

**Background Information –
Motion proposed to the WRAC Board by the WRAC MTC:
Oppose Metro Congestion Pricing on the Westside Without Robust North/South
Transit Options Already in Place**

PROPOSED MOTION

“The _____ NC/CC, a member of the Westside Regional Alliance of Councils (WRAC), strongly opposes the implementation of Metro’s Congestion Pricing pilot (aka the Metro Traffic Reductions Study (TRS) project) without first having robust transit options in place in the North/South direction through the Sepulveda Pass from the 101 to the 10 freeway.

“Robust transit options are defined as either 1) enhanced bus service through the Sepulveda Pass as previously suggested by the Southern California Association of Governments (pages 107, 111 in the Mobility Go Zone & Pricing Feasibility Study final report (https://scag.ca.gov/sites/main/files/file-attachments/mobilitygozone_report_final.pdf) and 2) the Sepulveda Transit Corridor project, which will provide either monorail or heavy rail subway service from the San Fernando Valley to LAX, with a stop on the UCLA Campus.”

BACKGROUND

A Brief Review of Congestion Pricing Concept

Congestion pricing is a tool being used to encourage drivers to switch to public transit. Tolls are charged during peak hours to use streets and freeways in designated geographic areas with the goal of reducing traffic and associated air pollution. An underlying assumption of this model is that many driving trips during the peak hours of 6 and 9 am and 4 and 7 PM are for reasons other than travel to work or school.

It has also been used as a way to raise money, which is often reinvested back into maintaining and improving transit

Previously, Metro has said that any form of congestion pricing that might be implemented would be put into effect along with other mobility improvements, including the installation of more public transit and making existing transit faster, more frequent and possibly discounted or free. (*Congestion pricing in Los Angeles, explained, Curbed Los Angeles, Sep 27, 2019 / <https://la.curbed.com/2017/10/13/16467386/congestion-pricing-los-angeles-explained>*)

For cities like London, congestion pricing has been successful in encouraging drivers to use public transit. Key features contributing to this success include London’s relatively compact and centralized geography, centralized business district, world famous Underground subway network and recently reworked bus system.

Unlike London, Los Angeles is a sprawling metropolis with slower mass transit and no central employment district. Many families live in less expensive outer suburbs with little or no access to transit-accessible commutes. A toll on driving would burden those who can’t afford to live where a car-free or transit-only commute is possible. This raises the concern that congestion pricing will disproportionately impact lower-income individuals.

The Lack of North/South Robust Public Transit on the Westside

Since 1974, there have been many different proposals for robust public transit on the 405 freeway and through the Sepulveda Pass, from the San Fernando Valley to LAX, including a monorail along the 405 freeway, a transit tunnel for buses, and using the 405 freeway HOV (carpool) lanes for buses. Yet despite decades of studies and proposals, no robust North/South public transit options have yet to be installed, which leaves this route without access to high quality transit.

In 2013, the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) began their [Mobility Go Zone & Pricing Feasibility Study](https://scag.ca.gov/sites/main/files/file-attachments/mobilitygozone_report_final.pdf) / https://scag.ca.gov/sites/main/files/file-attachments/mobilitygozone_report_final.pdf.

The final report was released in 2018. In regards to the 405 freeway and Sepulveda Pass, there was a significant number of car trips, primary for work, which originated in the San Fernando Valley or the South Bay and ended on the Westside. There were also very few work transit trips from the San Fernando Valley to the Westside. This was attributed to household income and limited transit services (page 71.) Their recommendation was for express commuter buses directly serving the San Fernando Valley and South Bay, with the goals of providing attractive transit options and shifting drivers to transit users (pages 107 and 111.)

More recently, a 2017 Metro feasibility study explored 48 different transit options between the Valley and LAX. which included light rail, heavy rail, monorail, maglev and even a gondola. The end result is the [Metro Sepulveda Transit Corridor project](https://www.metro.net/projects/sepulvedacorridor/) / <https://www.metro.net/projects/sepulvedacorridor/>, which revisits the monorail idea from the 1970's and proposes heavy rail options as well. Unfortunately, it is anticipated that this project won't be implemented until 2033-2035 at the earliest.

Conclusions

Los Angeles is currently trying to give people more options for robust public transit, but the fact remains that we haven't accomplished this goal yet. If congestion pricing is going to be piloted or permanently implemented anywhere in Los Angeles, then it should only be done if everyone has a real option to travel without a car. It's been suggested that, if Metro can reimagine its bus system, much like London did, this might be possible.

Currently, without robust transit options in place along the 405 freeway and in the Sepulveda Pass, drivers do not have the option to switch to public transit. If a Metro congestion pricing pilot were implemented on the Westside along the 405 freeway or Santa Monica Mountain canyons' streets, most drivers would have no choice but to pay the tolls for their trips to work or school.

It should also be noted that, even with the transit options available on the Westside in the East/West direction, it is questionable whether the currently available mass transit in that direction could accommodate increased demand if congestion pricing were implemented along the 10 freeway.

Presented in connection with the WRAC Board meeting, February 26, 2024