

## **ITEM 12 - Information**

September 21, 2011

### Status Report on Study of Public Attitudes toward Road-Use Pricing

#### **Staff**

**Recommendation:** Receive a status report on the schedule and activities to date for the study.

**Issues:** None

**Background:** In October 2009, the TPB approved the submission in partnership with the Brookings Institution of a grant proposal to the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) to investigate issues related to the public acceptability of road-use pricing in the Metropolitan Washington Region. The grant was awarded in late 2010. The study will use a series of invitation-based deliberative forums to explore public attitudes toward a variety of pricing options, ranging from variably priced lanes to system-wide vehicle-based pricing systems.

# National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board

777 North Capitol Street, N.E., Suite 300, Washington, D.C. 20002-4290 (202) 962-3310 Fax: (202) 962-3202 TDD: (202) 962-3213

## **MEMORANDUM**

TO: Transportation Planning Board  
FROM: John Swanson, Principal Transportation Planner  
SUBJECT: Status Report on TPB Study on the Public Acceptability of Road-Use Pricing  
DATE: September 15, 2011

In January of this year, the TPB, in partnership with the Brookings Institution, launched a study to investigate issues related the public acceptability of road-use pricing. The TPB has received a grant from the Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA) Value Pricing Program (VPP) to conduct this research. The main research activities for the project will occur this fall.

### **Background**

On October 21 2009, the TPB voted to approve an application to FHWA to conduct research on the public acceptability of road-use pricing. On November 3, 2009, the Council of Governments applied for a grant, totaling \$400,000, on behalf of the TPB. The grant application sought \$320,000 in federal funding, with \$80,000 provided through a COG match. This grant was submitted by the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) on behalf of COG and the TPB.

COG and the TPB received notice in the fall of the 2010 that the grant had been awarded. Staff commenced work on the project at the beginning of 2011. Although COG/TPB are the primary grant recipients, the grant application identified the Brookings Institution as a core project partner, and the grant application specified that Brookings would receive \$65,000 through the grant as a subcontractor.

### **Research Approach**

This project builds upon the TPB's past work on pricing, including scenario analysis (the CLRP Aspirations Scenario) of regional variably priced-lane networks combined with high-quality bus services and concentrated land-use patterns. The project also is directly linked to a report released in June 2009 by the Brookings Institution titled, "Road-use Pricing: How Would You Like to Spend Less Time in Traffic?" in which authors Alice Rivlin and Benjamin Orr proposed an experiment to implement a comprehensive GPS-based road-use pricing initiative in the Washington metropolitan region.

For the purposes of this study, the term "road-use pricing" includes a range of potential approaches, including facility-based fees (e.g., toll roads), cordon charges (e.g., the congestion charge in London), or vehicle-based charges (e.g., proposals to use GPS systems to charge drivers based upon vehicle miles of travel, and potentially vary fees according to levels of congestion, time of day, type of vehicle, etc.). Different types of pricing can serve a variety of policy goals, including increasing transportation revenues, relieving congestion and otherwise managing travel demand, and freeing up road capacity (as well as funding) for other transportation modes, such as high-quality bus services or bicycle/pedestrian improvements.

For use in the deliberative forums, the TPB and Brookings have identified a limited number of scenarios upon which to focus at the deliberative forums. These scenarios are likely to include the following:

- A regional network of variably priced lanes on all freeways, as well as some other major roadways;
- Zone-based charges in which drivers pay a fee to enter (or to drive within) a designated area or zone (a “cordon”); and
- System-wide road-use pricing (based upon the Brookings’ proposal mentioned above)

Using the Metropolitan Washington Region as a case study, this project will use invitation-based *deliberative forums* to explore attitudes toward a variety of pricing options. The forums will be designed to include between 60 and 70 members of the general public and will last approximately four hours. At these events, participant feedback will be recorded and monitored as information is shared and discussions ensue. By engaging the public in an extended exchange of ideas, opinions and reactions, the project will identify challenges and opportunities that decision makers would face if they were to move forward with implementing options for road-use pricing.

### **Project Startup**

The following activities have occurred since the project’s initiation:

- In July, the organization America Speaks was selected through a competitive process to be the primary consultant responsible for conducting five deliberative forums this fall. America Speaks is a the non-profit that has used its 21<sup>st</sup> Century Town Meetings format in a variety of forums designed to measure and explore citizen attitudes. Examples in our region include Mayor Williams’ budget forums, sessions on the future of DC’s Walter Reed property and the Envision Prince George’s forums.
- In August, TPB and Brookings staff, along with America Speaks staff, began planning the design and content for the deliberative forums. Two forums will be conducted in Maryland, two in Virginia and one in the District of Columbia.
- In preparation for the deliberative forums, the study team conducted four listening sessions (conducted in a focus-group format) in June and July with key stakeholders. Participants included local advocacy leaders, members of the TPB Citizens Advisory Committee and transportation professionals who have implemented pricing programs across the country and internationally. In addition to helping to specify the scenarios that will be discussed at the deliberative forums, the listening sessions helped to identify the “voices” that need to be heard and documented in this study and assisted the study team in better understanding various interests underlying public attitudes toward road-use pricing.

### **Planning the Deliberative Forums**

In mid-September, AmericaSpeaks began recruitment for the five deliberative forums to be held this fall. In order to engage a representative cross-section of the region’s residents, a stipend will be offered to

participants for attendance. The following four-hour Saturday sessions have been scheduled between mid-October and mid-January. Exact locations for the events are not yet determined:

- Saturday, October 15 – New Carrollton, MD
- Saturday, November 5 – ~~Chantilly, VA~~ **Rockville, MD \***
- Saturday, November 19 – ~~Rockville, MD~~ **Chantilly, VA \***
- Saturday, December 3 – Springfield, VA
- Saturday, January 21 – Washington, DC

### **Followup**

The results of the deliberative forums will be summarized in a report that will be presented to the TPB in the late spring of 2012.

### **Contact Information**

For more information on the study, please contact:

John Swanson  
Principal Transportation Planner  
Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments  
202-962-3295  
[jswanson@mwkog.org](mailto:jswanson@mwkog.org)

\*Revised after memorandum was mailed out.