



## Next Generation Bay Area Freeways Study

### Community Engagement Round 1

#### Methodology

*Round 1A:* During summer 2022, staff conducted fifteen focus groups to understand the communities' vision of a next generation freeway network and gain a more nuanced understanding of the perceptions and concerns with road pricing. Staff was intentional about listening and learning early in the study with deep open-ended conversations and uplifting voices of communities that have historically been left out of the decision-making process. These conversations were not meant to make a case for pricing freeways, nor were they nuanced discussions of pricing policy tradeoffs. Of the fifteen focus groups, eleven were conducted in English; four were conducted in languages other than English, including one each in Cantonese, Mandarin, Spanish and Vietnamese; one group was conducted in person (Vietnamese-speaking community); and two were conducted as in-person, one-on-one interviews (day laborers and unhoused community members). In all, staff heard from 115 community members that reflect the Bay Area's socially-, economically- and culturally-rich and diverse population.

*Round 1B:* During fall 2022, staff conducted two 90-minute public webinars, "The Future of Freeways," to educate the public on issues confronting Bay Area freeways and gather input on the draft goals for Next Generation Freeways. In addition, the recording of the first webinar was posted to provide the public with an asynchronous opportunity to participate. The recording was accompanied by a web survey to allow the public the chance to weigh in on the draft goals. In total, 786 individuals participated in Round 1B engagement — both live and asynchronously.



## Findings: Key Themes

Recurring themes heard regarding a vision for Next Generation Freeways included:

- Congestion-free freeways: Desire for less traffic, which could result in less stress, increased mental wellness and the ability to spend more time with family and friends
- Safer freeways: Addressing bad driver behavior — especially speeding, unsafe merging
- Improved maintenance of freeways
- Better and safe transit alternatives
- Better management of freight traffic

The concept of pricing was met with adverse reactions. There is a strong perception of pricing as “double taxation” and a deep belief that it would not reduce congestion but is like another “money grab”. Participants underscored the financial burden in the context of rising inflation and housing unaffordability and the burden of unfair decision-making about traveling within the region and the associated stress. Participants wanted to see proof that pricing could work and could be equitable and demanded more details. A video highlighting participants’ input can be found here: [Link to Next Generation Freeways Study: Round 1A Engagement YouTube video](#)

During Round 1B, questions and comments received centered on:

- Equity concerns, specifically the impacts of a tolling system on people with low incomes.



- Improving transit: improving transit before implementing tolls; improving access for people with disabilities and people in suburbs/rural areas; making transit cheaper or free; better coordinating transit; consolidating transit agencies; expanding service; expanding frequency; expanding rail; dedicating more funding to transit; improving safety and cleanliness; incentivizing and encouraging transit use; and dedicating freeway lanes to transit
- Improving active travel modes and improving first/last mile connections.
- Direct opposition to pricing freeways (a handful of participants enthusiastically supported tolling)

Participants were also polled for their level of support for each of the five goals developed for Next Generation Freeways, shown in Figure 1. Most goals received broad support of at least 60%. The exception was “Reparative”, which received with 44% support, 16% neutral and 41% lack of support.



Figure 1 Level of Support for Next Generation Freeways Goals (Round 1B Webinars and Web-Survey, 786 participants)

