Metro Traffic Reduction Study
Frequently Asked Questions (Winter – Spring 2022)

What is Metro's Traffic Reduction Study?

Metro is conducting a study to determine if a traffic reduction pilot program could be feasible and successful in LA County. This study will look at if, where, and how a traffic reduction pilot program that includes congestion pricing and additional transportation options can work somewhere in LA County to reduce traffic through a two-pronged approach:

1) Managing travel demand through congestion pricing, and
2) Providing more high-quality transportation options.

Ultimately, a traffic reduction pilot program concept and implementation plan will be brought to the Metro Board in partnership with one or more cities in Spring of 2023 for consideration. If the pilot program is approved, Metro and its partners will begin the multi-year design and implementation process for an anticipated launch in 2026.

See this video to learn more: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oQhNc03CbhQ&t=2s

What goals would a traffic reduction pilot program have?

The core goals of a pilot program are to:

- Reduce traffic through congestion pricing, making it easier for people to get around regardless of how they travel, and

- Provide additional high-quality options for getting around

Additional desired positive outcomes are intended to support:

- *Environmental and economic justice*, including seeking to address burdens and maximize benefits for low-income and vulnerable populations and reducing greenhouse gas emissions;

- *Public health and safety,* including supporting air quality improvements and roadway safety for users; and

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- *Economic opportunity and equity,* including supporting businesses and goods movement, and improving access to jobs and other key destinations and opportunities, and allowing for more equitable access, especially for neighborhoods and individuals that have been historically overburdened by congestion.

Why is Metro conducting a Traffic Reduction Study?

It's no surprise that LA County's street and highway system is highly congested and will likely become more so with time, unless we explore new solutions today. To date, efforts to ease traffic have not kept up with the demands of long-term regional growth.

The Traffic Reduction Study is an initiative identified in Metro's Vision 2028 Strategic Plan (see metro.net/about/plans/metro-strategic-plan), which was approved by the Metro Board in 2018. Vision 2028 envisions a future mobility system that enables people to travel swiftly and easily throughout LA County, no matter where or when they want to go. Metro is conducting the study to determine if a traffic reduction pilot program could support this vision, reducing the amount of time Angelenos spend in traffic, and supporting improvements to our health, economy, and quality of life.

What is congestion pricing?

Traffic exists because the number of people in cars who want to use the roads (demand) at that time is much greater than the actual space available (supply) for handling all of the vehicles.

Congestion pricing is a tool to manage roadway demand. When used as part of a comprehensive strategy to reduce traffic, congestion pricing can encourage some people to change the way they travel some of the time. This could include traveling at a different time; taking a different route; using a different mode, such as riding transit, walking, biking or rolling; carpooling; combining and reducing trips; telecommuting; or traveling to another destination.

The economic law of supply and demand applies to almost all products and services in the US, from housing and utilities to food and other forms of travel. When something that is in short supply is free or inexpensive, demand will be much higher than the available supply. Many businesses, utilities and other entities use pricing to manage demand, so that a limited supply can be enough for everyone.

See this video to learn more: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oQhNc03CbhQ&t=2s

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Isn't there another way to reduce traffic?

To date, many efforts to ease traffic have focused on increasing roadway supply, such as adding more lanes or improving interchanges. However, these projects are generally expensive and slow – and have not been able to keep up with rising demand. For this reason, traffic continues to increase.

Roadway projects that add more supply can also have a range of negative impacts. Managing demand can improve the performance of our existing roadway network, making it easier for everyone to travel, regardless of how they choose to do so.

What are the benefits of congestion pricing?

The core benefits of congestion pricing include reducing the amount of time, stress and costs incurred from sitting in traffic—and there are many other potential benefits as well. In other regions, when used as part of a comprehensive strategy, congestion pricing has resulted in improved air quality, has contributed to safer roadways and has been an effective tool for reducing carbon emissions. By helping vehicles move more freely—whether people are driving, carpooling or taking transit—people can better access jobs and other key destinations, which will help individuals and their communities thrive.

Why is Metro moving forward with consideration of congestion pricing as part of a traffic reduction strategy during a major public health crisis (COVID-19) that has resulted in an economic recession and significantly reduced traffic?

While the LA region is known as one of the world's economic and cultural capitals, it is also known for traffic. Our traffic has grown steadily worse through periods of economic growth and recessions. While COVID-19 is impacting us now, it's likely that our economy and population will continue to grow and traffic will intensify over the long term, unless we explore new ways to reduce traffic.

In fact, a study by the Southern California Association of Governments found that by Summer of 2020, during the midst of Stay at Home orders during the COVID-19 pandemic, traffic on our regional freeways had already climbed back to 90% of pre-pandemic levels. [1] Since then, traffic

[1] Southern California Association of Governments, Snapshot of COVID-19 Transportation Impacts in the SCAG Region, 2020, 3, https://scag.ca.gov/sites/main/files/file-attachments/scag-covid-19-transportation_impacts.pdf (accessed August 13, 2021).

has continued to increase, meeting or exceeding these levels in many areas of the county. [2] Early analysis shows that a pilot program can have a meaningful impact on easing this traffic. [3]

The Traffic Reduction Study is a multi-year effort to plan for a future where we can enjoy economic growth without the pain and stress of gridlock. At the completion of the study, anticipated in Spring 2023, the Metro Board of Directors will decide whether to implement a traffic reduction pilot program in partnership with one or more cities. Getting to an actual operational pilot program would still require federal and state approval, system design and deployment, with the anticipation of a pilot program launch in 2026.

How are you ensuring equity is centered throughout this study?

To provide a program that would work for everyone, including low-income and vulnerable communities, we must ensure that equity is a core consideration at every step of the process, and that the process is informed by stakeholder engagement and data. To improve equity outcomes through a potential traffic reduction pilot program, we must move beyond just mitigating or minimizing negative impacts. We must instead focus on improving outcomes. Throughout the Traffic Reduction Study, we will seek to:

- Identify who is impacted and how.
- Work with the community to establish desired outcomes and determine how to measure progress toward them.
- Measure potential benefits and burdens.
- Work with the community to develop strategies to address burdens and increase benefits, such as subsidies and low-income assistance programs and reinvestment of net revenues into the communities that are served or affected by a pilot program. This would include communities within the geographic boundaries and those whose members travel to or through a pilot area as well.
- Work with the community to develop proposed transportation improvements, which could include improving bus and rail service and frequency; creating safer places for people to walk, bike, or roll to transit or make short trips around their neighborhoods; providing better carpool incentives; and other improvements.
- Work with the community to develop the pilot concept(s) and iteratively refine the concept(s) with feedback from the community.

[2] Rachel Schnalzer, "Traffic is terrible again. Here's how to get it closer to spring 2020 levels." Los Angeles Times, July 22,2021, https://www.latimes.com/business/story/2021-07-22/los-angeles-traffic-congestion-commute-pandemic (accessed August 13, 2021).

[3] Office of Extraordinary Innovation, LA Metro, "With congestion increasing, here's an update on Metro's Traffic Reduction Study," The Source, June 24, 2021, https://thesource.metro.net/2021/06/24/with-congestion-increasing-heres-an-update-on-metros-traffic-reduction-study/ (accessed August 13, 2021).

What is the timeline for this study and what are the key milestones?

The study began in Fall 2019, with initial stakeholder and public engagement, and listening sessions taking place through 2020. In February 2021, we introduced early concepts, undertook technical analysis, examined issues raised by stakeholders, and continued stakeholder and public engagement. Metro will continue to study the concept areas through ongoing technical analysis, stakeholder and public engagement, more focused discussions with equity communities, and the development of an implementation plan.

We anticipate that in Spring of 2023, the preferred concept(s) and implementation plan will be brought forward, at which time the Metro Board will decide whether to approve a traffic reduction pilot program and move forward with implementation. At present, Metro estimates that an implementation process would take several years and that a pilot program opening would take place in 2026.

See the Metro Traffic Reduction Study Documents for the timeline and more information.
https://www.dropbox.com/home/Images/Projects/Traffic%20Reduction%20Study

I already pay lots of taxes. Why are you considering charging me more money to drive?

Congestion pricing is a direct user fee — much the same as paying for electricity, water or other road tolls — and is designed to manage roadway demand and reduce traffic.

Utilities use congestion pricing to ensure that people and businesses have the electricity, water and gas they need when they need it. For example, if we use too much electricity at once during periods of high demand, such as on hot summer afternoons, the grid would be stressed. We would have to worry constantly about blackouts. Pricing is used to avoid this outcome and effectively shift power usage to other parts of the day. In contrast, our roads are not priced, and, on an almost daily basis, we are subjected to gridlock, which has many negative effects on us as individuals and communities.

While much uncertainty from COVID-19 remains, traffic is already rising, threatening to return us to traffic-clogged roads. Congestion pricing is a tool to get our roads moving again and to ensure that we can swiftly and easily get to our jobs, schools, healthcare services and other key destinations.

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How much revenue could be generated from a program like this? What is Metro going to do with the revenues from any pilot pricing program?

We are still evaluating the potential range of net revenue, which would be reinvested into communities served and affected by the pilot program. This would include communities within the geographic boundaries and those whose members travel to or through a pilot area as well.

Any pilot program concept will focus first and foremost on achieving the goals of traffic reduction, providing additional high-quality transportation options, and supporting additional desired health and safety, economic and environmental justice, and economic vitality outcomes. Nevertheless, based on other programs around the world with similar objectives, we anticipate that it would generate revenues for reinvestment. Metro will work with communities and partnering agencies to identify investments that would be made.

The transit options in my area are not frequent and available enough for my needs. What do you mean by 'providing high-quality transit options in any study area'? I'm not seeing them right now.

Part of the study includes identifying and implementing better transportation options that would be in place before any pricing element would be introduced, which is currently anticipated to be in 2026. Some examples of better transportation options may include improving bus and rail service and frequency; creating safer walking, biking, and rolling conditions on streets; providing better incentives for carpooling and increased telecommuting options. These are just some examples. There are likely other improvements that we will explore as we engage with communities and conduct technical analysis.

In addition to managing roadway demand and reducing traffic, congestion pricing would also improve the speed and reliability of transit service. With additional improvements layered on top of these improved conditions, transit can function as a true high-quality option for more people.

How could a traffic reduction pilot program support low- or fixed-income county residents and communities, especially those who have historically been disadvantaged or are still recovering from the COVID-19 crisis?

Equity is a core priority of the Traffic Reduction Study.

While everyone would benefit from less traffic and time savings, not everyone may be able to shoulder the additional costs, even if the price is low. The Traffic Reduction Study will explore how a pilot program could improve outcomes, especially for vulnerable communities. As an example, utility services have implemented assistance programs for low-income households to ensure electricity is affordable and that pricing, to manage electricity demand, doesn't fall on their shoulders. Each of the concepts that are explored in the Traffic Reduction Study will be analyzed for their potential benefits and burdens on low-income households and communities. Once these have been identified, Metro will work to develop a suite of transportation improvements and low-income assistance programs to increase the benefits and address the burdens.

What is the public outreach process and plan for the Traffic Reduction Study? How do I participate?

The Traffic Reduction Study depends on meaningful public engagement throughout the process. Over the course of the study, there will be many ways to learn about the study's progress and to provide input. This will include Metro-hosted discussions, conversations with civic and advocacy organizations, residents, workers, businesses, municipalities and more. Metro will also hold public meetings throughout the process. Engagement with low-income and vulnerable communities will be a priority for ensuring that equity is at the core of a pilot program brought forward for consideration.

Visit the project website at metro.net/trafficreduction to learn about current input opportunities or send your thoughts and comments to trafficreduction@metro.net .

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What are the early concept areas you are considering for piloting a traffic reduction program? How did you select these areas?

The early concepts were selected (see February 2021 Source article here) by first looking at where congestion levels were particularly severe in LA County. From there, we considered locations and pricing models that met the below factors:

- Reduces substantial congestion
- Yields clear and understandable traffic reduction benefits
- Avoids potential spillover traffic
- Potential to have a reliable, diverse array of travel options in place by 2026, ahead of any pilot program's anticipated launch.
- Presence of potential municipalities interested in exploring congestion pricing

We also considered lessons learned from successful congestion pricing case studies in Europe and Asia:

- To the greatest extent possible, use natural or human-made structures as boundaries (such as water bodies, hills/mountains, highways/human-made structures)
- Focus on commercial locations in which trips and travel patterns can be influenced by pricing strategies
- Avoid bisecting neighborhoods
- Consider areas with existing robust transit options

Our technical analysis and modeling work will help us better understand how each of these scenarios performs in terms of benefits and burdens across multiple categories, including impacts on roadway congestion, access to opportunity, community health and environment, affordability and financial impacts. Public engagement will occur throughout the study to complement these efforts and inform the technical analysis.

What has Metro heard so far during its early engagement and outreach efforts?

Since August 2020, the project team has engaged a broad range of stakeholders across the region in conversations about their ideas and questions regarding the Traffic Reduction Study and a potential pilot program. Comments touched on themes around equity, stakeholder and public engagement, quality of public transit and alternative options in place of driving, potential benefits of pricing, revenues and reinvestments, economic impacts, and traffic impacts. This is a sample of what we've heard so far.

Doesn't Los Angeles County already have congestion pricing?

Yes! In the US, express lanes are the most common form of congestion pricing. A version of this concept can be seen on Metro's I-10 and I-110 ExpressLanes, which incorporates corridor congestion pricing to improve travel time reliability and reduce drive-alone trips, incentives to encourage carpooling, and investments to improve transit and expand biking and walking within those communities, offering people more travel options.

For the Traffic Reduction Study, Metro is exploring more expansive applications like cordon zones and full corridor pricing. Cordon zones cover geographic areas, such as central business districts. Full corridor pricing would include *all lanes* on roadways in a corridor and could include interstates, highways and/or surface roads. This broader approach has a greater potential for traffic reduction than the ExpressLanes, which only price select lanes on a roadway.

Does Metro have the authority to do this on its own or will it need to partner with cities, agencies and communities?

Partnerships are needed for both the study and implementation of any potential traffic reduction pilot program. Metro does not have authority over the roadway network and would not have the ability to implement a pilot program without one or more city and agency partners. Coordination, cooperation, and meeting shared goals are key to a potential pilot program.

For most of the Traffic Reduction Study, the nature of this partnership will be defined as willingness to explore and develop potential pilot program concepts. Community and stakeholder engagement will be a core component of this partnership process as well.

We anticipate that in Spring of 2023, the preferred pilot program and implementation plan will be brought to the Metro Board. If approved at that time, Metro and its partners will work together on a multi-year process to design and implement the program, with an anticipated opening date in 2026.

Does Metro need federal and state approval to move forward with a traffic reduction pilot program?

Metro and its partners would need federal approval and state legislation to move forward with any pilot program. Currently, it is anticipated that this process could occur in 2023, if the Metro Board approves a pilot program.

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