

EQUITY ADVISORY GROUP (EAG) MEETING #37

Date and Time: Monday, June 17, 2024, 5:30pm to 7:30pm

Location: Zoom Webinar and YouTube Livestream

Number of concurrent YouTube viewers: 6

WELCOME

Dr. Roberta Hunte, EAG Facilitator, welcomed EAG members to the meeting, explained how to view closed captions, gave instructions for public input, and previewed the meeting agenda.

PROGRAM ADMINISTRATOR UPDATE

Greg Johnson, Program Administrator, provided IBR program updates. Greg shared that there was a Bi-State Legislative Committee meeting on June 10, which was the first time the IBR program met with the group in about six months. The Committee was especially interested in the IBR program's efforts to include pedestrians and bicyclists on the bridge. Greg also shared that there was a recent meeting of the Bi-State Tolling Subcommittee on May 23rd and that the next meeting of the group is scheduled for June 21st.

Greg stated that the IBR program team gave a presentation for the Washington State Transportation Commission on May 15th, as well as hosted an IBR Equity Roundtable entitled "Pathways to Active Transportation: Strategies and Solutions." Greg described the Roundtable as a robust conversation about how to make the program area truly multimodal that accommodates people of all abilities to use the corridor.

Greg shared that the IBR program's community outreach efforts are still going strong. He said the program attended the Westside Economic Alliance on June 13th and had conversations with the Vancouver Heights and Arbor Lodge Neighborhood Associations. The IBR program also had tables at the Latino Community Resource Group's Multicultural Resource Fair, the Vancouver Juneteenth event, and at Portland Sunday Parkways.

Greg stated that the Draft SEIS is still expected to release later this year, and that the Record of Decision will hopefully come late 2025. The Record of Decision is the final step in the National Environmental Policy Act process. Greg also shared that he recently attended a Transportation Summit hosted by Identity Clark County and the Columbia River Economic Development Council. Greg described it as a well-attended event with companies in the construction industry and that there is a lot of positive energy for the project's future.

TOLLING INFORMATION AND FEEDBACK

Meghan Hodges, Community and Government Relations Manager, reminded the group of what she shared in the previous meeting regarding tolling roles and responsibilities. Meghan reiterated that the state legislatures give DOTs the authority to toll a facility, while the Transportation Commissions set toll rates and policies and the state Departments of Transportation implement the tolls and policies on state facilities. State DOTs also own customer service and toll equipment on a facility.

Overview of WSDOT Tolled Facilities and “What’s It’s Like to be a Customer”

Jennifer Charlebois, WSDOT Toll Division Deputy Director, presented to the group. Jennifer asked the group whether they have ever used a toll facility before, which several EAG members indicated they had. Jennifer then asked if anyone has used a *Good to Go!* WSDOT facility or if anyone had a *Good to Go!* account, and a few members raised their hands.

Jennifer presented information regarding the current toll facilities in Washington state, which range from flat rate tolls to dynamic rates, as well as from those that vary rates to repay construction costs or to help manage traffic performance. Jennifer listed three more facilities authorized by the legislature but not yet opened, including the I-5 bridge.

Jennifer explained the *Good to Go!* program’s payment options, emphasizing that the various options are intended to enhance convenience for the customers. Jennifer also provided information about the customer service operations, including the website. Jennifer stated that the website is frequently updated for improvements. Jennifer shared that there is also a customer call center that is open 6 days a week, with the aim to resolve issues over the phone for those that prefer that option.

Jennifer provided an overview of how electronic tolling works for customers with and without a *Good to Go!* Account. Jennifer explained how the WSDOT system tracks either the license plate of the vehicle or the *Good to Go!* account, then bills the customer appropriately. Jennifer provided an example of a potential bill that would be sent to a customer, as well as information regarding late fees.

Jennifer stated that WSDOT has been operating tolls for over 15 years and that the goal is to improve the experience each time a new facility is opened. She provided examples of improvement such as updating the Notice of Civil Penalty process, as well as developing the Penalty Forgiveness Program. She then asked the group for questions.

EAG member: *What is the rate of penalty you have seen and how do people get their penalties forgiven?*

Jennifer responded that most people pay their tolls. She estimated only 1% of customers go through the Notice of Civil Penalty process. She then explained the forgiveness program, saying that the late fees and civil penalties are waived in full if the customer agrees to pay the tolls in full.

EAG member: *The state of Oregon did an analysis some years ago about fines and the cost of collecting fines, and found that it is very expensive to collect fines and the cost to collect is not worth the amount of the fine. I'm also thinking about when improvements made to the Max and Adidas would pay for their employees to take Uber or Lyft because they did not have vehicles. Is there a way for employers to pay those fees then?*

Jennifer said there are ways for employers to either reimburse employees or to open a large account themselves for their employees. Jennifer also stated that WSDOT annually publishes the costs to collect. She explained that there is variance in the cost based on method of collection, but that the *Good to Go!* cost to collect is within the national average.

EAG member: *If collections go to a certain stage, are they sent to credit agencies or collection agencies?*

Jennifer stated that they do not report uncollected tolls or late fees to credit agencies and do not refer unpaid tolls to collection agencies. Jennifer explained that if a customer fails to pay after a civil penalty has been issued, they will not be able to renew their vehicle registration until it is paid.

EAG member: *Is there a low-income discount?*

Jennifer said the WSDOT toll division does not have a low-income discount, but there has been a lot of interest from the Commission and legislature, and that *Good to Go!* is ready to implement such a program if that decision is made.

EAG member: *Is there a service charge tacked onto tolls?*

Jennifer stated that there were no service charges outside of the pricing information she provided.

EAG member: *Is there an opportunity for carpooling benefits?*

Jennifer stated that this depends on the facility. The Transportation Commission is responsible for discounts and exemptions, and in Washington state, there is an express lane with carpool discounts associated with them.

Meghan explained that some of the questions EAG members are asking are the upcoming decisions that are currently before the Transportation Commissions. She further stated that there has not yet been discussion about carpool discounts for the I-5 bridge.

I-5 Bridge Toll Scenario Development and Feedback

Travis Brouwer, Assistant Director for Revenue Finance and Compliance at the Oregon Department of Transportation, and Carl See, Deputy Director at the Washington State Transportation Commission, presented to the group.

Travis explained that the goal of the evening was to help the EAG understand the Bi-State Tolling Subcommittee’s role, work, schedule, and policy considerations. He said they also intend to get direct feedback from EAG members about tolling scenarios.

Travis said the Subcommittee comprises two Oregon Transportation Commissioners and two Washington State Transportation Commissioners. The Subcommittee is responsible for recommending toll rates and policies, which will be considered by the full Commissions who make rate-setting decisions.

Travis explained that tolling the I-5 bridge is intended to contribute about \$1.24 billion in funding for bridge construction, help pay for maintenance and operation, and help improve travel reliability within the bridge corridor by helping to manage demand. Travis shared that pre-completion tolling is expected to begin in 2026, and that toll rates may change between pre-completion rates and new bridge rates depending on the tolling strategy approved by the Commission. Travis shared a toll rate setting schedule that showed further analysis through 2024, before adopting a rate and policy in summer 2025.

Travis explained that there are 3 levels of analysis for toll traffic and revenue and stated that they are currently in Level 2 of that process. The Level 3 study will be used to obtain an “investment-grade” credit rating to secure financing for the project. Travis then explained what a toll scenario entails. This includes toll rates by time of day or day of week, a truck toll multiplier, accounts for inflation, and discounts or exemptions.

Carl then explained additional considerations being weighed by the Bi-State Toll Subcommittee, including safe and efficient mobility, equity, environmental quality, and economic vitality. He explained that finding the balance is the Subcommittee’s goal and polled the group to ascertain which consideration is most important to them. EAG members indicated the most important consideration is equity, followed by safe and efficient mobility, then economic vitality, and finally environmental quality.

EAG Member: I have a question about how we are defining economic vitality. It lists moving goods and services, but I also think about people getting to and from their jobs to generate wealth. Is that included as part of considering economic vitality?

Carl stated that the focus is intended for goods and services, but that the EAG member raised a good point about how jobs are supported by connecting people to their work.

Carl then provided an overview of objectives and key toll scenario components. Carl stated that there are operating performance objectives and toll funding objectives. These objectives are met by considering toll rate variability, discounts or exemptions, inflation, truck multipliers, and toll rate changes between pre-completion and post-completion, as listed by Travis earlier.

Carl explained that pre-completion tolling provides early revenues for construction funding, which would in turn limit the amount needed for future interest costs. Carl also shared that pre-completion tolling will allow for further information gathering that will enable the tolling facility to fine-tune collection operations and forecast traffic and revenue more accurately. Carl then posed a question to the EAG about whether they prefer toll rates to remain the same from pre-completion to the new bridge opening, or whether pre-completion

rates should be lower but potentially have higher rates after the bridge is constructed. Polled EAG members indicated that there was no clear preference between either option.

EAG member: *In the Seattle Times recently, there was an article about tolling that referred to the Lexus factor. They found that no matter how high the toll cost goes up, some people didn't care, but that people who are severely affected by tolling rates could be kept from doing what they wanted across the bridge.*

Carl responded that the article highlighted the dynamic tolling of one facility that, based on congestion level, could charge as high as \$15 for the toll for the Express Lanes. Express Lanes allow for faster travel at a higher price. He stated that the I-5 toll range currently being considered would not have similar Express Lanes or similar maximum toll rate ranges. Meghan stated that she believed the article intended to highlight that people seem willing to pay extra for faster access over the slower access lane that does not have a toll.

EAG member: *Is it possible to use that data to encourage employers to schedule work schedules around the least congested hours?*

Carl responded that he thinks that is a possibility, especially for the I-5 bridge that is currently favoring varying toll rates based on specific times of day. The regularity of that proposed toll schedule is friendlier to people and employers in creating schedules. He further stated that it may encourage employers to be more open to teleworking schedules.

Carl then presented common responses travelers may have upon being confronted with tolling. This includes travelers seeking an alternative route, using a different mode of transportation, changing their destination, changing the timing of their trip, or changing the frequency of the trips they take. Carl then asked the group to respond to the following statement: "Paying a toll will cause me to rethink which mode of travel I use to cross the bridge." Responses from EAG members varied, with small favor towards rethinking mode of travel.

EAG Member: *I was on the strongly disagree side of this. I am not good at paying attention to things like that. I only cross so often, so I figure it in and I'm not good at thinking ahead on where costs are concerned.*

EAG member: *I think I'm the opposite. If I am presented with a toll, I will do everything in my power to not pay the toll and not use that crossing. If there are options, like light rail, I will take that over driving my car. I oppose driving my car more than I must.*

EAG member: *I think people will choose to divert to 205, so there needs to be a contingency plan on how to address that. A lot of people who work in Oregon and live in Washington to save on costs will be thinking about how to keep those savings by avoiding this toll.*

Carl responded that the IBR program has conducted analysis based on origin and destination to try to anticipate the number of travelers who would divert to 205 to avoid the toll. The study identified that about 30% of those who currently use I-5 may consider diverting to 205. He stated that the possible impacts of that change in traffic pattern is already being considered.

Meghan added that 205 is already at capacity during peak travel times, so there is not space for that level of influx. She also shared that she avoids I-84 even more so than I-5, so there is a lot of theorizing at this stage to try to determine how travelers will change their plans and patterns.

EAG member: *Have you done any polling of trucking and freight companies that use that corridor and how the tolls will affect them and the potential trickle-down impact to consumers?*

Travis responded that truckers don't often change their behavior due to tolls due to the route constraints they face. The cost of operating a truck is already very large, approximately \$2.25/mile or \$978 per hour, so a toll is fairly negligible to them. Carl added that the large share of through traffic uses 205, whereas more local traffic is more often using I-5, so many freight truckers are already using 205. Meghan reminded the group that the toll is an irritation, but the impact of stopping for the bridge lift is significant as well. She also stated that truckers will avoid congested hours already to avoid burning gas sitting in traffic.

The EAG was then polled about what they believe will be the most likely changes in traveler behavior once a toll is implemented. The EAG members listed the behaviors, in order of most to least likely to occur, as:

1. Travel during a different time of day
2. Take I-205
3. Take Transit
4. Travel with others and share the cost of the toll
5. Skip the trip
6. Walk/bike or No changes (tied)

EAG member: *In some of the places you have already put tolls, how long did it take until equilibrium was reached?*

Jennifer responded that the period immediately after toll implementation is the most variable, as people test out alternative routes and modes. Things start to stabilize after six months, then data will be collected after about a year later to ensure the system is stable. Carl added that when a facility is open for free for a short period before it is tolled, it gives people time to acclimate to its presence.

EAG member: *I am concerned for commuters from Clark and Cowlitz Counties who go to Oregon for work, and are lower income, they will have no other option to get to work. They will have to absorb the cost of this, as many won't have the time or money to pursue other options. I really hope that this is not only affordable but accessible for those whose only real option is to drive.*

EAG member: *Thinking about low income, I think about the standpoint of the employment office. If you have an EBT card, there's no doubt that you are of lower income and there should be a break for that person. That seems like an easy way to identify low-income people.*

Carl responded that determining eligibility is a big conversation already. One analysis has supported that 200% of the federal poverty level is in alignment with low-income definitions. He stated that locality is more nuanced, but that the 200% threshold is a common one by similar programs and may be the quickest way to determine eligibility.

Johnell Bell, IBR Chief Equity Officer, asked whether there was analysis on existing low-income programs such as TriMet that may shed light on how local agencies are determining their thresholds.

Carl responded that ODOT took an extensive look at existing programs in the state, as well as what other programs in the tolling industry were doing. Carl has also been part of analyzing and assessing Washington programs. Travis added that he did look at TriMet's program and confirmed they use the 200% federal poverty level threshold. He shared that among the programs in Oregon, most use either 200% or less of the federal poverty level. He also discussed that there is consideration around program reciprocity, meaning that if a customer qualifies for one low-income program, they will immediately qualify for another.

EAG member: *Tolling this may bring more people to transit. Is TriMet preparing for that influx?*

Meghan responded that C-Tran is going to maintain and improve the express bus service across the bridge, in addition to the light rail addition across the bridge. She stated one big goal of the IBR program is to improve multimodal transportation, so expanding transit is part of that. Carl added that the assumptions around expanding transit are part of the analysis in anticipating future use for design and operational considerations.

Carl shared with EAG that the Subcommittee is committed to outreach to raise awareness, collect feedback, and consult with tribes. He stated that the Subcommittee is deliberately trying to reach both the broader general public, as well as historically disadvantaged communities. Carl then asked the EAG to share what groups the Subcommittee should reach out to about tolling.

EAG member: *We need to be intentional and needs to be an ongoing conversation. This can't be a one-and-done. I had lunch today with an individual who was entirely unaware of this project. So not just who we talk to, but the consistency in talking with them.*

EAG member: *A lot of communities of color reside on the Washington side, yet the recreational and cultural options seem to take place on the Oregon side. We should determine how the toll would impact minority-owned or minority-targeted cultural or social events.*

EAG members responded to the poll encouraged the Subcommittee to contact community-based organizations that work with immigrant and low-income communities. They also encouraged the Subcommittee to speak with tribes, equity-priority communities, the blind/deaf community, and those who favor public transit but are currently not well served by transit due to routes or timetables.

Carl shared that the Subcommittee will remain in place after the toll rates are set and pre-completion tolling begins in early 2026. The ongoing responsibilities for the Subcommittee will be to review data, maintain a forum for public engagement, and recommend potential changes to rates and policies with the information gathered. The Subcommittee will also assess potential changes to the rates and policies once the new bridge opens in the early 2030s.

Carl stated that the next steps for the Subcommittee are meetings on June 21st and July 19th. He also shared where people can learn more and sign up for more updates from the Subcommittee.

EAG member: *I appreciated the interaction of this session.*

EAG member: *I think more people will turn to transit now that it will be more available as an option for folks.*

Greg thanked the group for using their time and voices towards advancing equity in the program.

PUBLIC COMMENT

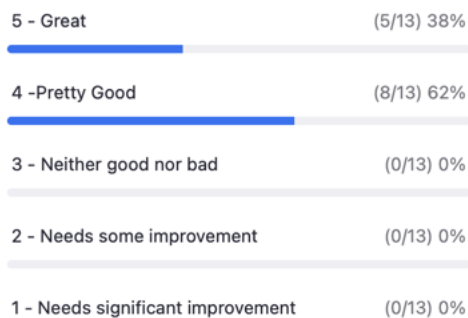
No comment

MEETING EVALUATION POLL

EAG Survey

00:02:41 | 1 question | 13 of 13 (100%) participat...

1. How would you rate tonight's meeting, on a scale of 1-5 (Single choice) *
13/13 (100%) answered



ADJOURN

- Next EAG meeting: July 15, 2024, 5:30pm-7:30pm

- Following EAG meeting: August 19, 2024, 5:30pm-7:30pm

ATTENDEES

Attendees	Organization/Affiliation
EAG Members	
Aidan Gronauer (they/he)	WSDOT
Vicki Nakashima	Community member
Sokho Eath	IRCO
Meg Johnson	Community Member
Jennifer Campos	SW Washington Regional Transportation Council
Nicole Chen	City of Vancouver
Pat Daniels	Constructing Hope
Sebrina Owens-Wilson	Metro DEI Team
Shawnea Posey	PBOT
Chandra Washington	C-TRAN
Shona Carter	Washington State Black Future Co-op
Guest Presenters	
Carl See	Washington State Transportation Commission
Travis Brouwer	Oregon Department of Transportation
Jennifer Charlebois	WSDOT
IBR Staff	
Greg Johnson	Program Administrator
Johnell Bell	Chief Equity Officer

Attendees	Organization/Affiliation
Erika McCalpine	Equity Team
Lucy Hamer	Equity Team
Meghan Hodges	Community and Government Relations Manager
Amy Danberg	Public Affairs Team
Emilee Thomas-Peralta	Equity Team
Dr. Roberta Suzette Hunte	Facilitator
Daniel and Andrea	ASL Interpreters
Amelia Ulsh	Tech Support

MEETING RECORDING AND MATERIALS

Meeting Recording

A recording of the meeting is available here: [Equity Advisory Group \(EAG\) June 17th, 2024 5:30PM PST](#)

Meeting Materials

The meeting materials are available here: [EAG June 17, 2024 Meeting | Interstate Bridge Replacement Program](#)