

Background Paper #11

Public and Stakeholder Outreach

■ Executive Summary

The Public Outreach Program for the Washington State Transportation Commission's Comprehensive Tolling Study was structured to *give* information to the public about the Study and nine draft policy recommendations and to *get* feedback through personal interaction with stakeholders and the citizens, written and web-based feedback surveys, and meetings to discuss the purpose and outcome of the study with newspaper editorial boards and reporters around the Washington State.

The outreach took place across Washington State, on-line, and in five cities from June 20 to June 29, 2006. The Commission's consultant, Cambridge Systematics, employed Frank Wilson & Associates to assist in presenting the policy recommendations to the public and stakeholders and to obtain public and stakeholder comments and opinions on the Commission's preliminary recommendations. Participants offered valuable insights about the challenges that face the State's transportation system and the difficult choices that lay ahead for decision-makers. This input generally confirmed what was heard during the public attitude research conducted earlier in the study.

Participation in the outreach included:

- About 5,000 citizens visited the project's web site or attended one of five evening public open houses. The project web site received more than 38,000 visits.
- Nearly 100 local leaders attended roundtables and participated in a 90-minute discussion.
- Commissioners and outreach team members visited the offices of eight newspapers and met with editorial boards and reporters. This resulted in more than 15 editorials and articles that will further inform the public about the Commission's Study.
- In all venues, comments and opinions were solicited informally through discussion opportunities with the Commissioners and WSTC staff, and formally via a concise 12-question quantitative survey that also invited qualitative comments.

In addition to asking the public to comment on the nine tolling policy recommendations, the outreach program was designed to help bridge the gap between Washingtonian's current perceptions of tolling and the advances that have been made in electronic tolling and the use of tolls – or “pricing” – for better management of the transportation system.

In general, the following findings were confirmed and/or brought to light:

- There was general agreement that traffic congestion is a very real concern and acknowledgment that tolling is a potentially viable solution for system management.
- The devil will be in the details of implementation; many are concerned about fairness and it will be very important for the State to take into consideration the needs among particular groups such as carpoolers, commercial vehicles/trucking, low-income drivers, etc.
- There were many questions and concerns about tolling as a state policy.
 - Some think taxes, rather than tolls, should fund transportation;
 - Some are concerned with how tolling revenue will be used; and
 - Some are concerned about how tolls will be set, how long they will last and how revenue will be used.
- The issues surrounding tolling – especially its use for system management – are complex and not at all well understood by the general public. The State will need to continually educate the public and stakeholders about how tolling benefits users and how the system works more efficiently when tolling/pricing is used to manage traffic.
- The video simulations of nonstop electronic toll collection were an eye opener for participants and did much to dispel objections that were based on the outdated “buckets and toll attendants” perception of toll collection. More education is needed to explain how electronic tolling works, its various applications (e.g., toll booth versus HOT lane configurations), and how *Good To Go!*¹ will work on projects statewide.
- The public is concerned about more taxes, and many expressed the opinion that taxes currently collected should be sufficient for transportation.
- The public seems willing to accept tolling under specific conditions and for specific projects. Citizens have many different ideas on where and when it should be used.
- Many were concerned that tolling will result in too much diversion of traffic onto free roads or local streets.
- The trucking community was concerned that tolls would erode the already thin margins in the industry, with no ability to pass the cost on to customers.

¹ *Good To Go!* is Washington State’s brand name for electronic tolling to be used throughout the State.

- Those who attended an event personally had positive remarks about the Commission’s outreach campaign and stressed the need for ongoing education and communication.
- Specific Projects – Most of the comments revealed a need for more specific information about the details, layout, and operation of specific projects.
 - Though somewhat reluctantly, many comments about the illustrative example about tolling Snoqualmie Pass agreed with it. More information on the specifics and proposed benefits will need to be provided;
 - Vancouver area residents are concerned with the bridges and how tolling will work between Washington and Oregon; and
 - Many from the Tacoma Narrows Bridge area feel that they are being unfairly treated because a toll is being charged to fund their project while others in the State are not.
- It would helpful to the reader for each of the nine recommendations to be framed with a headline or to note the question that it addresses in order to quickly clarify the intent of each recommendation.

A summary of all the feedback from Stakeholders, the general public, and editorial commentary is provided in the Goal 3 section found on page 10.9. Although feedback from the outreach is qualitative in nature and not statistically reliable, the results of this outreach supplement a comprehensive public attitudes study performed earlier and provide WSTC with additional insight into what local elected officials, public officials, community leaders, and interested citizens think about the Commission’s preliminary recommendations.

■ Introduction

The Washington State Transportation Commission (“the Commission”) was directed by the State Legislature to conduct a Comprehensive Tolling Study for the State of Washington and to present policy recommendations regarding future use of tolling in the State of Washington. WSTC contracted with Cambridge Systematics to conduct the Study, which resulted in nine policy recommendations.

Cambridge Systematics commissioned Frank Wilson & Associates and Lawrence Research to conduct public attitudes research to determine the public’s views on tolling and the key issues being addressed in the Study. That effort resulted in a report on public attitudes, which was based on interviews with opinion leaders from across the State, focus groups conducted in three areas of the State, and a statewide survey of almost 1,200 motorists and voters.

The public attitude research informed the Commission’s deliberations on developing policy recommendations to the legislature. The Commission wanted to engage the public in a discussion of the preliminary recommendations prior to finalizing and submitting them to the Legislature. Cambridge Systematics tasked Frank Wilson & Associates to assist the Commission in presenting the policy recommendations to the public and stakeholders across the State of Washington and to document public input and feedback on the recommendations.

This working paper documents the public outreach program undertaken by WSTC to support the Comprehensive Tolling Study.

■ Public Outreach Program Goals

WSTC wanted to *give* information to the public about its comprehensive Study and *get* information and feedback from the public concerning nine policy recommendations before submitting its report to the Legislature. To that end, the public outreach program had these goals:

- Identify concerned groups, individuals, stakeholders, and elected officials whose views and voices should be heard. Reach out to the public, encourage their participation, and maximize distribution of information to encourage the broadest possible input.
- Provide citizens and stakeholders with the facts they need in order to contribute their ideas and concerns about methods, criteria, and technical findings in a way that can be clearly understood by the general public.
- Ensure that public input is obtained and considered *before* final decisions are made.

■ Public Outreach Program

The Commission operates in an open meeting environment, and at all of the meetings held to discuss the Tolling Study, the public has had an opportunity to listen. Nonetheless, to ensure the broadest participation and greatest response possible within the available project budget, an integrated communications strategy was employed to inform the public and to solicit and obtain public input to the Study recommendations. The following is a summary of the Commission’s outreach.

Goal 1: Publicity and Promotion

Invite Stakeholders and the Public to Participate in the Study

Stakeholder Roundtable Invitations – Approximately 500 invitations were sent to elected officials, agency staff, local community leaders, and other local opinion leaders throughout the State. The Commission provided an initial list of names from its previous outreach efforts. Additional names that represent assorted local governments, WSDOT regional offices, tribes, ports, transportation service providers, private employers, and others with an interest in transportation topics were provided by Regional Transportation Planning Organizations (RTPO). These lists were further supplemented with suggestions from other local leaders and RTPO executive directors. Invitation letters were e-mailed or mailed to each of these individuals from the Commission’s Chair. In addition, invitees were reminded of the event through e-mails, announcements at RTPO meetings, and follow-up phone calls.

Also, each member of the State Legislature was sent a letter from the Commission’s Chair specifically inviting them to preview the policy recommendations at the regional roundtables.

Public Open House Invitations – The public outreach program was extensively promoted and publicized through these means:

- **Public Notices** – One hundred city halls, chambers of commerce, employers, and other organizations agreed to announce the outreach program and to urge their members, employees and the public to attend one of the public open houses or, alternatively, to visit the interactive web site,
- **E-mail Blasts** – More than 8,000 people were contacted weekly by e-mail during the month of June. Names were obtained from organizations such as the RTPOs, Discovery Institute’s Cascadia Center and other Commission studies;
- **Local News Media** – There are about 130 local newspapers across the State of Washington. Each of these publications was contacted with a news release that included the schedule of activities on the outreach program plus the web site address and
- **Advertising** – Third-page display ads were placed in the paper of record located in each of the five regional areas in which the outreach meetings took place. Each ad was customized for each newspaper to highlight that region’s meeting. The ads were designed as invitations to the public to both attend the public open houses and/or visit the project’s web site. The ads ran the week prior to the day of the region’s Public Open House, on Sunday to allow time for scheduling and on Friday as a reminder.

Table 11.1 shows the newspapers that ran ads inviting the public to participate in the outreach program. A sample copy of the ad can be found in Appendix A.

Table 11.1 Advertising

Newspaper	Open House City	Ad Size	Dates	Number of Ads
Columbian	Vancouver	1/3 page	Sunday, June 11; Friday, June 16	2
Seattle Post Intelligencer	Mercer Island	1/3 page	Sunday, June 11; Friday, June 16	2
Seattle Times	Mercer Island	1/3 page	Wednesday, June 14	1
Bellingham Herald	Bellingham	1/3 page	Sunday, June 11; Friday, June 16	2
Tri-City Herald	Yakima	1/3 page	Sunday, June 18; Friday, June 23	2
Yakima Herald	Yakima	1/3 page	Sunday, June 18; Friday, June 23	2
Review Independent	Yakima	1 page tab	Wednesday, June 21	1
The Spokesman Review	Spokane	1/3 page	Sunday, June 18; Friday, June 23	2

Goal 2: Giving Information

Clearly Communicate Study Information

Although tolling is the traditional way in which major transportation projects have been funded in the State, the use of tolling to manage congestion plus today’s nonstop electronic technologies for collecting tolls are new ground for most Washingtonians. In addition, the information, analytical methods, data, and evaluation criteria developed for the Comprehensive Tolling Study were both voluminous and complex, and they needed to be reduced and presented in an easily understandable manner.

To address this, of the team conducted a “road show” in five regions of the State between June 20 and 29, 2006. The public meetings and the virtual open house were heavily publicized prior to the events and received considerable media coverage during and following the events.

The Commission selected five areas of the State to encourage statewide representation and personal interaction between the Commissioners and the public:

- Southwest (Vancouver);
- Central Puget Sound (Mercer Island);
- Northwest (Bellingham);
- Central (Yakima); and
- East (Spokane Valley).

Information Kit – The information was simplified into 20 display boards and slides. In addition, two video simulations, one of a modern electronic toll plaza and the other of the proposed SR 167 HOT lanes were used to illustrate and simplify the discussion of modern nonstop electronic tolling. The public attitude research had revealed that an outdated image of tolling was a major barrier to acceptance. The video simulations proved to be a revelation to program participants and helped to move the conversation along.

The information kit for the Commission’s outreach program included:

- Invitation, e-vites, ads, and notices;
- Web site as an information repository and location for the virtual open house;
- Press kit;
- Fact sheets on electronic tolling and the use of tolling in other parts of the United States; and
- Display boards and video simulation of electronic toll collection and the operation of HOT lanes.

Events – The program consisted of three events in each city that afforded Commissioners an opportunity to interact with the local citizens, stakeholders, and media. In addition, the outreach used an interactive web site as a “virtual open house.” WSTC’s outreach program included the following:

- **Public Open Houses** – Scheduled for greatest public convenience, the early evening time provided the opportunity for the public to view the Commission’s preliminary recommendations and to discuss the work and concerns one-to-one with Commissioners, staff and consultants. The open houses received good coverage from local news media.
- **Stakeholder Roundtable Meetings** – A 90-minute roundtable featured a 20-minute presentation and extended discussion was held with local elected officials, public agency staff, and community leaders about the study and the draft recommendations.
- **Editorial Board Meetings** – Commission members and technical staff met with editorial boards and reporters in each of the cities visited, as well as media outlets in several nearby communities.
- **Virtual Open House** – To further encourage participation throughout the State, especially for those living in other regions or those unable to attend the meetings, an interactive web site was created which focused on project background, information on the use of tolling to fund major infrastructure projects and to manage congestion, and preliminary policy recommendations. The site recorded more than 38,000 hits and 5,000 unique visitors during the outreach program.

- **Informal Survey** – In addition to the in-person interaction at the open houses and roundtables, participants were asked to complete a 14-question survey that provided feedback to WSTC relating to tolling in general, as well as the proposed tolling policies. This survey form also was available on the web site. A total of 207 surveys were completed. Although this is a significant number, it should not be viewed as representative because survey participants were self-selected and no random sampling technique was used.

A calendar of the regional outreach activities is shown in Table 11.2.

Table 11.2 Public and Stakeholder Outreach Schedule

Date	City	Time	Event
Tuesday, June 20	Vancouver	7:30 to 9:00 a.m.	Stakeholder Roundtable
Tuesday, June 20	Vancouver	1:30 to 2:30 p.m.	Editorial Board at Vancouver Columbian
Tuesday, June 20	Vancouver	5:00 to 7:00 p.m.	Public Open House
Wednesday, June 21	Tacoma	11:00 to 12:00 p.m.	Editorial Board at Tacoma News Tribune
Wednesday, June 21	Seattle	11:00 to 12:00 p.m.	Editorial Board at Seattle Post Intelligencer
Wednesday, June 21	Everett	2:00 to 3:00 p.m.	Editorial Board at Everett Herald
Wednesday, June 21	Mercer Island	5:00 to 7:00 p.m.	Public Open House
Thursday, June 22	Mercer Island	7:30 to 9:00 a.m.	Stakeholder Roundtable
Thursday, June 22	Seattle	1:30 to 2:30 p.m.	Editorial Board at Seattle Times
Thursday, June 22	Bellingham	5:00 to 7:00 p.m.	Public Open House
Friday, June 23	Bellingham	7:30 to 9:00 a.m.	Stakeholder Roundtable
Friday, June 23	Bellingham	10:00 to 11:00 a.m.	Editorial Board at Bellingham Herald
Tuesday, June 27	Yakima	11:00 to 12:00 p.m.	Editorial Board at Yakima Herald Republic
Tuesday, June 27	Yakima	5:00 to 7:00 p.m.	Public Open House
Wednesday, June 28	Yakima	7:30 to 9:00 a.m.	Stakeholder Roundtable
Wednesday, June 28	Spokane	1:30 to 2:30 p.m.	Editorial Board at Spokane Spokesman Review
Wednesday, June 28	Spokane Valley	5:00 to 7:00 p.m.	Public Open House
Thursday, June 29	Spokane Valley	7:30 to 9:00 a.m.	Stakeholder Roundtable

Goal 3: Get Information

Ensure that Public Input is Obtained Before Final Decisions are Made

In general, comments received from stakeholders and members of the public during the outreach confirmed what was heard in the public attitude research conducted earlier for the project. The following is a summary of comments received from stakeholders who attended the roundtables, citizens who attended the open houses and citizens who made comments on the on-line survey.

Stakeholder Roundtable Comments – More than 100 local elected officials, agency staff, and community leaders attended the roundtable meetings. Comments made by local officials and other opinion leaders at the local roundtable discussions varied greatly and touched on numerous topics ranging from the draft policy recommendations and tolling in general to such topics as taxes and specific local transportation needs.

- There was general agreement that traffic congestion is a very real concern and acknowledgment that tolling is a potentially viable solution for system management.
- The devil will be in the details of implementation and it will be very important for the State to take into consideration the needs of commercial vehicle owners and operators and low-income individuals as it implements the tolling program.
 - There is a concern that the trucking industry should weigh-in on the study.
- Stakeholders, generally felt that the greatest need was in the area of using tolls to generate revenue to create and maintain an efficient transportation system. Thus, closing funding gaps and incorporating “sunset provisions” were more important than using variable tolls to obtain better utilization of capacity and to keep traffic moving.
- There were many questions and concerns about tolling as a state policy.
 - Some think taxes, rather than tolls, should fund transportation;
 - Some are concerned with how tolling revenue will be used; and
 - Some are concerned about how tolls will be set, how long they will last and how revenue will be used.
- The issues surrounding tolling – especially its use for system management – are complex and not at all well understood by the general public. The State will need to continually educate the public and stakeholders about how tolling benefits users and how the system works more efficiently when tolling/pricing is used to manage traffic.

- The video simulations of modern electronic tolling and *Good To Go!*² on Tacoma Narrows Bridge and SR 167 HOT lanes were a revelation to participants. More education is needed to explain how electronic tolling works, its various applications (e.g., toll booth versus HOT lane configurations), and how *Good To Go!* will work on projects statewide.
- It would helpful to the reader for each of the nine recommendations to be framed with a headline or to note the question that it addresses in order to quickly clarify the intent of each recommendation.

Table 11.3 documents the various questions and comments made at the Stakeholder Roundtables, organized by topic.

Table 11.3 Stakeholder Questions and Comments by Topic

<p>Electronic Tolling and Good To Go!</p> <p><i>More education is needed to explain how electronic tolling works and how Good To Go! will work.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How far developed is electronic tolling? • What are the enforcement policies for ETC? • I hope we won't spend too much money on enforcement – the HOV enforcement works well. • Can we use debit cards for tolls? • When/how will Good To Go! be available? Is it renewable? • Will Good To Go! integrate with the ferry systems? • How will WSDOT deal with tourists? How will they learn about the system to keep it efficient? What if they don't have Good To Go!? • With technology being accepted and implemented, will tolling become more effective and profitable as other areas adopt tolling? • Any discussion about how much the electronic mechanism would cost to put in? Will that outweigh any profit? • How do you keep track of the amount of money kept in your personal account?
<p>Economic Inequity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will tolls make it so some can't afford to go to work?
<p>Pricing for Traffic Management</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Isn't pushing people off roads through traffic management social engineering? • Are we heading toward congestion pricing for long-term transportation answers?
<p>Taxes</p> <p><i>Some think taxes rather than tolls should help fund transportation.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How about an employee tax for businesses instead of tolling? • Would you consider a different user-pay system besides tolling? • Could we index the gas tax instead of tolling? • In 15 years the gas tax won't mean anything; I think we should start to look toward a per mile tax. Do any states do per mile tax? • The State asked for a new gas tax and now we are being asked to supplement that tax. DOT is getting more and more money.

² *Good To Go!* is Washington State's brand name for electronic tolling to be used throughout the State.

Table 11.3 Stakeholder Questions and Comments by Topic (continued)

<p>Tolling Revenues</p> <p><i>Stakeholders are concerned with how tolling revenue will be used.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will tolls be taken off when the facility is paid? • I am concerned with keeping revenues local/regional. • I have a problem with tolling for facilities that we already have bought and paid for but do not have a problem if we fund new projects.
<p>Tolling Study and Legislation</p> <p><i>General questions.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has the commission formally adopted the nine policies? • What other policies besides tolling were looked at for fixing infrastructure? • Is tolling the only solution the commission is working on? • Did this study look into tolling roads before they need to be replaced – setting aside funds for the future...? • We are shifting the responsibility of tolling from an elected body to the appointed commission and I'm concerned with that. • Why do we need to spend all this time and money to create policies? Can't the Legislature just legislate? • I appreciate the overall policies and the consideration of working between ODOT and WSDOT.
<p>Commercial Trucking</p> <p><i>There is a concern that the trucking industry weigh-in on the study.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did freight interests get involved in this Study? What are their preferences with tolling? • Tolling for commercial vehicles at the ports should not be a revenue enhancer. It shouldn't single out one user and have their revenues pay for other or future users. • Tolling will increase costs for truckers, who already operate on very thin margins.
<p>I-167 HOT Lanes/Managed Lanes</p> <p><i>Many Washingtonians have not experienced managed lanes, so they had many questions about how and if they work or if they are fair.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What types of HOT lane experiences are there in other parts of the country? Are they successful? What are the violator fines like? • What is the cost of the SR 167 HOT lane project? Where will the revenue go? • What is the plan to monitor accidents in the corridor? • How did you arrive at the toll for HOT lanes? • How are we going to educate people on HOT lanes being traffic management rather than revenue project? • Going into an HOV and someday a HOT is good – but what do you do when you're behind grandma and grandpa and they are going slow? What about slow traffic moving in and out of the lanes? Will the lane really be efficient? • Are HOT lanes safe for people moving in and out of lanes from fast to slow traffic? • What will happen to the drivers who cross the double white lines on the HOT lanes? • You talk about optimizing the “system” through HOT lanes, but you are really just optimizing that lane. • SR 167 won't pay for itself – so it is a waste of money because it is adding to the budget gap.
<p>Quality of Life</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transportation is a quality of life issue and people are willing to pay for a better quality of life.

Table 11.3 Stakeholder Questions and Comments by Topic (continued)

<p>Toll Roads and Tolls</p> <p><i>Stakeholders are concerned about how tolls will be determined, how long they will last and what will be done with them.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are you working with Translink? And with interoperability with Oregon? • How about private roads? Will their systems be interoperable? • How will this be fairly and equitably be used across the State if small areas would not create enough revenue to significantly contribute to the cost of a project? • Do we know which projects can be reasonably tolled? Is there a list/ determination made? • What is the estimated tolling revenue versus state funding on projects? • Why are some tolling monies going toward transit when we have such a big deficit on road projects? How will this monetary diversion affect the \$38 billion gap? • Will the Legislature have the ability to sunset a toll? • Is the tolling concept always going to be used for new projects? • Tolling is a false choice for the public because they think tolls solve problems but we can't maintain a free flowing system by using tolls.
<p>Regional Issues</p> <p><i>Stakeholders from different regions have different concerns.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there a danger to lower populated areas? Is it fair to them? We won't have the ability to toll for profit or to pay for significant portion of the project. • In a community like Bellingham the gas tax doesn't build anything in Whatcom County. So will we have to toll to get something built? • Based on all this information what kind of traffic management tolled facility can we do from Everett to Olympia? • It is hard to imagine where in Eastern Washington there could be tolls. • All the modern toll roads in Washington will be in Western Washington, so how will that work for Easterners? • From an Easterners perspective, this is a way for us to get roads in a part of the State where they need it – this is equitable. • Did you look at any other Eastern Washington projects besides the Snoqualmie Pass? • What about diversion to other roads from the Snoqualmie Pass? • How about working with the business community to stagger work times instead of tolling?
<p>Policy #2 (Tolling as significant revenue source)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy 2 says tolling should “contribute a significant share of revenue”; what is the minimum percentage? • What is meant by a “significant portion” of a project?
<p>Policy #3 (Toll revenue stays in system)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you propose to safeguard Policy 3 – keeping toll revenue within the tolling system? • Policy 3 is contradictory with other things you are saying – you can collect money on a bridge in Seattle and build a new road in Eastern Washington. That money could be spread everywhere to maintain and operate, etc. Why should the monies only go back into the tolled project?

Public Comments

The general public had two specific opportunities to participate in the Study – a well-publicized public open house in each of five cities and a “virtual open house” at the project web site for those who could not attend one of the open houses. The following is a summary of the comments received among the more than 5,000 people who participated at a public open house or who visited the web site.

- Many people were concerned about the State’s growing traffic congestion problem and don’t see it improving.
- Although in the minority, some citizen participants could see tolls as a potential way to manage traffic congestion, but had many questions about how such a program would be implemented, especially its impact on carpool drivers, low-income users and on specific roadways.
- The video simulations of nonstop electronic toll collection were an eye opener for participants and did much to dispel objections that were based on the outdated “buckets and toll attendants” perception of toll collection.
- The public is concerned about more taxes, and many expressed the opinion that taxes currently collected should be sufficient for transportation.
- Some citizens cautioned about using tolling as a “social engineering” tool.
- Some public comments reflect a concern about those who may not be able to afford tolls but the majority of comments related to personal concerns based upon the individuals own driving habits and needs.
- The public seems willing to accept tolling under specific conditions and for specific projects. Citizens have many different ideas on where and when it should be used.
- Many think the trucking industry should be tolled.
- Again, the illustration of modern nonstop electronic toll collection was a revelation. Once described or demonstrated, the public appreciated the convenience of modern electronic toll collection and the need for a uniform system for collection.
- Many were concerned that tolling will result in too much diversion of traffic onto free roads or local streets.
- Those who attended an event personally had positive remarks about the Commission’s outreach campaign and stressed the need for ongoing education and communication.
- Specific Projects – Most of the comments revealed a need for more specific information about the details, layout, and operation of specific projects.

- Many comments about the illustrative example about tolling Snoqualmie Pass agreed with it, but many others were concerned about tolling the “lifeline” of eastern Washington. More information on the specifics and proposed benefits will need to be provided.
- Vancouver area residents are concerned with the bridges and how tolling works between Washington and Oregon.
- Many from the Tacoma Narrows Bridge area feel that they are being unfairly treated because a toll is being charged to fund their project while others in the State are not.

Table 11.4 documents the various questions and comments made at the Public Open Houses and at the project’s web site.

Table 11.4 Public Comments

<p>Gas Tax/Other Taxes</p> <p><i>The public is concerned about more taxes and many express concern that taxes collected should be sufficient for transportation.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We just had a large increase in the gas tax – that should cover road improvements. • We have the highest gas tax in the nation and we pay other taxes; tolls are unnecessary. • We pay the highest gas tax in the nation; we need to stop wasting money on studies and start building more lanes. • The gas tax is a user fee and should be used for roads, not mass transit. • The gas tax should not be used for social programs, those should be funded through sales tax. • I’d rather you raise my income tax than toll me. • Using existing taxing infrastructure will allow for more dollars to go to transportation, rather than having to spend the money to set up tolling systems. • Gas tax and general fund should pay for transportation. • Gas taxes should be higher to discourage use of gas. • As I believe the financial productivity of the gas tax is going to decay very rapidly, the toll authority should develop a plan for supplementing tolling that can be put into effect quickly. • Gas prices should be taxed through the roof to force efficient and effective alternatives to petroleum and better public transportation. • Current tax revenue exceeds our needs if the tax money is spent efficiently. • Use current taxes wisely, don’t toll. • I supported the gas tax so we wouldn’t have to have tolls. • Tolling is like an income tax and DOT wouldn’t know when to stop raising them. • I would be more supportive if money in gas taxes wasn’t subsidizing a waterfront park in downtown Seattle (a.k.a. the viaduct tunnel) • 60K people work in Oregon and pay 9% taxes – that and tolls is unfair. • Tolling in Vancouver to fund projects elsewhere constitutes a tax!
<p>Privacy</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I am worried that toll roads will allow the government to track residents. • Privacy issues can be overcome.

Table 11.4 Public Comments (continued)

<p>Economic Inequity</p> <p><i>Some public comments reflect a concern about those who may not be able to afford tolls.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outreach and education about tolls prior to implementing is key. More areas in low- to moderate-income groups are affected. • Needs to be affordable. Wages have not kept up with inflation. • Tolling should be used cautiously to avoid penalizing low-income people. • I'm concerned about the burden on workers who have to commute long distances owing to economics. • Will tolls allow the wealthy to use public state roads while the poor will not be able to? • Tolls discriminate against poor people. • Tolling is economically burdensome. • There is a fundamental difference between funding a new project partially with tolls and providing the well-to-do with private express, HOT lanes on existing roads. • The State exercises too much power over regional authorities, typically; screwing Seattle in favor of influential "burbs." • You will always want more. There is never enough!
<p>HOV Lane</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Define the transportation system to include transit/HOV. • Build toll roads not just HOV lanes. • I don't think we should allow SOVs to use the HOV lanes because we need to shift the paradigm to carpooling. • We need to keep carpool lanes – if we got rid of them there would be more traffic. • Tolls should be uniformly applied to all lanes. • Conversion of HOV to HOT lanes is a good idea to increase use. But keep free for carpools. • HOV lanes increase pollution because they make us sit in traffic rather than taking advantage of an extra lane. • No HOV lanes to favor the well-off over average people who must drive further for affordable housing. HOV lanes should only be in effect during times when car pooling is effective to reduce traffic.

Table 11.4 Public Comments (continued)

<p>Tolling</p> <p><i>The public seems to accept tolling but has many different ideas on where and when it should be used.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tolling should not be used to fund general transportation needs. • Tolls should continue on all projects without consideration of “paid off” status. • I would caution against tolling major interstates. • Tolls should tax single car commuting and congestion. • Those of us who use ferries already are paying a toll. Others also should pay tolls. • Toll entire transportation system to reduce congestion and pollution. • Each toll project needs an extensive cost/benefit study. • Tolling should only be used for traffic management and if you are an HOV you shouldn’t be charged. • Tolling is the first step in a utilities type system for transportation. • Only new roads should be tolled. • All of WA benefits from our transportation system even if we do not drive a given road personally. Our goods and services travel them and as such the cost should be shared by all in the State. • Tolls should only be used for mega projects. • Conversion of HOV to HOT lanes is a good idea to increase use. But keep free for carpools. • Tolls should only be used for that facility – building and maintaining, not on other projects. • I think tolling is a great idea, especially if it means we can pay off large projects quicker. • Instead of tolls we could have car tab fees. • Tolling is the only fair way to pay for and maintain roads. • Do it! • Tolling bridges makes sense. • One of the reasons I retired to Washington eight years ago was because there are no tolls. • Tolls restrict commerce. • If the DOT would use our tax dollars wisely, tolling would not be necessary. • No tolls, no tolling. • Toll booths cause traffic jams.
<p>Trucks and Tolling</p> <p><i>Many think the trucking industry should be tolled.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tolling commercial trucks is the only tolling there should be. • 4 x 4 trucks should be tolled the same amount as commercial trucks. • Trucks do not carry their fair share burden. • Vehicles which are the biggest and heaviest or cause the most damage and wear on the roads should pay the highest tolls. Motorcycles should pay the least with vehicle appropriately for size and weight. • Truck commerce is extremely important in Washington State. Please don’t price trucks out of their jobs.

Table 11.4 Public Comments (continued)

<p>Electronic Tolling</p> <p><i>The public appreciates the convenience of modern electronic toll collection and a uniform system for collection.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use Good To Go! on ferries too. • ETC should be implemented, especially if it solves congestion. • Use ETC as much as possible and avoid toll booths. • Avoid toll booths, use electronic tolling as much as possible. • Electronically tolling is subject to hackers. • ETC is an inefficient way of collecting tax dollars.
<p>Diversion Caused by Tolling</p> <p><i>Many believe tolling will cause diversion traffic.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I am worried that people will crowd other routes to avoid paying tolls. • Tolling will just cause people to divert their routes onto other roads. • I strongly recommend a rapid (10 years or less) move to tolling of the entire regional freeway system for purpose of congestion-easing, and reduce adverse environmental aspects, redisburse diverters to the “free” roads. • Some diversion is a necessary result of tolling; short trips shouldn’t be tolled anyway. Include transit and parallel routes and enforcement. • Extreme care should be exercised in siting commercial routes, low-volume use and consideration of adding to the congestion problem should be major considerations.
<p>Mass Transit</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will mass transit rates rise to cover the cost of tolls? • Tolls should not fund transit. • I think an additional benefit of tolls may be to encourage more use of public transportation. • I will support tolls to help fund public transit. • Stop building roads and start building more mass transit.
<p>Public and Stakeholder Outreach Program</p> <p><i>Those who attended an event personally had positive remarks about the outreach campaign and stress ongoing education and communication.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have a meeting by the Tacoma Narrows Toll Bridge. • Commission needs to assume full responsibility that a project once completed; it will automatically improve that roadways performance. • The public needs to clearly understand what time period the State is proposing along with dollar amount total as time goes by. The whole story is never told. • Educate the public by having the local office working with the neighborhoods. • You need continued PR efforts to help people understand. • Keep up the good work! • Keep educating people on the benefits of tolling. • Continue educating locally. • Keep the traffic moving! • Be bold, people get it! • Sounds like a good idea, show me more! • Being able to discuss items with a representative was most helpful. • I enjoyed listening and learning, but the best part was being able to talk one-on-one. • This was PR to dupe the public into giving more money to DOT. • Prove your point or make it clear to the public why. • Not sure how this open house advances the understanding or acceptance of tolls.

Table 11.4 Public Comments (continued)

SR 520	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tolls on the SR 520 must be prorated: less money for short trips. • Provided that the project being funded offers additional capacity to the payer (e.g., we must have additional GP capacity on 520 to justify).
Alaskan Way Viaduct	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We should build the tunnels with a toll. • Alaskan Way should be tolled. • Will tolls be used to replace the viaduct with a tunnel? I am opposed to that. • Why shouldn't those using the Viaduct pay for it? I'm being forced to pay for the TNB.
I-167/Managed Lanes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Makes sense if they don't fill up. • This already was tolled and paid for. Why are we going to pay for it again? • Letting people pay for the HOV lanes is selective and wrong. • Managed lanes have not proven to be effective.
Snoqualmie Pass <i>Most comments about Snoqualmie Pass were against tolling it.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This will add to the disconnect between Western and Eastern Washington. • Snoqualmie is a Federal highway and the burden of its upkeep should be shouldered by all Americans. • Toll all mountain passes not just Snoqualmie. • You shouldn't toll the "lifeblood" of the State. • Many people cannot afford the West Coast housing prices. Now they will not be able to afford visiting there either. • A toll would discriminate against my disabled daughter on her doctor's trips to Western Washington. • We have not seen repairs on Snoqualmie Pass in years. • Paying \$8 to visit my grandchildren in Western Washington is unfair. • Charging college kids \$4 to go to college is extreme. • Tolling the Snoqualmie Pass taxes the poor folk from Eastern Washington more and that is not fair. • Snoqualmie Pass should not be considered a tolling point. Many people use the pass many times a year and it would be an unfair toll on a few people to pay for larger projects. The tolls should be applied to the specific major highway it will improve. • We already paid for an interstate. We shouldn't have to pay again.

Table 11.4 Public Comments (continued)

<p>Columbia River Bridges</p> <p><i>Those in the Vancouver area are concerned with the bridges and how tolling works between Washington and Oregon.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The two states should partner. • I would support tax dollars for the extension of Portland’s light rail across the bridge. • Those who commute to Portland for work should live in Portland. I shouldn’t have to pay for a commuter. • A new bridge won’t solve the congestion problem; we need more continuous flow lanes across the bridge. • Tolling the bridges will discourage people in Portland from shopping in Washington and will cause a downturn in the local economy. • A new bridge will only cause more congestion because more people will commute to Portland, this will cause more pollution. • I live in Washington and work in Portland and pay taxes in both states. Now you want to charge me more taxes? • The carpool lane across the bridge made my commute longer; tolled bridges will do the same. • We don’t need to reconfigure or add HOV lanes, we need a new bridge.
<p>Tacoma Narrows Bridge</p> <p><i>Many in the TNB area feel that they are being unfairly imposed with tolls while others in the State aren’t.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why don’t you have an open house for us in the Tacoma area? • DOT gerrymandered second Tacoma Narrows Bridge ballot in violation of state law. No tolls anywhere! • When tolls were placed on the TNB, we were told that tolls would be on other projects like I90 and viaduct. • Tolls should be voted in by users, not nonusers like the TNB. • I never understood why the tolls were taken off the TNB, maintenance is costly. • Kitsap and Gig Harbor residents should not be taxed with the TNB to pay for King County projects. • Why hasn’t the State helped with the Narrows Bridge in Tacoma/Gig Harbor the same way they’re planning for Seattle area bridges, roadways?

Additional verbatim comments are included in Appendix C.

Outreach Survey

Table 11.5 summarizes the results of the nonscientific survey that was available to the public at the open houses, to the stakeholders at the roundtables, and at the project web site. Please note these represent only an anecdotal response and is in no way statistically reliable as the respondents were self-selected.

Table 11.5 Survey Results

Question	Strongly Agree		Somewhat Agree		Somewhat Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Total
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	
• Washington should use tolling to encourage effective use of the transportation system.	77	37%	30	14%	17	8%	83	40%	207
• Washington should use tolling to provide a supplementary source of transportation funding.	76	37%	33	16%	18	9%	80	39%	207
• Tolling should be used when it can be demonstrated to contribute to a significant portion of the cost of a project that cannot be funded solely with existing sources.	77	37%	54	26%	20	10%	56	27%	207
• Tolling should be used when it can be demonstrated to optimize system performance, such as with an HOV/Tolled Express lane.	79	38%	37	18%	29	14%	62	30%	207
• Tolling should be fairly and equitably applied in the context of the statewide transportation system.	107	52%	38	18%	13	6%	49	24%	207
• Tolling should not have significant adverse impacts through diversion of traffic to other routes.	103	50%	56	27%	13	6%	34	17%	207
• Toll revenue should be used only to improve, maintain, or operate the transportation system.	120	58%	30	14%	18	9%	39	19%	207
• Toll rates should be set to optimize system performance, recognizing necessary tradeoffs to generate revenue.	72	35%	53	26%	27	13%	55	27%	207
• Since transportation infrastructure projects have costs and benefits that extend well beyond those paid for by initial construction funding, tolls should remain in place to fund additional capacity, capital rehabilitation, maintenance, operations, and to optimize performance of the system.	56	27%	39	19%	27	13%	85	41%	207

Table 11.5 Survey Results (continued)

Question	Strongly Agree		Somewhat Agree		Somewhat Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Total
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Following broad statutory direction, the WSTC, as the currently designated State Tolling Authority, should develop policies and criteria for selecting the parts of the transportation system to be tolled; propose the study of potential toll facilities; recommend toll deployments to the Governor and Legislature; and set toll rates. The Authority should engage in robust and continuous coordination with state-authorized regional or multistate entities that may propose toll facilities to the Authority. 	71	34%	43	21%	28	14%	65	31%	207
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Washington State Department of Transportation should be responsible for planning, development, operations and administration of toll projects and toll operations within the State. 	75	36%	51	25%	22	11%	59	29%	207
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Toll systems in the State of Washington should be simple, unified, and interoperable, and avoid attended tollbooths wherever possible. 	124	60%	38	18%	13	6%	32	15%	207
Totals	1,035	42%	501	20%	244	10%	699	28%	
How useful was the information presented?	Very Useful		Somewhat Useful		Not Very Useful				
	58	29%	92	46%	52	26%			202

Editorial Summary – Eight meetings with editorial board of local newspapers were attended by outreach team members. These meetings were set up at the major newspaper(s) in each of the five regions that were visited. As a result of the visits, four newspapers ran editorials about tolling, addressing the outreach activities, and commenting on the proposed policies. In addition, proactive press relations garnered 14 articles in eight different papers, plus additional media coverage at two radio stations and two television stations.

The response from the editorial boards was excellent – Commissioners gave each a message seemed to resonate. As keen followers of public policy, current events, and new ideas, editors were able to significantly add to the discussion with the public about the ways in which tolling can be used to advance Washington’s transportation system. The one criticism garnered in an editorial was that the Commission was not proposing to move quickly enough on implementing tolling.

These editorials will serve to help bridge the gap between public perceptions about tolling and how tolling will benefit the citizens of Washington. Several key points were picked up in the editorial coverage that will serve to help move Washingtonians to a better understanding of tolling:

- Tolling has a rich history in Washington, and has been used often to raise funds for large infrastructure projects;
- Tolls are a user fee, with those using the facility paying for the facility;
- If implemented, tolls on all Washington facilities will be interoperable and hassle free;
- The Commission is recommending a policy that tolls collected will be used only for the transportation system; and
- Tolling is a welcome advance that will both help to build roads and bridges and help make traffic move more efficiently.

Table 11.6 provides a list of the Editorial Board Meetings and Table 11.7 shows the Media Coverage garnered from all press relations efforts.

Table 11.6 Editorial Board Meetings

Region	Newspaper	Date
Southwest	Vancouver Columbian	6/20/2006
Puget Sound	Tacoma News Tribune	6/21/2006
Puget Sound	Seattle Post Intelligencer	6/21/2006
Puget Sound	Everett Herald	6/21/2006
Puget Sound	Seattle Times	6/22/2006
Northwest	Bellingham Herald	6/23/2006
Central	Yakima Herald Republic	6/27/2006
Eastern	Spokane Spokesman Review	6/28/2006

Table 11.7 Media Coverage

Newspaper	Date	Type of Article	Article Title
King County Journal	6/19/2006	Article	“Better Bridge Traffic? Sure At a Price”
The Columbian	6/19/2006	Article	“State Seeks Public Input on Toll Report”
Yakima Herald	6/20/2006	Article	“Road Tolls May Come To Pass”
The Seattle Times	6/20/2006	Editorial	“Tolls Proposed For 20 Bridge, Pass on I-90”
The Columbian	6/20/2006	Editorial	“Learn About Tolls”
The Columbian	6/21/2006	Editorial	“Highway Toll Ideas Spark Little Interest”
The Columbian	6/22/2006	Article	“High-Tech Tolls”
Bellingham Herald	6/24/2006	Article	“State To Try Toll Lanes Near Seattle”
The Herald	6/25/2006	Article	“Tolls A Promising Tool To Get Traffic Moving”
Spokesman Review	6/26/06	Article	“Toll Talk”
Yakima Herald	6/28/2006	Article	“I-90 Toll Suggestion Draws Mixed Reaction”
Spokesman Review	6/28/2006	Article	“Toll Road Proposal To Get Airing”
Seattle Post Intelligencer	7/2/2006	Editorial	“Highway Capacity: Tolling For Thee”
The Herald	7/6/2006	Article	“Tolls On I-90 Could Make U.S. 2 Busier...”
TV/Radio Station	Date	Type of Clip	Program
KUOW PBS in Seattle	6/29/2006	Interview	Ross Reynolds show interview
KTU Channel 2 in Vancouver	6/19-21/2006	News clip	WSTC’s Tolling Study
KIRO 710 AM in Seattle	6/22/2006	News clip	Morning news
KIMA CBS channel 29 in Yakima	6/27/2006	Interview	Interview with Aaron Kellogg on 11 p.m. news

■ Conclusion

WSTC's Comprehensive Tolling Study Public and Stakeholder Outreach program achieved its goal to elicit participation from citizens and local stakeholders across Washington, with more than 5,000 citizens either participating via the program web site (there were 38,000 visitors to the web site) or by attending local meetings. The information, comments, suggestions, and concerns that were communicated by citizens will provide valuable input to the Commission as it fashions its final recommendations to the Legislature.

Overall, all of the people who participated were interested in the Study and truly concerned about Washington's transportation future. Almost all agreed that the State's transportation infrastructure needs to be improved. This is an important message for leaders to acknowledge during the planning phases of improvements. Citizens want relief from traffic congestion and all have strong opinions on how to best solve the State's transportation problems. They all want Washington's elected officials to ultimately use their leadership to improve the State's aging infrastructure.

While the results of the informal 14-question survey are not representative of the State as a whole, they do reflect the hopes and frustrations of more than 5,000 people who cared enough and took the time to participate in the Commission's Study.

Background paper prepared by Frank Wilson & Associates in July 2006.