

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

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 without the implementation 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 to evaluate during the first round of analysis in spring and summer 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 associated 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

With the overarching objective of advancing outcomes that support Equity Priority Communities, 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. Impacts will be measured using performance indicators for specific outcomes outlined in **Attachment C**.

Proposed Portfolio of Pathways for Round 1 Analysis

Staff has co-created an initial set of “pathways” with the Advisory Group for the first round of analysis in this study. These pathways would be refined over the course of the study with an understanding of potential impacts from the technical analysis and through further engagement with communities and stakeholders. The proposed portfolio includes three pricing strategies that form the basis of pathways:

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

Under all pricing strategies, tolls would vary by place and time-of-day and would be zero when there is no congestion. Tolling revenues would fund complementary strategies, which may also be potentially supported by funding from a future regional measure.

Each pricing pathway includes a “Core Package” of complementary strategies that would invest 60 percent of anticipated revenues to improve trunkline transit frequencies, advance a fully connected network of carpool lanes on freeways, enhance safety of local streets, provide a basic set of discounts for transit fares and tolls, and fund community-scale reparative investments. The remaining 40 percent of revenues would be spent on one of two divergent “Investment Focus” concepts reflecting different priorities voiced by the Advisory Group and during community engagement: “Transit Double Down” and “Affordability Focus”. The former prioritizes revenues for additional transit improvements, while the latter prioritizes revenues for larger transit fare and toll discounts. An additional seventh pathway that does not include any new pricing initiatives but still integrates potential future regional measure funding will also be analyzed. Further details on this topic 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 Advisory Group will prioritize pathways and corridors for Round 2 public engagement. Staff will return to this committee for further feedback in fall 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



Andrew B. Fremier