



**Date:** Monday, November 20, 2017

**To:** Portland Region Value Pricing Advisory Committee

**CC:** Megan Channell, Project Manager, Oregon Department of Transportation  
Portland City Council

**From:** No More Freeway Expansions Coalition

### **Congestion Pricing is a Cost Effective, Fiscally Responsible, Equitable Alternative to Freeway Expansion**

The No More Freeway Expansions Coalition is writing to express our gratitude to the numerous organizations, individuals, and elected officials committing their time, wisdom and expertise to the Portland Region Value Pricing Advisory Committee, and to the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) for convening this committee. As the Portland Metro Region continues to grow, it's imperative that our governing entities collaborate with community partners to build a transportation system that provides reliable mobility options for cost-effective, reliable, efficient, and sustainable movement of people and goods.

From commuters to shoppers, freight trucks to tourists, everyone is impacted by traffic congestion. The unreliably variable and increasing travel times imposed by our policy of heavily subsidizing unfettered access to our major arterials and freeways during peak hours significantly hinders our regional and state economic potential, contributes to atrocious public health outcomes in terms of both air quality and sedentary behavior, and distributes the biggest burdens of congestion disproportionately to low-income, vulnerable Oregonians and Washingtonians who need improved mobility options for economic opportunity and quality of life.

**It is with this background and perspective that we ask the members of the committee to use this Advisory Committee as a forum to advocate aggressively for congestion pricing policies as a fiscally responsible, climate-smart, technically-competent, and ethically just alternative to freeway expansion within Portland's Urban Growth Boundary.** The numerous benefits to the region provided by successful implementation of congestion pricing - significant mitigation of recurring traffic gridlock, reliable commute times, increased relative competitiveness of transit alternatives, reduction in carbon emissions, improvement of local air quality, decreased incentive for exurban sprawl, predictable commute times for freight interests - are heavily negated by continued, unchecked expansion of lane miles of our region's freeways and arterials. **We strongly object to potential revenues raised from congestion pricing being used to finance further freeway construction and expansion, and ask committee members to advocate for any potential revenue to be reinvested in transit, biking, and walking infrastructure and programming that provides cost-effective, healthy alternatives to freeway expansions that will actually address our region's congestion woes.**



No More Freeway Expansions has collected the signatures of over 460 community members and 33 organizations and small businesses in opposition to the proposed 1.8 mile I-5 Rose Quarter Freeway Expansion. Our opposition centers on the proposed megaproject's inherent inability to address recurring traffic congestion, ODOT's dubious claims about the alleged improvements to traffic safety and surface-level bicycle/pedestrian facilities, the consequences of this project's contributions to carbon emissions and local air quality, and the substantial opportunity cost a half-billion dollar investment in outdated freeway expansion represents towards a myriad of local, regional, and state goals for livable communities.

Our letter in opposition to the Rose Quarter Freeway Expansion was signed by organizations including The Audubon Society of Portland, Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility, Neighbors for Clean Air, OPAL - Environmental Justice Oregon, Depave, Oregon Walks, the Rosewood Initiative, and the Community Cycling Center. Our letter to Portland's City Council, dated September 7th, requested that the city ask ODOT to implement congestion pricing before freeway expansion as a fiscally-responsible approach to transportation planning:

*Adopt the one tool that has been proven to reduce congestion in cities around the world: road pricing. To use taxpayer dollars efficiently, we also ask that no decisions be made on expanding I-5 until after road pricing is implemented, giving us a good understanding of how much traffic can be reduced through significantly cheaper initiatives. In addition, any revenue raised from tolling should be reinvested to address equity concerns and explore congestion-free transit options to increase travelling capacity along the corridor and throughout the region.*

Our coalition also has directed these comments to ODOT through a recent Public Comment Period on the Proposed Freeway Expansion. Along with an additional 125 comments in opposition, No More Freeway Expansions submitted a letter to ODOT on October 6th, asking for congestion pricing implementation ahead of freeway expansion:

*We understand the fundamental reality that traffic congestion is worsening as our region's population grows. It's a serious problem that threatens our economic competitiveness and quality of life. However, freeway expansion has never solved traffic congestion in any city in North America, and often made congestion worse at exorbitant and unnecessary cost. **Our coalition asks that ODOT work with municipal, regional, business and community partners to implement congestion pricing on I-5 before any further study or work to expand the Rose Quarter Freeway is conducted, and that congestion pricing is implemented before any other freeway expansion is considered anywhere in the Portland Metro area.***

It's imperative that the Portland region's leaders are considerate about the consequences future generations will face based on today's decisions on transportation infrastructure and policy. An



average Oregonian/Washingtonian born this year has almost even odds to be alive in 2100; every facet of her life, from the air she'll breathe, the state of the planet she'll inherit, her likelihood of asthma or diabetes, and the number of hours she'll spend stuck in traffic will be determined by the collective leadership on display at tables such as the Portland Region Value Pricing Advisory Committee. (These facets are also significantly impacted by this young Oregonian's home zip code and race. We heartily celebrate ODOT's invitation of housing and environmental justice advocates at this table to ensure congestion pricing policy works to upend our shameful history locally and nationally of twentieth century racist and classist transportation planning paradigms.)

We're happy to discuss our position with any member of the Value Pricing Committee or ODOT's staff that would like to learn more about our vision for a robust transportation system for the Portland area. As representatives from 350 PDX, Audubon Society of Portland and Neighbors for Clean Air wrote in an editorial opposing the freeway expansion in *The Oregonian* last September 15th:

*Portland's livability today is directly descended from the leadership in the 1970s that fought to fund light rail and stop the Mt Hood Freeway. What's missing from Portland today isn't another mile of freeway; it's courageous, forward-thinking political leadership for cost-effective solutions. Our coalition is eager to collaborate with whichever city, regional and state officials wish to stand up for the very values a freeway can't provide: a healthier, cleaner future with less gridlock.*

Tremendous thanks for your attention to this issue; we look forward to engaging with this committee on identifying the appropriate path forward for twenty-first century transportation policies that provide a pathway to a prosperous, congestion-free Portland Metro region.

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