

## Comments on Urban Mobility Strategy Finance Plan

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Submitted to the  
**Oregon Transportation Commission**  
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Dear Commissioners:

My name is John A. Charles, Jr., and I am President of Cascade Policy Institute, a nonprofit policy research center in Portland. I have been extensively involved in the Oregon policy process since 1980, and served on ODOT's Oregon Road User Fee Task force for over 10 years.

I have a few suggestions related to the UMS Finance Plan. First, the RQ/I-5 project should be significantly downsized to focus just on the auxiliary lanes and improved safety shoulders. Everything else is just an ornament on the tree.

In particular, the highway cover is excessively expensive and has nothing to do with solving any transportation problem. Even if the cover is built, the plan to give the new air rights only to Black-led organizations is divisive and illegal, and will undoubtedly result in litigation.

Slimming down the RQ project would free up at least \$600 million, which probably makes it the most significant thing you could do in the short term. Since the Cover-3 design was chosen by the former governor, not the current governor, I encourage you to delete it from the planning concept.

With regard to pricing: I have been a long-time advocate for congestion pricing, but the concept being forwarded by the OTC is not likely to succeed. You've chosen the single most difficult version of CP possible - a retrofit of existing highways where motorists will not feel that they are getting any improvements from the toll revenue, with the exception of the new I-205 lanes near Stafford.

As Commissioner Paul Savas said yesterday at the Toll Advisory meeting, a much more palatable version would be the Atlanta model where they are building new express toll lanes. With new capacity, there are no issues with "equity" or "diversion." The value proposition to motorists is obvious, and they can opt-in to pay a premium, or not.

Every governor since Vic Atiyeh has made a conscious choice to prevent any significant expansion of the regional highway system, even as population has grown. This has placed the Commission in a bind. The politics of tolling existing lanes of I-205 and/or I-5 will never be solved because elected leaders of both parties won't allow it. New express toll lanes are the solution.

Finally, the notion of "income-based" tolling is a terrible idea and should be dropped now. Oregon has a proud tradition of paying for roads primarily through user fees. That is inherently fair: those who use roads the most, pay the most. Please maintain that philosophy.

I hope these comments are helpful.