

# Metropolitan Transportation Commission Policy Advisory Council

March 8, 2023

Agenda Item 7

## Next Generation Bay Area Freeways Study: Pathways for Round 1 Analysis

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### **Subject:**

Summary of summer and fall 2022 engagement efforts, goals for next generation freeways, and proposed portfolio of pricing pathways for the first round of analysis.

### **Background:**

As determined during Plan Bay Area 2050 analysis, Bay Area freeways will remain severely congested in the future in the absence of bold strategies. The Next Generation Bay Area Freeways Study, kicked off in early 2022 in partnership with Caltrans, is reimagining an alternative future for our freeways by exploring pricing strategies. Pricing has proven benefits in shifting driver behavior and addressing mobility and environmental goals. Accompanied by a meaningful suite of complementary strategies tailored to the Bay Area, pricing strategies may have the potential to advance equitable outcomes, rather than further exacerbating inequities. This two-year study – a first and early action that MTC is undertaking to step toward the vision of Plan Bay Area 2050’s Strategy T5 – is exploring whether there are equitable and politically acceptable “pathways” centered on pricing toward a shared vision of Next Generation Freeways. The study timeline and details on the staff-level and executive-level advisory groups can be found in **Attachment A**. Ultimately, the study will seek to recommend one or two pathways forward and one or more corridor(s) that promise potential for future pilot implementation, while charting out further studies, analyses, and legislative actions that would be necessary. This memo provides a brief update on the first round of community engagement and goals development over the last year, and a proposed portfolio of pathways that staff has co-created with the Advisory Group and is seeking to evaluate during the first round of analysis in spring 2023.

### **Public Engagement Round 1: Early Learnings**

Across fifteen small group discussions with communities from various demographic, language and occupational groups, frustration with both traffic and unaffordability in the region were recurring themes. Participants want to spend less time in traffic and correlated that with more time for family and friends, improved mental wellness and more economic opportunity. The concept of pricing roads met with aversion, accompanied by concerns about the financial burden

and how this would restrict access to opportunity, especially for those who have moved away from their jobs or those that travel to multiple job sites. During two public webinars named “The Future of Freeways,” participants’ top priority for policymakers was improving and expanding transit. The recurring themes in comments received were equity concerns, specifically impacts of pricing on people with low incomes, improving transit prior to any pricing implementation, and general opposition to tolling. Further details on the engagement can be found in **Attachment B**. The input received was used to craft a shared vision for next generation freeways and develop pathways for the first round of analysis that respond to communities’ concerns.

### **A Shared Vision for Next Generation Freeways**

Five goals were developed as a shared vision for Next Generation Freeways, echoing the visions of the study’s advisory groups, community members and stakeholder organizations that staff engaged with during summer/fall 2022: Affordable, Efficient, Reliable, Reparative and Safe. This set of five goals received broad support during the public webinars hosted in fall 2022. Pathways to be developed in this study are intended to advance all five goals, but they will have differing impacts on each goal necessitating tradeoff discussions. The extent of these impacts will be measured using performance indicators for specific outcomes outlined in **Attachment C**.

### **Proposed Portfolio of Pathways for Round 1 Analysis**

The focus of the last few months, over multiple meetings and an in-person interactive activity with the Advisory Group, has been to co-create an initial set of pathways for analysis in this study. The proposed portfolio of pathways includes three pricing strategies, each with two versions of complementary strategy packages resulting in six pricing pathways. The three pricing strategies include:

1. All-Lane Highway Tolling in Transit-Rich Corridors
2. All-Lane Highway and Arterial Tolling in Transit-Rich Corridors
3. Cordon Pricing around Major Urban Centers (San Jose, San Francisco, Oakland)

Under all pricing strategies, tolls vary by place and time-of-day and would be zero when there is no congestion. Two versions of complementary strategy packages focus on different priorities voiced by the Advisory Group and during community engagement: “Transit Double Down” and “Affordability Focus”:

- Both versions propose prioritizing 40 percent of revenues for “Transit-First” strategies to improve trunkline transit frequencies, a complete network of carpool lanes on freeways for transit priority, and local street improvements for safe transit access by bicycle and foot.
- “Transit Double Down” prioritizes an additional 40 percent of revenues for transit improvements such as new express bus service, local transit improvements and extended service hours, while “Affordability Focus” prioritizes fare discounts for transit users and toll discounts and caps for drivers. The remaining 20 percent complements the primary focus and includes community-scale reparative investments.

An additional seventh pathway that does not include any new pricing initiatives but still integrates potential future regional measure funding is also included in the portfolio of pathways for analysis. Further details on the full proposal can be found in **Attachment D**.

**Next Steps:**

Staff is preparing for the first round of technical analysis to evaluate the proposed portfolio of pathways. With analysis findings, including regional performance indicators and corridor-level outcomes, the study’s Advisory Group will prioritize pathways and corridors for Round 2 public engagement. Staff will return to the Council for further feedback in summer 2023.

**Issues:**

None identified.

**Attachments:**

- Attachment A: Study Timeline and Advisory Group Composition
- Attachment B: Community Engagement Round 1
- Attachment C: Goals, Outcomes and Early Proposal for Performance Indicators
- Attachment D: Pathways for Analysis Round 1
- Attachment E: PowerPoint Presentation