

APPENDIX E: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Context

Q: What organization is leading this project?

A: SCAG is leading this effort to support local agency decisions through dialogue with community stakeholder organizations and technical experts to increase understanding of critical equity issues that may arise with congestion pricing and low emission zones that lead with the concerns of underrepresented communities.

Q: What are you trying to accomplish?

A: Through this study SCAG is ensuring that equity issues presented by congestion pricing and low emission zones are at the forefront of the discussion and consideration by public agencies. SCAG is collaborating with nonprofit groups to expand community (and agency) expertise, challenge assumptions, and test potential solutions. This project has two goals:

Listen to stakeholders and community-based organizations that work with historically underserved communities in Southern California. Our goal is to convene an interdisciplinary group of experts, advocates, and community representatives to share their travel experiences, express concerns, and identify potential solutions that are responsive to their communities' needs.

Facilitate a shared learning process that identifies specific lessons for public agency stakeholders and community-based organizations.

Q: What is the expected deliverable? How will it be used?

A: The final result will be a resource that community-based organizations and implementing agencies can use.

For agencies, the final deliverable will include a Committee-informed framework for building an inclusive, equity-focused planning, participation, and implementation process for possible future congestion pricing and low emission zone programs.

For community-based organizations, the document will be a reference guide that explains key concepts related to pricing, uses plain language to define technical terms, and provides a list of policy interventions that may advance equity goals.

Q: What is the timeline for this project?

A: Virtual engagements will be completed by August 31, 2020. The Advisory Committee convened starting in February 2020, with committee activities completed by May 2020.

Q: Which area(s) will be studied?

A: The project focuses on the SCAG region, including the counties of Imperial, Orange, Los Angeles, Riverside, San Bernardino, and Ventura.

Low Emissions Areas

Q: What is a Low Emissions Area?

A: Low Emissions Areas (also known as Low Emission Zones or Clean Air Zones) are designated urban areas that use a suite of policies, infrastructure changes, and/or charging programs to achieve air quality improvements. These changes may include the following:⁹⁴

- Closing roads and streets within the zone to all vehicles (including electric vehicles)
- Banning most polluting vehicles from entering the area
- Charging fees to limit vehicle access (clean or zero-emission vehicles may enter the zone for free or at a discount)
- Banning or significantly restricting parking in the area
- Banning vehicle idling within the district

Q: Where is this happening in Southern California?

A: The City of Los Angeles is also developing a Zero Emissions Area implementation plan. The SCAG team can connect you with the agency directing this study if you have specific questions regarding timing and/or project scope.

⁹⁴ C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group. March 2019. *How to design and implement a clean air or low emission zone.*

Road Pricing

Q: What is road pricing?

A: Road pricing refers to any system in which drivers pay directly to use roads, as opposed to indirect payments such as fuel purchases and taxes. Drivers may pay to enter or exit a designated area, or they may pay for each mile driven. Tollways (i.e., highways that charge drivers a fee) are probably the most common form of road pricing in the U.S. You may have also experienced a form of road pricing if you have used carshare apps or pay-as-you-go auto insurance. While road pricing generally refers to fees paid by drivers, you may have also paid per mile to use apps for ridesharing (e.g., Lyft or Uber), bike sharing, and/or electric scooters.

Q: What is congestion pricing?

A: Congestion pricing, a form of road pricing, typically charges drivers at a variable rate based on demand. In other words, drivers pay more when and where there is more traffic. Congestion pricing encourages drivers to share rides, to travel at less-congested times, and to use non-automobile modes. Local governments typically use congestion pricing to manage traffic in congested urban areas that have a mix of high-quality alternatives to driving (e.g., frequent bus service, subways, and/or light rail, as well as attractive walking, bicycling, and rolling options). Revenues from congestion pricing can help fund these high-quality alternatives.

Q: How can congestion pricing benefit me?

A: By discouraging driving during congested periods, congestion pricing benefits many road users by making travel times faster and more predictable. For example, bus riders experience faster trips and shorter wait times. Reducing the number of cars on the road can improve air quality, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and enhance road safety. Revenues from congestion pricing can be used to improve transit options and build safer connections for people bicycling, walking, or rolling to their destinations.

Q: What are the potential downsides?

A: Without the right mix of safeguards and intentional investment strategies, congestion pricing can create unfair outcomes. We list some common issues that stakeholders have raised when agencies have proposed congestion pricing projects in the past:⁹⁵

- Pricing is regressive and will disproportionately burden low-income drivers.
- A combination of upfront costs and financial requirements (e.g., access to a bank account or a credit card) for tolling technology (e.g., transponders) may be a barrier for low-income users.
- Pricing may create a two-tiered transportation system, where those who can afford to pay benefit from less traffic.
- For low- and moderate-income drivers that must travel by automobile, pricing may make traveling much more expensive.
- These are valid concerns that deserve careful consideration. Fortunately, each of these issues can be addressed. Communities can work with implementing agencies to devise an investment strategy that prioritizes enhancing mobility options for vulnerable communities. That, coupled with a mix of targeted discounts, exemptions, and subsidies, has the potential to address the equity concerns identified above.

⁹⁵ TransForm. March 2019. *Pricing Roads, Advancing Equity*. p. 10-11.

Q: Is there an example of congestion pricing that already exists?

A: Yes. Congestion pricing is currently used in London, Stockholm, Milan, Gothenburg, and Singapore. It is planned for New York in 2021, and is being studied in Seattle, San Francisco, and Vancouver. You may have already experienced a form of congestion pricing when using Lyft or Uber late at night or in the rain; as more customers request rides from a limited number of drivers, prices “surge” to adjust for demand.

Q: Where is this happening in Southern California?

A: Several studies have analyzed the potential for congestion pricing in the Los Angeles area. The most recent studies include SCAG’s “Mobility Go Zone and Pricing Feasibility Study”⁹⁶ and Metro’s forthcoming “Traffic Reduction Study.”⁹⁷

Q: How far are they along in the planning process?

A: These studies are in the early conceptualization phases. The SCAG team can connect you with local agencies directing these studies if you have specific questions regarding timing and/or project scope.

Q: How can my community get involved?

A: Metro’s Traffic Reduction Study has a community outreach and engagement component. The SCAG team can connect you to agency staff directing this project if you’d like to participate in their engagement processes.

⁹⁶ Southern California Association of Governments. March 2019. *Mobility Go Zone & Pricing Feasibility Study*.

⁹⁷ Sotero, Dave. September 28, 2020. *Metro to hold four public meetings to provide details on Traffic Reduction Study*. Los Angeles Metropolitan Transportation Authority.

Pricing and Low Emissions Areas: Beyond the Basics

Q: Will pricing make traveling more expensive for some users? Is there potential to decrease overall transportation costs?

A: Yes, and yes. Congestion pricing will make driving more expensive for some users. It also has the potential to reduce travel costs for other road users. Congestion pricing uses fees to discourage driving during high-demand travel times. But those fees can be structured so that they reduce the financial burden for vulnerable populations. This may include offering discounts, subsidies, or exemptions to low-income drivers and travelers with disabilities. Congestion pricing systems can also use revenues to invest in programs and infrastructure that reduce travel costs and create time savings for historically underserved groups. This includes offering incentive programs like deeply discounted (or free) transit fares and bikeshare discounts for low-income households.

Q: What types of subsidies could be used? How do they work? Who is eligible?

A: Cities have designed congestion pricing programs with a variety of exemptions, subsidies, discounts, incentives, and caps to reduce the burden for sensitive groups. Although these subsidies vary based on the particularities of the pricing program, we've listed some common tools below:⁹⁸

- **Discounts:** congestion pricing programs may reduce fees for low-income drivers, drivers with disabilities, carpools, and/or low- or zero-emission vehicles.
- **Exemptions:** programs may allow specific drivers to avoid paying fees; in London, the congestion pricing zone initially exempted alternative fuel vehicles.
- **Caps:** congestion pricing programs can include caps for specific groups, like small businesses. The cap sets a maximum charge over a specific time period. In New York, one proposal would subject small businesses to a maximum daily fee, allowing qualifying drivers to make multiple trips in and out of the pricing area without being charged additional fees after they've hit the cap.
- **Incentives:** congestion pricing programs may also offer incentives that reward individuals for using alternate travel options. This includes reduced transit fares, bikeshare discounts, and/or low-income carshare programs.

Subsidies and incentives can be structured so that they reduce travel costs for vulnerable populations while encouraging more efficient travel patterns. This can include offering the steepest discounts and subsidies to low-income households and employing income-based travel incentives.

⁹⁸ TransForm. March 2019. *Pricing Roads, Advancing Equity*. p. 10-11.

Q: How might agencies spend the revenue generated from congestion pricing?

A: Revenue expenditures are often tied to explicit goals. A transit provider may invest revenues in bus and/or rail improvements within a pricing area. Agencies often use a portion of revenues to provide subsidies and discounts for specific users. Below is a list of potential revenue expenditures:

- Facility operation and maintenance costs
- Transit operations and maintenance costs (e.g., vehicle repair, vehicle maintenance, infrastructure maintenance, vehicle drivers, etc.)
- Transit infrastructure, service, and vehicle costs (e.g., transit vehicle purchases, building or extending new transit lines, transit stations, etc.)
- Enhanced infrastructure for people who walk, bike, and roll (e.g., upgraded sidewalks and bikeways, pedestrian and cyclist roadway safety improvements, etc.)
- Air quality mitigation measures (e.g., urban greening investments, electric vehicle charging infrastructure, low-income electric car share, etc.)
- Community benefits (e.g., community-identified mitigation measures and/or transportation enhancements)

Q: How do we measure success? What performance indicators have been used to measure equity outcomes?

A: Communities can assess the outcomes of pricing programs using a variety of metrics and indicators. These indicators should be informed by overall project goals and expected outcomes. The best performance indicators should account for the entire population that might be affected by the pricing program, not just those who are expected to pay fees.⁹⁹ Below is a sampling of potential indicators (please note that these indicators are illustrative and would need to be considered in the context of overall program goals, anticipated benefits, and potential costs):¹⁰⁰

- Affordability: (1) Discount level on tolls for vulnerable populations; (2) Change in share of household income spent on transportation and housing; (3) Number of people from historically marginalized communities eligible for discounts; (4) Amount of toll revenue invested in subsidies.
- Improving Mobility Options: (1) Dollar amount invested in transit and alternative mobility options that benefit historically marginalized communities; (2) New transit miles, expanded routes, and/or new transit vehicle purchases that benefit historically marginalized communities; (3) Changes in transit speed, reliability, and quality; (4) Miles of safe bike lanes and sidewalks added or enhanced.
- Community Benefits: (1) Change in traffic injuries and deaths attributable to infrastructure improvements; (2) Change in number of bicycling, walking, and rolling trips; (3) Share of new clean vehicles that provide benefits to vulnerable communities; (4) Change in particulate matter and criteria pollutant levels in underserved communities.

⁹⁹ Robert D Plotnick et al. August 2011. *A Geography-Specific Approach to Estimating the Distributional Impact of Highway Tolls: An Application to the Puget Sound Region of Washington State*. Journal of Urban Affairs.

¹⁰⁰ TransForm, Nelson/Nygaard, Sam Schwartz Transportation Consultants, Silicon Transportation Consultants, enviroissues, and Daniel Firth. May 2019. *Seattle Congestion Pricing Study Phase 1: Pricing and Equity White Paper*.