

MEETING SUMMARY

Subject: Community Advisory Group (CAG) Meeting #36

Date and Time: Thursday, June 13th, 2024 / 4:00 – 6:00pm

Location: Zoom Meeting and YouTube Livestream

Number of concurrent YouTube viewers: 22

OUTCOMES

- Receive an update on recent program activities.
- Better understand what it will be like to drive on a facility tolled by WSDOT and what it's like to be a *Good to Go!* customer.
- Receive an overview of potential tolling scenarios and policies being considered for analysis.
- Provide feedback on toll scenarios and policies to inform upcoming recommendations by the Bi-State Toll Subcommittee.

WELCOME & PROGRAM UPDATE

Johnell Bell, CAG co-facilitator, opened the meeting and provided introductory comments. Bell then welcomed Jon Wilson, a new CAG member representing the Vancouver Clinic and Columbia River Economic Development Council. Lynn Valenter, CAG co-chair, further welcomed the group, and invited members to introduce themselves.

Greg Johnson, Program Administrator for the Interstate Bridge Replacement (IBR) program, highlighted the program's recent public involvement and activities. He provided an update on the June 10 Bi-State Legislative Committee meeting where lawmakers asked questions about bridge configuration and the ongoing efforts to create a bike walking facility across the river. Johnson talked about the progress of the Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS), which is expected to be released later this year, and the subsequent public comment and hearings that will occur upon release.

Johnson emphasized the importance of preparing the workforce, including small businesses and minority-owned companies. During the Q&A Johnson assured the team that there will be detailed community outreach leading up to the release of the Requests for Proposals (RFPs). He also addressed concerns raised by a CAG member about the timeline for the eminent domain process, clarifying that the final decision would be made late next year. The discussion also covered potentially increasing program costs, securing permits, potential legal challenges, and the introduction of tolling as a funding mechanism for transportation projects.

OVERVIEW OF WSDOT TOLLED FACILITIES AND 'WHAT IT'S LIKE TO BE A CUSTOMER'

Meghan Hodges, IBR Community and Government Relations Manager, began by outlining the roles and responsibilities related to tolling efforts in each state. She explained that these efforts will be developed through a bi-state process involving each of the decision makers.

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Hodges emphasized that the Oregon and Washington Legislatures play a critical role by passing laws that authorize tolling facilities and determine how toll revenue is allocated. She highlighted that the Oregon and Washington Transportation Commissions are responsible for setting toll rates and policies. In Oregon, the Commission also decides how toll revenue is spent. She further explained that the I-5 Bridge Bi-State Toll Subcommittee was established to recommend toll rates and policies to the full commissions of both states. Additionally, the Oregon and Washington Departments of Transportation are tasked with implementing the tolls and policies on state facilities.

Ed Barry, WSDOT Toll Division Director, began his presentation by overviewing current toll facilities in the Puget Sound area, including their operation, purpose and funding mechanisms. He highlighted the recent addition of the IBR program to the 'Good to Go!' family. Barry also discussed the authorized toll facilities they are working to bring online, such as the Gateway Program and the 405 Express Lanes, which are in various stages of construction and implementation. He emphasized that the revenue generated from these facilities funds future projects.

Barry then discussed the operational aspects of the toll facilities in the Seattle area, focusing on customer experience and various payment options. He emphasized the importance of customer service, noting that over 1.2 million customers utilize prepaid and pay-as-you-go options. Barry highlighted the company's efforts to improve customer service over the past 15 years, including the development of an effective civil penalty process.

During the Q&A, a CAG member asked about low-income based pricing. Barry acknowledged the lack of a low-income discount program but noted it is a topic of ongoing discussion with the Washington state legislature and commission. Another CAG member asked about the administrative costs associated with the toll program, with Barry clarifying that the cost percentage varies depending on the facility and toll rate. CAG members also asked whether buses will be charged for tolling, if that would impact the bus rider costs, and what happens if a car doesn't have a license plate. Barry responded by saying that exemptions are within the purview of the commissions and that a license plate is needed to send a person a bill.

I-5 BRIDGE TOLL SCENARIO DEVELOPMENT AND FEEDBACK

Travis Brouwer, Assistant Director for the Oregon Department of Transportation, and Carl See, Deputy Director for the Washington State Transportation Commission, began their presentation by discussing specific toll rates and policy considerations that the subcommittee is working on. Brouwer explained the tolling process, its financial implications, the attributes of a toll scenario, and the schedule for scenario development and toll rate setting. Tolling is expected to begin in 2026 and transfer to the new bridge once it opens to traffic.

See outlined that toll rates and policies will consider various factors such as time of day, day of week, truck toll multipliers, and inflation adjustments. The public process for input on the toll scenarios will start next year. He emphasized the importance of safe and efficient mobility, equity, environmental quality, and economic vitality. See asked the CAG members in a poll via Mentimeter, "What toll rate and policy considerations are most important to you?" The CAG members participated, with over 70% of respondents identifying safe and efficient mobility as the top priority. See explained that this information will be shared with the subcommittee at their next meeting as they are considering recommendations for Level 3 scenarios.

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See then outlined the five components of the toll scenarios developed by the subcommittee for recommendation to the full commission. These components include toll rate variability by time of day and day of week, user discounts and exemptions, toll escalation, and truck toll multipliers. He explained that pre-completion tolling would generate early revenues for construction, reduce future interest costs, and help manage traffic demand. He then asked the CAG members in a poll via Mentimeter, “Which tradeoff approach do you prefer?” The CAG members indicated a preference for pre-completion toll rates similar to toll rates after the new bridge opens.

See then led a discussion on potential changes in travel behavior due to the implementation of a toll. The group participated in another Mentimeter poll, asking, “How do you feel about this statement? Statement: Paying a toll will cause me to rethink which mode of travel I use to cross the bridge.” The CAG members leaned towards strongly agreeing with the statement with a score of 3.3 out of 5. The next poll listed potential changes in traveler behavior, including no changes, taking I-205, skipping the trip, taking transit, walking/biking, traveling at a different time of day and carpooling. The CAG members selected taking I-205 and traveling during a different time of day as the top two likely changes. The group agreed that these insights would be valuable for both commissions and the public to understand the potential opportunities and challenges of the toll.

During the Q&A, the team addressed potential impacts and feedback on tolling policies for medium and heavy-duty trucks. A CAG member expressed concerns about the lack of choice in terms of time of day for truckers, while another CAG member suggested expanding polling to the wider community. Additionally, CAG members raised concerns about how tolling might cause diversion to other routes, congestion, and potential impact of toll rates. See noted that the rates were still being considered, likely ranging from \$3 to \$4 for the top rate. Another comment from a CAG member suggested considering an inflationary rate tied to an index like the consumer price index (CPI) for future variability.

See also discussed outreach plans for engaging the community in the tolling policy discussion. These plans include contacting the general public, historically disadvantaged and marginalized communities, and tribal consultation. The final Mentimeter poll asked the CAG members, “What groups should we reach out to about tolling?” Responses included tribes, super commuters, trucks, clients of medical facilities, low-income residents, vulnerable communities, people with family on fixed incomes, Cowlitz Tribe, human services transportation, and the IBR Equity Advisory Group.

See then shared that the Bi-State Tolling Subcommittee will continue to operate after the adoption of I-5 Bridge toll rates and policies in the summer of 2025, with pre-completion tolling starting in early 2026. Their ongoing responsibilities will include reviewing the facility's traffic, revenue, and costs prepared by WSDOT, maintaining public engagement forums, and recommending changes to toll rates and policies to the full Commissions. The Subcommittee will particularly focus on assessing toll rates and policies as the new bridge opens in the early 2030s. Upcoming meetings are scheduled for June 21 and July 19 from 1 pm to 3 pm. He encouraged the CAG members to visit the Subcommittee websites for Washington and Oregon or sign up for updates by emailing info@bistatesubcommittee.org for more information.

PUBLIC COMMENT

No public comment.

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CAG Member Participants

Participants	Organization
Bill Prows	OAME
Dena Horton	PNWA
Gerina Hatch	Community in Motion
Irina Phillips	At-large Community Member
Jana Jarvis	Oregon Trucking Association
Jay Clark	PMC
Jon Wilson	The Vancouver Clinic, Columbia River Economic Development Council
Julie Doumbia	At-large Community Member
Lynn Valenter	CAG Co-Chair
Martha Wiley	Public Transit Representative - WA
Sam Kim	At-large Community Member
Sheri Call	Washington Trucking Association
Tom Hickey	Bridgeton Neighborhood Association
Tom Sandhwar	Clark College
Zachary Lauritzen	Oregon Walks

Facilitators and Presenters

Staff Name	Role
Greg Johnson	IBR Program Administrator
Johnell Bell	IBR CAG Co-facilitator
Lisa Keohokalole Schauer	IBR CAG Co-facilitator
Meghan Hodges	IBR Community and Government Relations Manager

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Staff Name	Role
Ed Barry	WSDOT Toll Division Director
Carl See	Deputy Director Washington State Transportation Commission
Travis Brouwer	Assistant Director Oregon Department of Transportation

Additional Attendees

- Fabian Hidalgo Guerrero, CAG Lead
- Robert Areola, IBR staff, tech support
- Amy Danberg, IBR Program Staff
- ASL interpreters: Andrea and Amanda
- Close Captioner: Lauren

MEETING RECORDING AND MATERIALS

Meeting Recording

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gr0slbiwBFs>

Meeting Materials

<https://www.interstatebridge.org/get-involved-folder/calendar/cag-june-13-2024-meeting/>