



Low-Income Toll Program: WSTC Preparations

Carl See

Deputy Director

Washington State

Transportation Commission

WSTC Low-Income Toll Program Study

From 2019-2021, the Commission studied and assessed options for a low-income toll program, leading to a recommendation that a system-wide low-income toll program be implemented:

- Eligibility would be based upon income level, not geographic location of where one lived.
- Implementation would be phased-in by facility to ensure financial obligations could be met and traffic performance goals would be maintained.

The Commission has continued to support this approach with annual recommendations to the Legislature.



Legislative Direction to Implement

Following the Commission's initial stated intent in Spring 2025 to proceed with implementing a system-wide low-income program*, the Legislature included the following direction in the 2025-27 Transportation Budget to the Commission:

Section 205-Transportation Commission

(5) The commission shall partner with the department of transportation to design and implement a toll relief program based upon income qualification. Implementation must start with facilities where tolling begins in fiscal year 2026 or later. The commission shall work with the department of transportation to assess potential impacts of extending the toll relief program based upon income qualification to existing tolled facilities that opened prior to fiscal year 2026. The assessment, at a minimum, must determine potential impacts to meeting current financial and legal requirements in place for each facility. The commission, in partnership with the department of transportation, shall provide annual updates on the program to the transportation committees of the legislature.

*Statement of intent included as part of Commission's final toll rate and policies proposal for the Puget Sound Gateway SR 509 & SR 167 Expressways in Spring 2025.

Public Input on Low-Income Tolling

- The first location a future low-income toll program will be implemented is on the Puget Sound Gateway SR 509 & 167 Expressways.
- As part of its public outreach work, the Commission gathered over 1,800 comments during the rate-setting process for these facilities, including an online open house, two virtual public meetings, email, and stakeholder engagement.
- Advancing a low-income discount was generally favored by the public:
 - Those stating a preferred approach expressing significantly more support of the system-wide discount.
 - Input from local stakeholders also favored the system-wide approach.

Preparing for a Low-Income Toll Program

- **Program Design:** WSDOT is leading the design of the operational framework including methods for enrollment and process for eligibility review with input from the Commission.
- **Toll Rate & Policy Features Under Considerations:**
 - A possible low-income discount of 50% has been discussed by the Commission.
 - Setting income eligibility at 200% of the federal poverty level (FPL) has been discussed by the Commission.
 - An initial financial assessment is being conducted assuming these two features, subject to further direction by the Commission.
- **Implementation:** The Commission and WSDOT are identifying steps for a planned implementation of the low-income toll program by December 2026.

Comparison to Other Low-Income Toll Programs

A handful of low-income toll programs are in effect across the United States. While some programs offer credits towards tolls and/or transit, a subset of these programs provide the toll benefit in the form of a discounted toll rate as proposed in Washington. Below is a comparison of those programs.

- [I-880 Express Lanes \(Oakland to Milpitas, California\)](#)
 - Low-income residents of the San Francisco Bay Area may qualify for a 50% discount while driving alone.
 - Eligibility is based on a household income of less than 200% of the Federal Poverty Level.
- [Elizabeth River Tunnels \(Portsmouth to Norfolk, Virginia\)](#)
 - Low-income residents of the region may qualify for a 50% or 100% toll discount for up to 14 trips per week, with the amount of discount based on income status of the designated area.
 - Eligibility is based on whether residents earn less than designated income levels for their designated area (below \$65,000 for 50% discount throughout the region, and \$50,000 for 100% discount if resident in selected communities or greatest need).
- [New York City Congestion Relief Zone](#)
 - After 10 trips per month, qualifying low-income drivers receive a 50% discount on all peak period trips.
 - Eligibility is available at least on a state-wide level, annual income of less than \$50,000, and enrollment in qualifying government assistance program.

Future Considerations

- Following implementation of the low-income toll program for the SR 167 and SR 509 Expressways, extending the low-income toll program to other tolled facilities will require:
 - Specific traffic and revenue analysis for each facility to determine the potential impacts.
 - Consideration of potential toll rate impacts from accommodating a low-income toll discount to ensure existing financial and legal requirements are met.
 - On-going monitoring and reporting the low-income toll program, as directed by the Legislature.
- Maintaining consistent policies and toll rates for the low-income program across all facilities will support public clarity about the program and help minimize program costs.
- Engagement with customers and low-income and historically disadvantaged communities will support continued consideration of toll rate options and operational improvements.

Tentative Schedule

Fall 2025 – Spring 2026:

- Program design
- Baseline financial analysis by WSDOT

Summer 2026 – Fall 2026:

- Commission conducts public outreach to inform rate-setting
- WSDOT finalizes program operations

Fall 2026:

- WSDOT initiates customer engagement

December 2026:

- Program / discount goes live for the SR 167 and SR 509 Expressways

Questions / Contact

Carl See

Washington State Transportation Commission

360-705-7070

carl.see@wstc.wa.gov

