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QuickPoint! – Making Driving More Expensive Won't Fix Oregon's Congested Roads

By Micah DeSilva

Metro is the regional government of the greater Portland region. It is tasked with managing regional issues like transportation, land use, and public parks. Metro's Regional Mobility Policy guides the region's transportation investments toward its goals—directing investments in roads, bridges, bike lanes, light rail, and more.

One of Metro's proposed policies for 2023 is the use of congestion pricing, meaning imposing tolls on users of high-traffic roadways. Cascade Policy Institute has long supported the use of toll lanes and congestion pricing to alleviate traffic, but Metro's plans for implementing these policies leave much to be desired. Metro would use tolling revenues as if they were another form of general funding, financing unrelated projects like transit subsidization instead of reinvesting revenues back into the roadways that generated them.

Using pricing in this way amounts to just another tax. Clearing up existing roadways by making driving more expensive does nothing to resolve the underlying problem. For pricing to be effective, revenues from busy roadways should be reinvested in additional lanes or alternative routes that allow everyone to get where they need to go quickly and efficiently.

More taxes are not the solution to congested roads. Metro needs to seriously rethink its approach to pricing if it wants to make meaningful progress in reducing traffic in the greater Portland region.

Micah DeSilva is a Research Associate at Cascade Policy Institute, Oregon's free market public policy research organization.

