

# Metro Traffic Reduction Study

## Frequently Asked Questions (Updated January of 2023)

### What is Metro's Traffic Reduction Study?

Metro is conducting a feasible study to determine if a traffic reduction pilot program could be 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 within LA County to reduce traffic through a two-pronged approach:

- 1) Reduce traffic through congestion pricing, and
- 2) Provide more high-quality transportation options.

In late 2023, in partnership with cities and agencies, a Traffic Reduction Pilot Program concept will be presented to the Metro Board for consideration for further development. If the Board approves, Metro and its partners will move forward with next steps, such as an environmental study, exploration of state legislation and ongoing public engagement. Should a pilot be implemented it would launch in 2028, prior to the Olympics.

Please watch this short video to learn more:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oQhNc03CbhQ&t=2s>

### What are the goals of a traffic reduction pilot program?

The core goals of this pilot program would be to reduce traffic and provide more high-quality ways to get around. Pricing would reduce traffic and get everyone moving again, whether traveling by car, bus or driving a truck. Transportation investments, such as improved bus service, would provide people with more fast, frequent and reliable alternatives to driving.

The pilot program would also need to:

- *Enhance economic opportunity* through improved access to jobs and other key destinations, especially for low-income and vulnerable populations
- *Reduce air and climate pollution*, especially in communities near major roads and freeways
- *Improve safety on our roads and on transit* through investments that make our roads, buses and rail safer for everyone



- *Reinvest in our communities* by investing net revenues from a pilot program into communities and populations that would be affected by a program

### **How would this approach reduce traffic?**

Traffic exists when the number of people in cars who want to access roads (demand) are much greater than the actual roadway space available (supply) for handling all the vehicles.

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

To be successful in LA County, pricing must be paired with transportation investments such as faster, more reliable, and safe transit and low-income assistance programs. This comprehensive approach can lead to less time stuck in traffic for everyone and a higher-performing, cleaner and more equitable transportation system that can better meet everyone's needs.

Please watch this short video to learn more:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oQhNc03CbhQ&t=2s>

### **How could this approach improve transit and other modes of transportation?**

Through a combination of pricing and investment, we can make our transit options safer, more reliable, faster and more frequent. As an example, pricing reduces traffic, which gets our buses and the people riding them to move faster. Adding or increasing bus and rail service, adding bus lanes and improving bus stops are examples of investment options that would need to be paired with pricing to provide people with new high-quality ways to get around.

Improved safety would also be a priority. This includes investments that would make our streets safer for people to walk, bike and roll, as well as improving safety and security on bus and rail. These investments would be put in place prior to a pilot to ensure that people have safe and high-quality transportation options to get around.

### **How could this approach improve driving?**

Pricing reduces traffic and results in more reliable and predictable roads. Traffic's impact on our daily lives goes well beyond the time spent stuck in gridlock. Most of us plan for and adapt to traffic in ways that cost us valuable time that could be used in other significant and more



meaningful ways. The most common way we adapt to traffic is by changing when we travel. For example, if a trip to work or school usually takes 30 minutes in typical heavy traffic, most of us will leave an extra 10, 20 or 30 minutes early (sometimes even more) to ensure we get to our destination on time just in case traffic is particularly bad. Sometimes we may even choose to wait out the worst of traffic, instead of heading home right away at the end of a long day. Pricing can give us back the time we spend stuck in traffic and the time we spend planning and organizing our lives around it.

### **What about people who still need to drive and can't afford the cost?**

Pricing that is affordable is a core focus of this study. Even with substantial improvements to transit and other modes, many people will still need to drive. This includes gardeners and construction workers that need their vehicles to carry equipment, late shift workers and parents with school-age children, among others. Many may also be low-income and not able to afford to pay even a low toll price. That's why low-income assistance programs (such as discounts, credits and subsidies) and related strategies (such as carpool and vanpool incentives) would be needed.

### **Why is Metro continuing the Traffic Reduction Study?**

Since the dramatic decline of traffic in the early days of the pandemic traffic has gradually been increasing and is now approaching pre-pandemic levels in much of LA County, especially on our freeways. It's no surprise that LA County's roadways are 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. Vision 2028 envisions a future mobility system that enables people to travel swiftly and easily throughout the LA County region, no matter where or when they want to go. Metro is conducting this feasibility study to determine if a traffic reduction pilot program could support this vision, reduce the amount of time Angelenos spend in traffic, and support improvements to our health, economy and quality of life.

### **Isn't there another way to reduce traffic?**

Roadway projects that add more supply can also have a range of negative impacts. To date, many efforts to ease traffic have focused on increasing roadway supply, such as adding more lanes or improving interchanges. These projects are expensive and take a long time to complete— and have not been able to keep up with rising demand. They also generally lead to more traffic congestion over time and an increase in air and climate pollution.



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.

### **How are you ensuring equity is centered throughout this study?**

Equity is both a process and an outcome.

Metro is committed to inclusive public engagement that meaningfully informs the study throughout the entire process. This includes meeting with communities and populations when and where it most suits them, listening to their feedback, and demonstrating how their input is reflected and integrated into the study. Engaging vulnerable and hard-to-reach communities is an especially strong point of emphasis.

So far in the study, engagement has played a significant role in shaping the technical analysis and reinforcing the role that robust investments in new and improved transportation options and low-income assistance would need to play for any pilot program to be feasible and successful. In 2023, Metro will seek out and welcome opportunities to connect with vulnerable communities and populations. These include low-income communities, people who depend on vehicles for their livelihood such as gardeners and construction workers, parents with kids, shift workers, long-distance commuters, small-business owners, people with limited or no English and delivery/truck drivers among others.

Visit the project website at [metro.net/trafficreduction](https://metro.net/trafficreduction) to learn about current input opportunities or send your thoughts and comments to [trafficreduction@metro.net](mailto:trafficreduction@metro.net).

### **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.

Due to the ongoing uncertainty with COVID, Metro took most of 2022 to monitor changing traffic and economic conditions in order to update the analysis of the concept areas. In 2023, Metro will complete the updated technical analysis, conduct ongoing engagement and seek to conclude the feasibility study with a recommendation to the Metro board for consideration late in the year. If the Board approves a pilot concept, Metro and its partners will undertake immediate next steps including beginning an environmental study, exploring state legislation and conducting ongoing stakeholder engagement. Should a pilot ultimately move forward the anticipated launch would occur 2028, prior to the Olympics.



## **What examples are there of congestion pricing being used successfully?**

Congestion pricing is broadly used to manage demand for many products and services. Many applications, such as increasing the cost of airplane tickets and charging premiums to bypass lines at the amusement park are luxuries and do not play as central a role to our daily lives as our roads.

Utilities however do play a central role in our daily lives and 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 heat waves, the grid would be stressed to potential failure. 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.

Utilities also pair this pricing approach with assistance programs to ensure low-income and disadvantaged households can afford electricity, water and power. This includes credits and rebates for investment in energy efficient appliances, home weatherization and discounts on utility bills. This combination of pricing and assistance programs plays a role in maintaining a stable, reliable grid and advancing equity. In the same way, pricing, transportation investments and low-income assistance programs would be paired together in a pilot program to reduce traffic and get people moving regardless of how they travel, while also addressing equity.

## **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?**

The potential range of net revenue will be included in the results of the updated technical analysis that will be shared in late Spring. Any net revenue would be reinvested to serve communities and populations that live within or near priced roads as well as those who travel into or through these areas.

Any pilot program concept will first be evaluated for its ability to reduce traffic and provide additional high-quality transportation options. Generating revenue is not a core goal of a pilot program; nevertheless, based on other programs around the world with similar objectives, we anticipate that it would generate revenues above and beyond what would be needed to operate a pilot program. These net revenues would be dedicated for investment in new and improved transportation options along with low-income assistance programs. 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 need to be in place before any pricing element would be introduced, which is currently anticipated to be in 2028. Some example improvements include adding bus or rail service and frequency, better walking and rolling conditions on streets, better incentives for carpooling and increased telecommuting options. These are just some examples and 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.

**What are the concept areas you are exploring through this feasibility study? How did you select these areas?**

We are exploring pricing in the following concept areas:

- Pricing on the portions of the I-405, US-101, and I-5 freeways and arterials crossing over the Santa Monica Mountains
- Pricing on the I-10 west of Downtown LA through Santa Monica
- Pricing on surface streets within Downtown LA and freeways that surround Downtown LA

These locations were identified using the following factors:

- Presence of high levels of traffic congestion
- Potential to substantially reduce traffic congestion
- Clear and understandable traffic reduction benefits
- Ability to address spillover traffic
- Potential to have a reliable, diverse array of travel options in place by 2028, ahead of any pilot program’s anticipated launch
- Presence of potential municipalities/agencies and community partners interested in exploring congestion pricing
- 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 perform in terms of benefits and burdens across multiple categories, including effect on roadway congestion, access to opportunity, community health and environment, affordability and finances. Public engagement will occur at the same time to complement these efforts and inform the technical analysis.

### **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 includes *all lanes* on a set of 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 certain 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 or 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.

During 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. If a concept is advanced by the Board for further development in late 2023 these partnerships will continue through post-study phases and into implementation.

