



January 6, 2023

Garet Prior, AICP
ODOT Toll Policy Manager
Oregon Department of Transportation
355 Capitol Street NE, MS 11
Salem, Oregon 97301-3871

Dear Mr. Prior:

We have previously submitted comment opposing Oregon's plans for levying new tolls on existing interstate lanes in the Portland area, and today we reiterate our opposition to this central component of the so-called Regional Mobility Pricing Project (RMPP).

The Alliance for Toll-Free Interstates is the leading national coalition of individuals, businesses and organizations working to protect existing interstates from the misguided imposition of new tolls. We recognize congested highways carry costs to commuters, communities and the state. These costs, however, are not good cause for the state to double-down on poor policy that carries additional negative economic consequences. Yet this is precisely what the state appears to be doing with its latest proposal.

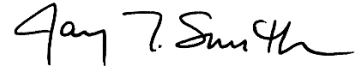
Under the RMPP, local and state economies will certainly face disruption, and communities will see increased traffic on municipal and side streets as drivers opt for non-tolled routes. Oregon motorists, who already have paid for existing lanes on Interstate 5 and Interstate 205 through existing revenue streams, will shoulder the burden of new tolls for the privilege of driving the same roads. It is fundamentally unfair for the state to impose a double tax in the form of a tolling scheme that punishes drivers utilizing transportation arteries that serve the needs of Oregonians statewide. Tolls are among the least-efficient means for funding road maintenance, and the construction of gantries and use of all-electronic collection – and higher fees for pay-by-plate notices – carry additional financial burdens that will weigh on lower-income and working class commuters, as well as the costs of goods and services.

As we've noted previously, the unpopularity of tolls is well recognized. In a September 2020 report, the Oregon Department of Transportation acknowledged the "majority of respondents across all demographic groups and commenting methods expressed strong opposition to tolling in general or to the specifics of the I-205 Toll Project." Two years later, ODOT touted a revised plan that expanded tolls onto Interstate 5 and pledged to find a way to provide relief to qualifying lower-income motorists.

Nevertheless, the Regional Mobility Pricing Project is a worse version of the original plan. Its negative impacts will spread across the region, and any toll rate scheme based on locations and times of day – and electronic collection – will serve as a cautionary tale for other states to resist the temptation of well-intended but shortsighted policy.

We strongly encourage the Oregon Department of Transportation to abandon plans to toll Interstate 5 and Interstate 205, and to find more efficient funds to support transportation infrastructure in Oregon.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jay Smith". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jay Smith
Executive Director
Alliance for Toll-Free Interstates

