



Washington State Transportation Commission

I-405/SR 167 Toll Rate Adjustment Hearing

January 29, 2024

January 29, 2024

Chair Debbie Young opened the meeting at 9 a.m. with introductions by Commission members and staff, an overview of the agenda, and meeting protocols.

Agenda Item 2: Overview of the Toll Rate Proposal

Presenters:

- Carl See, Deputy Director, Washington State Transportation Commission
- Ed Barry, Director, Tolling Division, Washington State Department of Transportation
- Karl Westby, Senior Traffic Manager, I-405 Program, Washington State Department of Transportation
- Kimberly Rubenstein, Communications and Outreach Coordinator, Washington State Transportation Commission

Carl See provided a situation assessment for the I-405/SR 167 corridor, noting that increased traffic congestion has had an impact on performance goals and that increased funding for improvements are necessary to address shortfalls for recently awarded corridor projects. Toll rates have not been adjusted since they were first set on the SR 167 high occupancy toll lanes (2008) and on the I-405 express toll lanes (2015). In the 2023-2025 Transportation Budget, the Legislature directed the Commission to review toll revenue performance in the corridor and encouraged adjustment of rates. In response, the Commission adopted a proposal that raises the minimum rates on both facilities to \$1, the maximum toll rate to \$15, and extends tolling hours of operation (including HOV occupancy requirements) an hour, to 8 p.m.

Ed Barry explained the operational goal of express toll lanes is to provide travel speed reliability for HOV, transit and paid trips through dynamic pricing. When the lane use is low, the toll rate goes to the minimum, and when it approaches capacity, the toll rate increases to the maximum. Travel times in the corridor from October 2022 to October 2023 increased by 3-9 minutes in the general-purpose travel lanes, and by 1-3 minutes in the express toll lanes. The Legislature directed WSDOT to identify approaches to close the funding gap for projects in the corridor, with bids for recently awarded projects coming in at about \$275 million over planned funding.

Karl Westby reviewed performance trends in the corridor. While target performance is 45 mph 90 percent of the time during peak periods, northbound I-405 is the only portion of the facility meeting that metric (southbound I-405, and northbound and southbound SR 167 are not). The average daily toll rate on I-405 is \$2.41, and the average daily toll rate on SR 167 is \$3.36. The maximum toll rates (\$9 on SR 167 and \$10 on I-405, during peak use) apply to 4 percent of trips on I-405 and 8 percent of trips on SR 167. The toll rate proposal, which would increase the maximum rate throughout the corridor to \$15, is expected to improve traffic performance and increase transit speed and reliability.

Carl See reviewed the benefits of the proposal, to include improvements in ETL operations for transit, carpools and paid users; an increase of potential revenues between \$4.8-\$8.3 million between March 2024 and June 2025; and better traffic management from 7 to 8 p.m.

Carl See and Kimberly Rubenstein reviewed public outreach and input on the proposal. Input was received by the City of Bellevue, the City of Auburn, King County Councilmember Reagan Dunn, the Bellevue Chamber of Commerce and members of the business community. Nearly 5,000 written comments were received in the form of email. The majority of those comments opposed the proposal, citing concerns over equity and the effect higher prices would have on lower-income drivers. Those supporting the proposal cited the need to fund improvements in the corridor and to increase the performance of the express toll lanes.

Presentation: [Overview of Toll Rate Proposal](#)

For more detail on agenda item 2, please refer to the [TVW Meeting Recording](#), starting at 00:03:41, on the progress bar found at the bottom of the screen.

Action: None

Follow-Up: None at this time.

Agenda Item 3: Public Comment

Serena Bell – Pointed out that roads are funded through other means than tolls, and car registration and gas prices are putting a burden on drivers. The state already has higher tolls than other states around the country.

Ricardo Garmendia, Renton – Expressed concern that increasing the tolls will move more drivers into general purpose lanes, increasing the congestion in those lanes. Rising housing costs are causing more lower- and middle-income people to move south, and they must commute on the SR 167/I-405 corridor to get to jobs in Seattle and on the eastside. They don't have the means to pay a higher toll, meaning they will be disadvantaged by congestion in the general-purpose lanes.

Val Dyachuk, Maple Valley – Spends \$20-\$30 a month on tolls in the Bellevue area, but those who live in the area are going to feel the pain of higher tolls and spend much more. Those who work in Bellevue and Seattle but face high housing costs are migrating outward, and they shouldn't be disadvantaged by higher tolls. The Commission should look at other solutions.

Sean Donahue, Puyallup – Leaders and legislators have an obligation to listen to public feedback rejecting the idea and go back to the drawing board for other solutions.

Sinar Nainggolan, Maple Valley – The state should listen to the public opposition to higher tolls and respond to those concerns. Voices disagreeing with the proposal are being ignored.

Sun Lee, Bellevue – With children in a lot of activities, the cost of driving is going up with tolls. Urges reconsidering toll increase and to even consider lowering tolls, given that many cannot afford to pay them.

Presentation: There was no associated presentation.

For more detail on agenda item 3, please refer to the [TVW Meeting Recording](#), starting at 00:34:04, on the progress bar found at the bottom of the screen.

Action: None.

Follow-Up: None at this time.

Agenda Item 4:

Commission Discussion & Adoption of Toll Rate Changes – ACTION

Vice Chair Jim Restucci asked WSDOT representatives to estimate how many of the drivers will be asked to pay the \$15 maximum rate. Karl Westby said that between 4-8 percent of drivers are currently paying the maximum rates on each facility, so the best estimate is some fraction of those numbers.

Commissioner Roy Jennings asked if the rates were raised to \$15, what the average increase would be for a driver at lower ranges. Karl Westby said that a driver paying a \$4 toll today would pay essentially the same toll rate if traffic conditions were the same. Only the moderate to higher end of the range is expected to be affected.

Commissioner Shiv Batra said he's sympathetic to those offering public comment opposing the rate increase. The purpose of tolling the corridor initially was to raise funds to build the complete corridor and to maintain smooth traffic. Congestion and rising project costs must be addressed. The Commission is studying low-income tolling, and when the corridor is complete, there may be an opportunity to implement a low-income tolling program.

Commissioner Nicole Grant expressed support for the proposal, saying that performance issues must be addressed for those carpooling, using public transit, or paying to use the lanes. Funding the corridor to enable maximum mobility is a high priority.

Chair Young acknowledged the hardship of paying more tolls and said it's not an easy decision to raise them. Given the length of time since the original toll rates were set and the rising cost of goods, it's not unreasonable that tolls should also go up to give drivers value for the money they pay. The increase is only paying for a small portion of the improvements; the other portion will be paid for with gas taxes by citizens across the state.

Presentations: No associated presentation

For more detail on agenda item 4, please refer to the [TVW Meeting Recording](#), starting at 01:04:35, on the progress bar found at the bottom of the screen.

Action: Commissioner Grant moved to adopt the proposal for raising the minimum and maximum tolling rates and extending tolling to 8 p.m. on I-405/SR 167; Commissioner Batra

seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken. Voting yea: Chair Young, Vice Chair Restucci, Commissioner JC Baldwin, Commissioner Batra, Commissioner Grant. Voting nay: Commissioner Jennings. Excused: Commissioner Kelly Fukai. The motion passed 5-1.

Follow-Up: The Commission staff will file the final CR-103 rule-making paperwork by Jan. 29 to enable WSDOT to implement the new rates on March 1, 2024.

Chair Young adjourned the meeting at 10:30 a.m.

The Commission will hold a virtual meeting on Feb. 14-15.

TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

DEBBIE YOUNG, Chair

JIM RESTUCCI, Vice-Chair

JC BALDWIN, Member

SHIV BATRA, Member

NICOLE GRANT, Member

KELLY FUKAI, Member

ROY JENNINGS, Member

ATTEST:

REEMA GRIFFITH, Executive Director

DATE OF APPROVAL