

Geographic and Situational Limits of Tolling

Highlights of Tolling White Paper 2



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Introduction

Tolling and roadway pricing can be used to achieve different objectives. Revenue generation to pay for projects is the traditional use of tolling and has been used in the past in Oregon for several of the Columbia River bridges. New technologies that eliminate toll booths and keep traffic moving are making congestion management an additional and achievable goal through roadway pricing.

Determining the potential effectiveness of projects and applications to achieve these goals is the purpose of White Paper 2, which addresses two specific questions.

- 1) Under what circumstances could pricing and tolling be applied successfully in Oregon? (or, as phrased in the white paper, are there geographic or situational limits which should guide tolling policy?); and
- 2) How can we effectively plan a project if toll revenues are not adequate to pay for it? (This is a likely situation, given Oregon's sparse population in many areas of the state.)

As background, the paper discusses key management issues that should be considered as part of a project proposal, including who owns, operates and finances a tolled facility. It summarizes current regulations and identifies new legislation that would clarify and allow for emerging issues and technologies.

Most of the paper, however, is spent identifying the type of tolling/pricing projects and the situations or characteristics under which those can be successful in achieving either adequate revenue generation to fund a project or in managing traffic.

Seven technical tolling and pricing white papers were prepared for ODOT in February 2009 as a way to consider concerns and issues for Oregon to address prior to developing a tolling/pricing policy in the future.

1. Is tolling an effective means of reducing greenhouse gas emissions?
2. Where, geographically, could tolling work and under what circumstances?
3. Forecasting change – how do we incorporate tolling and pricing into our regional transportation models?
4. What are the economics of transportation system reliability?
5. How should the economic and social effects of broad applications of congestion pricing be assessed?
6. How do you determine if tolling a project is a better alternative than other non-tolled options and how would you choose between a number of tolled alternatives?
7. Are truck-only toll lanes a viable option for Oregon?

This document highlights White Paper 2 – where and under what circumstances could tolling work in Oregon. Find all papers online and provide your comments: www.oregon.gov/ODOT/TD/TP/Tolling_Background.shtml

Situations/conditions for potential toll projects:

- Applying tolls on existing facilities to fund new capacity
- Adding a new tolled lane or lanes to a highly congested corridor to manage demand and/or raise revenues to pay for the new capacity
- Constructing a toll by-pass route if traffic volumes are moderate to high
- Building a new access road to an airport, port or other significant trip generator

Conclusions

There are circumstances where tolling should not be considered in Oregon, such as:

- Daily traffic volumes are less than 20,000 vehicles
- There are less than three miles to a free route to which motorists could easily divert
- There is little or no congestion relief on adjacent or parallel routes

Even in cases where there could be sufficient volumes to raise revenue, most projects would not raise enough from tolling alone. This raises questions about how ODOT should treat partially toll-funded projects in the State Transportation Improvement Plan (STIP). The STIP includes projects having full funding and a high likelihood of being constructed. Including expensive, partially funded projects in the STIP – given current and likely future funding limitations – challenges traditional practices and would raise questions about local government assertions of secure sources of other funds.

There are circumstances where tolling can be considered in Oregon. These include:

- Daily traffic volumes exceed 60,000 vehicles
- Substantial travel time savings are achieved
- Parallel facilities don't become overly congested
- Free alternative routes are not within a reasonable distance of the tolled facility (not within three miles)
- Transit is exempt from paying tolls
- Tolls are used to expand transit service during peak periods to encourage ridership and provide an alternative to paying the toll
- There is public acceptance for the project with local champions to help support it

For More Information

- Visit the Web site to read the white papers and complete a comment form:
www.oregon.gov/ODOT/TD/TP/Tolling_Background.shtml
- Email: Robert.A.Maestre@odot.state.or.us