meetings were held between December 2, 2023, to January 10, 2024, at the following locations:

- Meeting 1: Rose Quarter (North Portland)
- Meeting 2: East Portland
- Meeting 3: Wilsonville / Charbonneau / Lake Oswego / Tualatin
- Meeting 4: Oregon City / West Linn / Gladstone
- Meeting 5: Statewide Public Comment, Virtual and In-Person

Legislators serving each of these communities and regions were contacted by LPRO staff to provide input on invited speakers, local issues of concern, and meeting locations. Agendas for these meetings were posted on the Oregon Legislative Information System (OLIS). A summary of these community meetings follows.

Community Meeting Summary

Meeting 1: I-5 Rose Quarter

December 2, 2023, Portland Community College Cascade Campus

[Link to Recorded Meeting](#)

Invited Speakers

- Chris Smith, No More Freeways
- Tom Markgraf, Tri-Met
- Jesse Beason, Multnomah County Commissioner District 2
- Councilor Mary Nolan, Oregon Metro
- Millicent Williams, Bureau Director, Portland Bureau of Transportation

A total of 33 people provided in-person testimony at this meeting, and 213 pieces of written testimony were submitted.



Meeting 2: I-205 East Portland

December 2, 2023, Portland Community College Southeast Campus

[Link to Recorded Meeting](#)

Invited Speakers

- Cheyenne Holliday, Verde
- Sarah Iannarone, Street Trust

A total of 28 people provided in-person testimony at this meeting, and 36 pieces of written testimony were submitted.

Meeting 3: Wilsonville / Charbonneau / Lake Oswego / Tualatin

December 14, 2023, Wilsonville City Council Chambers

[Link to Recorded Meeting](#)

Invited Speakers

- Mayor Frank Bubenik, Tualatin
- Mayor Joe Buck, City of Lake Oswego
- Mayor Julie Fitzgerald, City of Wilsonville
- Councilor Gerritt Rosenthal, Oregon Metro
- Anne Shevlin, President of the Charbonneau Association
- Kevin O'Malley, Wilsonville Chamber

A total of 31 people provided in-person testimony at this meeting, and 31 pieces of written testimony were submitted.

Meeting 4: Oregon City/West Linn/Gladstone

January 6, 2024, Gladstone High School Auditorium

[Link to Recorded Meeting](#)

Invited Speakers

- Mayor Rory Bialostosky, City of West Linn
- Mayor Denyse McGriff, Oregon City
- Mayor Michael Milch, City of Gladstone
- Christine Lewis, Oregon Metro
- Paul Savas, Clackamas County Commissioner
- Nellie deVries, Clackamas County Business Alliance
- Bridget Dazey, Clackamas Workforce Partnership
- Shatrine Krake, West Linn Chamber
- Jay Jones, North Clackamas Chamber of Commerce

A total of 47 people provided in-person testimony at this meeting, and 49 pieces of written testimony were submitted.



Meeting 5: Statewide Public Comment

January 10, 2024, Joint Transportation, Special Subcommittee on Transportation Planning Hearing

[Link to Recorded Meeting](#)

One member of the public provided testimony at this meeting, and four pieces of written testimony were submitted.

Summary of Invited and Public Testimony

A total of 140 individuals provided public testimony at these meetings, and 333 pieces of written testimony were submitted. Some members of the public who testified during public comment identified themselves as representatives or members of an organization such as staff from local Chambers of Commerce, Families for Safe Streets, Oregon Walks, Sunrise PDX, and the Metro Climate Action Team.

Below are some recurring themes of invited and public testimony from each of these community meetings. They are broadly organized by subject, and the subjects and themes are not listed in any particular order or prioritization. This document provides a summary and does not reflect all the testimony received by the subcommittee.

Recordings of these meetings and written comments are accessible online on the SSTP OLIS page (<https://olis.oregonlegislature.gov/liz/202311/Committees/JTSSTP/Overview>). Links are provided above in the community meeting summary.

Congestion Pricing and Demand Management

The recurring themes from invited and public testimony on congestion pricing and demand management for proposed tolling in the Portland Metro region include:

- Support for congestion pricing during peak travel times for reducing vehicle miles travelled and vehicle emissions, as well as encouraging alternative methods of transportation.
- Desire to implement congestion pricing along I-5 and the Rose Quarter prior to expanding existing lanes in these areas to see if expansion is necessary.
- Concern that congestion pricing would lead to increased diversion and impacts on local communities.

Diversion Impacts and Mitigation

The recurring themes from invited and public testimony on diversion impacts and mitigation include:

- Concern about traffic diversion from freeways onto highways, arterial streets, and neighborhoods; testifiers shared specific examples of the anticipated local impacts of diversion and mitigation needs at each community meeting.
- Support for using tolling revenue for traffic safety, diversion, public transit, and mitigation projects.
- Concern about the safety of existing highways and roads, especially on high crash corridors and busy arterial streets.



- Diversion would adversely impact safety on roads, with impacts on schools, businesses, and residential areas.
- Diversion would increase traffic deaths, and reduce the overall safety of pedestrians, bicyclists, and motorists.
- Diversion would increase trip delays, as well as increase noise and air pollution.

Economic Impact of Tolling on Individuals, Families, and Businesses

The recurring themes from invited and public testimony on the economic impact of tolling on individuals, families, and businesses include:

- Affordability of tolls due to the increasing cost of living, existing fuel taxes, and DMV fees.
- Concern about price of tolls in general.
- Economic impact of tolls on low-income and middle-income households and individuals, with specific concerns for youth, students, migrant workers, travelling health care workers, individuals who travel regularly for health care, and those on a fixed income.
- Equity of tolling on Oregonians and that tolling would be a financial barrier to access to education, health care, and employment.
- Adverse impacts of tolls on small businesses, including service providers passing on tolling costs to customers and customers being deterred from choosing small businesses in certain locations or spending less when they got there.
- Challenges related to retaining and hiring staff who would be subject to tolls to travel to and from work.
- Ability of people to adjust their commute to alternative peak hours.
- Concern about the economic impact of tolling on small business owners, which might lead to business owners having to relocate out of tolling areas or close their businesses.
- Support for the Equity and Mobility Advisory Committee recommendations for equitable tolling discounts or incentives for low-income Oregonians.

Climate Change and Environmental Concerns

The recurring themes from invited and public testimony on climate change and environmental issues include:

- Concern about climate change in general and the impacts of transportation-related vehicle emissions and air pollution in Oregon.
- Concern tolling diversion would increase vehicle emissions in residential and business areas, including school zones and historically disadvantaged and displaced communities.
- Expressed demand that ODOT complete an Environmental Impact Statement for the Rose Quarter improvement project that studies alternative to freeway expansion, among other factors.



Alternative Transportation

The recurring themes from invited and public testimony on alternative transportation include:

- Support for investing tolling revenue in multi-modal and alternative transportation options in areas where tolling is proposed, including mass transit, railways, and pedestrian and biking infrastructure.
- Comments that mass transit options are not viable or reliable in some of the proposed tolling areas.
- Questions whether there is mass transit available in communities that is not in high demand or use.
- Support for improving and expanding existing transit systems, including investments in rail and bus routes between cities.
- Support for safety improvements for alternative transportation users, such as repairing and building sidewalks and ramps; developing and improving bike lanes; as well as rezoning areas for walkable and bikeable streets.

Impacts on Local Residents Who Have Limited Alternative Routes

The recurring theme from invited and public testimony on impacts on local residents who have limited alternative routes include:

- Potential tolling gantries on I-205 and I-5 are proposed in areas that have limited or no alternative routes to goods and services, including communities adjacent to I-205 Abernathy Bridge project, as well as tolling between Charbonneau and Wilsonville.

State Agency Planning Process

The recurring themes from invited and public testimony on the tolling planning process include:

- Concern about the planning and engagement process of the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT), including:
 - an overall lack of trust in the planning process;
 - agency data sharing;
 - overall agency transparency;
 - clarity on the proposals being deliberated;
 - responding to public and jurisdictional comments previously submitted;
 - levels of analysis conducted during planning studies;
 - historic policies and actions of ODOT that have displaced communities; and,
 - communications to communities adjacent to proposed tolling gantries.
- Desire for additional agency oversight.
- Suggested using alternative revenue sources to fund transportation projects, maintenance projects, and administration instead of tolling. Alternative ideas include raising the fuel tax, developing tolling on vehicle types (including electronic and hybrid vehicles), and charging for VMT (vehicle miles travelled).



- Recommending that ODOT share tolling revenues with communities impacted by tolling for road maintenance, repair, safety, and multi-modal transportation improvements.
- Concern that original legislative intention behind tolling was to address congestion rather than increased revenue. Concern for the increased cost associated with current plans as opposed to the cost at the time of passage.
- Considering other options like corridor tolling to allow people to pay one toll per day or managed lanes to provide a choice.
- Concern about the high administrative cost of operating a tolling system, which may not be as cost efficient as other revenue generating mechanisms.
- Suggesting it is better to invest in multimodal transportation options than to build new freeways and highways.
- Recommending that a comprehensive and long-term statewide transportation vision for Oregon is needed.

Other Concerns, Comments and Feedback

Other concerns, comments and feedback from invited and public testimony include:

- Acknowledging the economic benefit to entire state of reduced congestion.
- Concern that tolling in Metro region to fund infrastructure improvements would create inequitable cost burden for people living in Metro region.
- Considering affordable housing needs in relation to transportation planning.
- Recommendations that tolling be addressed in a statewide ballot measure.
- Personal stories about traffic fatalities or injuries, the historic displacement of communities of color, and multi-modal transportation experiences.

Staff

Beth Reiley, Legislative Analyst

Beverly Schoonover, Legislative Analyst

Legislative Policy and Research Office

Oregon State Capitol | (503) 986-1813 | www.oregonlegislature.gov/lpro

The Legislative Policy and Research Office (LPRO) provides centralized, nonpartisan research and issue analysis for Oregon's legislative branch. LPRO does not provide legal advice. LPRO publications contain general information that is current as of the date of publication. Subsequent action by the legislative, executive, or judicial branches may affect accuracy.

