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Please contact:

Cascade Policy Institute
4850 SW Scholls Ferry Rd.
Suite 103
Portland, Oregon 97225

Phone: (503) 242-0900
Fax: (503) 242-3822

www.cascadepolicy.org
info@cascadepolicy.org

4850 SW Scholls Ferry Road
Suite 103
Portland, Oregon 97225

t: 503.242.0900
f: 503.242.3822
info@cascadepolicy.org
www.cascadepolicy.org

QuickPoint! – Road Policy Belongs to Those Who Show Up

By John A. Charles, Jr.

The Oregon Department of Transportation is [hosting three Open Houses this month](#) to discuss the possibility of changing how several local highways are managed.

Currently, we finance roads through gasoline taxes. However, a growing number of cars use little or no gasoline. Therefore, the legislature is requiring ODOT to study an alternative finance mechanism for I-205 and part of I-5 that would rely on user fees collected electronically.

In addition, those fees would vary in price depending on the time of day, direction of travel, and day of the week.

While this may sound punitive, the fact is that a single highway lane can move anywhere from 700 vehicles per lane, per hour, to more than 2,000 vehicles, depending on the density of traffic. At times of hyper-congestion, throughput drops dramatically as we sit in stop-and-go conditions.

An alternative would be to use variable toll rates to even out demand, thereby tripling the number of cars per lane while averaging about 45 miles per hour.

Is it a good idea to make our highways three times more productive through congestion pricing? That's what the Open Houses will explore. Interested motorists should attend, because policy belongs to those who show up.

John A. Charles, Jr. is President and CEO of Cascade Policy Institute, Oregon's free market public policy research organization.

This is the schedule for ODOT's community conversations, [according to the department's press release](#):

- Tuesday, Jan. 23, 4:30 to 7:30 p.m., Clackamas Town Center Community Room (Level 1 near Buckle and across from Macy's), 12000 S.E. 82nd Avenue, Happy Valley
- Saturday, Jan. 27, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., Lloyd Center (Level 1 between Ross and the ice rink), 2201 Lloyd Center, Portland
- Tuesday, Jan. 30, 4:30 to 7:30 p.m., Vancouver Community Library, 901 C Street, Vancouver.
- Jan. 17 to Feb. 5, the Online Open House will be active at odotvaluepricing.org. The public can see materials, view video recordings of the project Policy Advisory Committee meetings and leave comments for the project team.

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