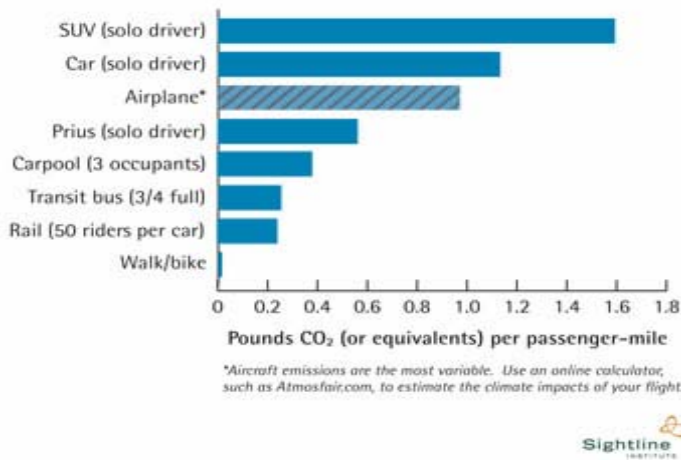




Sol-u-tion: the act of solving a problem

How tolls will help reduce congestion, global warming

Washington State can take the lead on the fight against global warming and reach our goal to reduce greenhouse gas emissions 80% below 1990 levels by 2050. If we all take steps together—in our homes, neighborhoods, and the state capitol—we can tackle the challenge of global warming. One way to reduce our greenhouse gas pollution is to reduce the number of cars on the road.



Transportation is the largest contributor to greenhouse gas pollution in the Puget Sound region. We can use our current roads more efficiently, reduce carbon emissions and save money at the pump.

Tolling our major highways, like the 520 and I-90 bridges, will reduce greenhouse gas emissions by reducing vehicle miles traveled and provide ample funds to repair our bridges and invest in buses and other alternatives to make commuting and travel more convenient and affordable.

Variable priced tolls set to keep traffic flowing: Variable price tolls help reduce traffic congestion and greenhouse gas emissions. In variable tolling, the price changes throughout the day – more expensive during peak travel times and less expensive when there is less traffic – to motivate people to plan trips during the off-hours. With car travel more evenly spread throughout the day, traffic congestion will lighten. This has been demonstrated successfully in other large cities that have adopted this method.

Invest in alternatives: With major highway corridors tolled, we need to ensure convenient and numerous alternatives to driving are available – buses, rapid transit, safe bike and pedestrian routes, and light rail. With rising gas and parking prices, driving is becoming less convenient and more costly. Record numbers of travelers are opting to leave the car at home, so we must make transit funding a priority to make sure we all have many options.

How does variable pricing work? A large percentage of trips during the commute hours are people doing errands or visiting, trips which could be planned for later or earlier in the day. If people take these more flexible trips during periods when the tolls are less expensive, there will be fewer cars on the road during peak hours. Our roads are used more efficiently. Traffic will flow smoothly. Toll prices should be set to ensure enough motivation for people to switch drive times, or chose an alternative such as carpooling or taking the bus.

Will tolls slow down traffic? Not at all. Toll collection today can be all electronic, so stopping at a toll booth is not needed. Electronic readers over the highway can detect an account card carried in a vehicle and charge the

account the current toll for a section of highway. Drivers can set up pre-paid accounts like coffee or phone cards, or be billed for the charges that result from their driving on the tolled roads. The toll rate can be displayed along the highway and a different price charged at different times of the day.

Is it fair? What about low income drivers?

Any tolling program must recognize that some low income workers will not be able to use transit services due to their work location or work hours. The burden on low income motorists must be reduced so they aren't priced out of the ability to reach work. This can be done by giving them a baseline amount of free miles each month, or charging them lower prices, or rebating some of the amount they pay at the end of the month. Additionally, everyone will benefit through faster and more reliable travel times: get to work and day care on time. This is particularly important for hourly workers who are already crunched for time.

According to a study by the Victoria Transport Policy Institute relying on the car culture is unfair:

Because driving is costly, regressive and difficult (particularly for some disadvantaged people, such as people with disabilities and immigrants who do not speak English), automobile-oriented solutions create additional equity problems. Cheap automobiles affordable to poor people tend to be unreliable, and are sometimes unsafe. Lower-income drivers often share vehicles with other household members. Even poor people who own an automobile often rely somewhat on other modes. As a result, disadvantaged people tend to benefit from a more diverse transport system. In other words, disadvantaged people may benefit from policies that help them drive, but they can benefit even more overall from policies and programs that increase total travel options. (excerpted from Evaluating Transportation Equity, www.vtpi.org/equity.pdf)

How much money will it raise? How should it be spent? Toll revenues have dual purposes. They can help us manage limited road lane capacity – by reducing traffic congestion and pollution – and they raise a significant amount of money for the region's transportation system. King County conducted a study in 2007 that suggested that tolling both the 520 and I90 bridges could raise \$36 billion over 20 years. Toll pricing can be designed so that a base amount is set to pay for the construction costs for replacing or fixing infrastructure (such as the SR520 bridge). Then, to see the maximum benefits of variable priced tolls, the remaining tolling revenue must be used to fund the capital, operating and maintenance costs of transportation alternatives that will move people and goods efficiently, meet our state's greenhouse gas emission reduction targets and ensure cleaner, healthier communities.”

When should tolling begin? We can obtain the advantages of reduced congestion, less greenhouse gas pollution, and added funding to support maintenance and transportation alternatives by starting the tolls in the next year or two. There is no reason to wait until a new 520 bridge is constructed to toll the cross-Lake Washington highways. The transportation experts need to pay close attention to likely diversion of traffic to non-tolled routes. To minimize these problems, tolling of both I-90 and 520 floating bridges will be necessary. This can also keep the toll lower than if only the 520 bridge was tolled to pay for its replacement.

It is important to toll the 520 and I-90 bridges. It is important that this is done right, as a successful and effective tolling plan could be expandable to other corridors to help us meet our mobility, maintenance and carbon reduction needs.

By making smarter energy and transportation choices, we can also save money, create jobs, reduce air and water pollution and improve the health of our families. Let's seize this moment and work together as citizens, community leaders, businesses and families. Let's make Washington State a COOL state!

www.CoolStateWashington.org