



# I-405 / SR 167 ETL Low-Income Program Study Update

WSTC Commission Meeting

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# Study Tasks Update

- Project and agency staff confirming study assumptions and findings
- **Proposed recommendations set for Commissioners' approval**
- Study report under review in preparation for final draft for submission to Legislature by August 27th

# Recap: Selected Program Options

- The two discount options selected by the Commission in Jan. 2021 for detailed quantitative analysis were:
  - Providing a monthly toll credit equal to the toll usage of the average ETL customer – assessed at \$50 per month
  - Providing ten (10) free ETL trips per month
- Both these options provide for free use of the lanes, limited monthly by either a credit amount or number of trips

# Recap: Selected Standard Program Components

The program components for enrollment and engagement selected by the Commission in Jan. 2021 for detailed quantitative analysis were:

- Provide a free *Good To Go!* Flex Pass to program users
- The program to have an advisory panel, including low-income users of the program, that is diverse with regard to race, geography of residence, age and gender, which reports out at least annually
- The program documentation to be available in all primary languages for the region, with live translation available for other languages used in region, and using language that is judgement-free
- Program information to be shown in visual formats as much as possible
- The enrollment process (physical and remote) to be accommodating for users with disabilities, and to be implemented using staff who have received equity training
- Program enrollment to be broadly geographically accessible to keep time cost of enrollment low

# Summary of Key Findings

- This study was limited in its scope to addressing the specific question of whether low-income toll discounts on the I-405/ SR 167 ETLs are feasible, and to identifying the likely benefits and impacts of specific implementation options
- Study findings may support a broader discussion on transportation equity, and more narrowly the application of low-income discounts for other tolled facilities

# Summary of Key Findings

- Low-income toll discounts could expand transportation access in the corridor
  - This program would help low-income users of the I-405 / SR 167 corridor realize more of the benefits provided by the Express Toll Lanes.
- Low-income drivers have diverse mobility and program access needs
  - Mobility needs for low-income drivers for using the corridor, including variations in origin and destination, trip purpose, and the time of day of their travel
  - Low-income drivers face a diversity of barriers to access for participating in a potential low-income program, including cultural, physical and financial considerations

# Summary of Key Findings

- Efficiencies can be gained by using existing systems
  - Use of Washington State Department of Social and Health Services' (DSHS) interface and applicable eligibility standards for enrollment is a cost effective and value-added approach for program implementation
- Both selected discount options provide similar customer value
  - Provide similar benefits to program users
  - Easy to implement compared to other options considered
  - Low implementation costs compared to other options considered
  - Simple to understand and use
  - Minimal impacts on performance and toll rates
  - Could be applied to non-ETL toll facilities

# Summary of Key Findings

- Follow-up assessment and engagement necessary before program implementation
  - Further analysis is needed to identify implementation details and refine policy choices
  - Implementation and operations costs appear viable under existing conditions, but significant uncertainty exists with on-going development of:
    - Corridor financial requirements
    - Plans and timeline for corridor expansion
    - Projections for revenue capacity and future corridor performance



# Recommendations Overview

- Recommendations support future implementation of a low-income tolling program pending results of continued assessments, community engagement, and preparations
  - Significant work needed to further engage low-income populations
  - Uncertainties about program costs and corridor financials
- Recommendations provide direction to the Legislature on:
  - Program elements and policy choices
  - Next steps to advance further program assessment

# Recommended Program Components

- **Recommendation 1:** Advance the two selected program options as preferred options for further assessment
  - Both selected program options are:
    - Feasible to implement
    - Valuable to users
    - Similarly challenging from a cost and operational perspective
  - Report describes considerations for selection of final program option

# Recommended Program Components

- **Recommendation 2: Use Existing Programs & Enhance Access**
  - Use existing DSHS enrollment system and eligibility criteria for social services
    - The most cost-effective approach to defining and assessing low-income toll program eligibility
    - Enables significant cost savings to the implementing agencies
  - Advance proposed standard program components for enrollment and engagement

# Recommended Next Steps

- **Recommendation 3:** Set project timeline that supports informed program selection and cost-effective implementation
  - Implementing a program no sooner than mid-2020s would provide for the following benefits:
    - Follows expected addition of back office system functionality that may better support account management for a low-income program
    - Aligns with expected completion of the I-405 ETL between Renton and Bellevue and the SR 167 expansion
    - Provides time for further planning, assessment, testing, and engagement prior to implementation

# Recommended Next Steps

- **Recommendation 4: Develop a concept of operations**
  - To advance program design, develop a detailed concept of operations for a low-income toll program, and conduct further refined analyses in preparation for a program launch
  - Conduct further outreach and consultation to support refinement of the program and its operations

# Recommended Next Steps

- **Recommendation 5:** Engage potential program participants to inform the program design process
  - Additional outreach to potential program participants and other corridor users is needed to:
    - Further assess how a program can best provide value
    - Increase understanding of potential corridor use with the program
    - Continue identifying barriers to accessing such a program
  - Establish program advisory council that includes potential program participants

# Recommended Next Steps

- **Recommendation 6:** Implement a low-income program as a pilot initially, to test and gain further learnings
  - A pilot program in the range of two to five years would allow the program to iterate
  - Start planning for the pilot during preceding assessment and engagement steps to support program design
  - Identify performance metrics to evaluate the program both during the pilot phase, and on an on-going annual basis if established as permanent program

# Recommended Next Steps

- **Recommendation 7:** Assess costs and benefits of expanding to full tolling system (all facilities)
  - Identify costs and benefits of extending a low-income tolling program to all state toll facilities in an operationally and cost-effective manner
  - Both the toll credit and free trips discount options are plausibly extendible to non-ETL facilities, with varying value to the participants



# Complete List of Recommendations

## Recommended Program Components

- **Recommendation 1:** Advance the two selected program options as preferred options for further assessment
- **Recommendation 2:** Use Existing Programs & Enhance Access

## Recommended Next Steps for Advancing Further Program Assessment

- **Recommendation 3:** Set project timeline that supports informed program selection and cost-effective implementation
- **Recommendation 4:** Develop a concept of operations
- **Recommendation 5:** Engage potential program participants to inform the program design process
- **Recommendation 6:** Implement a low-income program as a pilot initially, to test and gain further learnings
- **Recommendation 7:** Assess costs and benefits of expanding to full tolling system (all facilities)

# Next Steps

- Prepare letter from Commission Chair to accompany study report
- Complete preparation and review of final report draft
- Submit report to Legislature by August 27<sup>th</sup>

# Discussion & Questions

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