



DRAFT MEETING NOTES

Downtown Congestion Pricing Information Session: Why We are Studying Congestion Pricing

Date: March 4, 2020

Packet: [Follow this link](#) for all materials shared in meeting.

Project staff:

- Rachel Hiatt, Assistant Deputy Director for Planning, Transportation Authority
- Colin Dentel-Post, Senior Transportation Planner, Transportation Authority

Policy Advisory Committee Members in Attendance

- Steven Cornell, San Francisco Council of District Merchants Associations
- Peter Straus, San Francisco Transit Riders
- Rajni Banthia, Mission Economic Development Agency
- Chris Sweis, Yellow Cab of San Francisco

Not in Attendance

APA Family Support Services, Central City SRO Collaborative (Evan Oravec), Chinatown Community Development Center (Chris Man), ClimatePlan (Amy Hartman), Commission on the Environment (Tiffany Chu), Greenlining Institute (Alvaro Sanchez), Hayes Valley Neighborhood Association (Robin Levitt), La Raza Centro Legal (James Ford), Potrero Boosters Neighborhood Association (J.R. Eppler), San Francisco Bicycle Coalition (Janice Li), San Francisco Chamber of Commerce (Rodney Fong), San Francisco Giants (Josh Karlin-Resnick), San Francisco Human Rights Commission (Brittini Chicuata), San Francisco Travel (Jessica Lum), South Beach | Rincon | Mission Bay Neighborhood Association (Bruce Agid), Senior and Disability Action (Pi Ra), TransForm (Hayley Currier), Transportation Authority Citizens Advisory Committee (John Larson), Uber (Chris Pangilinan), Union Square Business Improvement District (Bri Caspersen), Vietnamese Youth Development Center (Judy Young), Walk San Francisco (Jodie Medeiros), West of Twin Peaks Central Council (Steve Martin-Pinto)

Agenda Item: Introductions

1. Chris Lepe, Regional Policy Director, Transform
2. Steve Boland, Transit Planning, SFMTA
3. Megan Weir, SF Department of Public Health

4. Rich Chien, Climate and Building Team, SF Department of the Environment

Agenda Item: Presentations

Colin Dentel-Post: Congestion pricing has been recommended in a number of city studies starting with the Transportation Authority's first congestion pricing study, the Mobility Access and Pricing Study, in 2010. That study found that congestion pricing would have benefits in a number of different areas, including congestion, safety, and greenhouse gas emissions. As a result, congestion pricing has since been incorporated into plans to meet a variety of different city goals. The panel today includes representatives from different agencies and organizations to cover each of our study's four goal areas: to get traffic moving, clean the air, improve safety, and advance equity. Each presentation will focus on other actions underway to make progress in the respective goal area and how congestion pricing fits in and could help us ultimately achieve the goal.

Rachel Hiatt: As a congestion management agency, the Transportation Authority has the role of monitoring congestion and devising strategies to manage it. The SF Transportation Plan (SFTP) is the long-range transportation plan for San Francisco. The last SFTP in 2013 included congestion pricing as a strategy. The 2013 Regional Transportation Plan analyzed congestion pricing as well.

Another role of the SFTP is to guide investment of revenues, including local sales tax.

One of the questions we asked in the 2013 SFTP was, "what would it take to meet our big goals in managing travel?" We developed aspirational scenarios to figure out what policy strategies we'd need to meet our mode share and GHG reduction goals. We had a significant challenge meeting the goals, but a consistent finding was that investing in transportation supply alone did not get us to our goals. Those scenarios that got us closest were ones that used congestion pricing. We developed the aspiration scenarios without resource constraints, but the plan's final recommendations included a resource-constrained list of programs and projects, including congestion pricing.

Overall, we found we need to manage driving to get us closer to our goals. We are updating the SFTP now. You can learn more at ConnectSF.org.

Steve Boland: My presentation is about the current transit operating environment. 70% of our riders are on buses. We operate mostly in traffic citywide, even with the addition of transit-only lanes. Congestion has only gotten worse. Average operating speed citywide is less than 8 mph. Bikes beat us.

Strategies to improve service include increased operator hiring, modernizing the fleet and a near-term focus on subway reliability. Longer-term, we are planning technology upgrades with a modern train control system.

Today I'll focus primarily on the Muni Forward program, which is a number of things. It includes transit priority projects, and it touches all of the busiest corridors. Our red carpet lanes are the highest-profile form of transit priority. They cover up to 20 miles citywide. Less visible but also effective is redesigning our stops so buses don't have to pull out of traffic and then back into traffic. So we're building more transit bulbs or transit islands. When we make infrastructure changes that improve reliability we see ridership go up.

Our transit quick-build program helps us shorten the time needed to make infrastructure improvements. In the current operating environment, our vision is to eliminate needless delay, meaning we stop only at stops. We want at-grade transit to work like a subway.

It's not so much a technical problem but a political problem. As long as we have congested streets it increases the need for transit lanes. Because transit lanes are not physically separated from traffic, even with red lanes enforcement is an issue.

Megan Wier: Congestion pricing is a transformative policy for our vision zero goals. Vision Zero is a commitment to eliminate traffic deaths and reduce severe injuries. Congestion pricing is a critical piece to helping our vision zero policy.

Challenges to Vision Zero are a growing population, an aging population, a growing number of people without housing. Vision Zero focuses on our city's high injury network, the 13% of streets where 75% of crashes happen.

Our high injury network is concentrated in Communities of Concern and also in the city's Northeast quadrant, which is the focus area for congestion pricing.

Congestion pricing is a transformative policy, because it is evidence based. In London and Stockholm, cities saw 20% reduction in severe and fatal injuries. It is increasingly clear that all these goals intersect.

The city's major goals are all interrelated: to reach our Vision Zero goal we also need to address climate issues and help transit. All these things help create a healthier city.

Richard Chien: I'll be talking about the city's effort to update its climate action plan and the role congestion pricing can have in reducing emissions in the sector. 0-80-100-Roots is a brand to frame climate action efforts. Zero waste to landfills. 80% sustainable trips. 100% renewable energy. Roots refers to looking to natural systems to sequester carbon we can't eliminate from these other actions.

We plan to update our Climate Action Plan in November 2020. Emissions have been declining, gone down 36% below 1990 levels. That's the good news.

Looking ahead we think those gains are in danger of heading the wrong way. SF Environment released a technical report that looks at what business as usual would yield for the city compared to the goal scenario.

The business as usual scenario: Our emissions will trend in the wrong direction if we don't implement 0-80-100. Our emissions profile: almost half are from buildings and almost the other half are from transportation. We need to increase mode shift and switch cars to electric.

To get to the goals of the Climate Action Plan we have a working group of many city agencies to look at the technical analysis. We're looking at existing plans and policies to understand potential emissions reductions. If we can point to other efforts, like congestion pricing, it adds to the case these are important efforts the city should invest in.

Chris Lepe: Transform advances equity around transportation. We've looked at a more equitable form of congestion pricing, moving more people in fewer cars.

We look at not just throughput, but health and safety of the surrounding communities. Our report, "Pricing Roads, Advancing Equity" was originally intended to focus on express lanes locally, but became a broader look at congestion pricing and is now influencing other metro areas. A lot of agencies are working to prioritize equity.

From the equity standpoint we're on ground zero, since no one has really done this before. SF and LA have a really powerful role in setting a good example for the nation. Congestion pricing can advance equity but it depends on how it is structured.

The process has to be focused on communities of concern and outcomes. In the past equity was done at the end and mitigations were carried out, like under CEQA. We must focus every step of the way to provide disproportionate benefits to disadvantaged communities.

It matters who pays in congestion pricing. And it matters who benefits. Depending on the mechanism, it can be regressive or progressive. Under congestion pricing you raise revenues and that can be spent on communities where there is the greatest need. For example, in Los Angeles, express lanes are funding clean air buses, increasing frequency of BRT, and creating bike lanes near transit lines.

Agenda Item: Q and A session

Q: PAC Member: Two questions. One is general and the second is for Richard. Richard, are you hoping congestion pricing will reduce the number of cars? Have you seen in other cities that the impact is such that cars are willing to pay that fee and are you using that to sequester emissions? What do you mean by sequester emissions?

A: Richard Chien – We're definitely looking at this from the perspective that pricing will disincentivize trips into the zone. And it will generate revenue to put back into transit projects. Regarding sequestration, it's looking at natural systems like collecting organics and producing high quality compost from that. Some organics can be spread

on range lands or agricultural uses. In reality the amount that can be sequestered is not known precisely.

A: Rachel Hiatt: We're estimating that if we get a 15% reduction in rush hour driving we can achieve the kinds of benefits we're talking about and also significant travel time improvements. We'll also be talking about what other cities have experienced. In London, Stockholm they saw closer to 20% trip reductions.

Q: PAC Member: Any non-obvious benefits that we're hoping to see?

A: Megan Weir: There would likely be a variety of health benefits from more active transportation like walking and biking.

PAC Member: You said we might be looking at a 15% reduction of trips. That sounds too modest. I'd be disappointed if we went through this and reduced trips only 15%.

Q: PAC Member: What is the thinking of how revenue will be used?

A: Colin Dentel-Post: There is not a current plan. We want to develop that plan through this process. This is a three-part policy: fees, discounts/subsidies, and what happens with revenues. That is something that is core to what we want to develop in this process. We'll need to develop those scenarios through an equity-focused process and then we'll analyze those scenarios.

PAC Member: Make sure to embed the spending plan in the equity process. There should be exemptions, not discounts, for low income folks. We advocate for exemptions for low income folks.

PAC Member: An obvious need for revenue is to increase transit service. We need to state that at the outset.

Q: PAC Member: What about the goods movement aspect of the City's Transit First policy? We must have safe movement of people and goods. Goods movement need to be addressed in this program.

A: Colin Dentel-Post: We have four goals for the program. First is to get traffic moving so people and goods get to where they need to go. Goods are something we're looking at.

A: Mari Hunter, SFMTA: The SFMTA just passed a Curb Management Strategy to prioritize curb space for our various needs, including goods movement and loading. How do we provide the right size and location for economic activity? This new strategy allows us to do it holistically. These guidelines will be there for any project.

Q: Member of the public: What is congestion? Is it a perception that you know when you see it?

A: Colin Dentel-Post: We think of it as delay. The amount of time to get somewhere when there is heavy demand compared to time it would take you at less crowded time. We've also looked at measures of speed.

Q: Member of the public: There are a lot of assumptions connected with the word congestion. We're talking about Downtown congestion. Is it uniform downtown? What about outside of downtown? If you're going to address congestion you need to respond to those factors. How will a broad-based strategy address those? And congestion by mode. I know I see it in vehicle lanes. I also see bike congestion and congestion on the sidewalk. I see it in the red lanes with bunching of buses. These things can have major effects on whatever this congestion is – and need to be addressed. Congestion pricing is only one part of mobility management. We need to be more specific about various factors of congestion so we can make judgements.

A: Colin Dentel-Post: Yes, different issues are related. We've tried to talk about pricing as addressing only one piece of getting around the city. It can fund a variety of different ways of helping other congestion like wider sidewalks, helping get at some of the other factors you were pointing out.

A: Mari Hunter: Also there is curb congestion. We're trying to make curbs more efficient. Congestion pricing would help as we work to make transit more efficient. Here is a multiplier effect that congestion pricing gives us.

Q: PAC Member: Curb management is a good strategy but things are evolving. Delivery needs are changing so that's one problem. Will congestion pricing be bad for businesses? Good for them? Has that been studied? Ever since Market Street was changed 15 years ago I can't park on Market because I have 4-wheel vehicle, not six wheels.

A: Colin Dentel-Post: We agree that businesses are an important consideration. One of the things we proposed as a metric of success is to reduce the number of vehicles going downtown but we want to make sure the number of people is not being reduced. We've identified the need for supporting business as a priority. Those are things we hear as concerns that will continue to be part of the conversation.

A: Rachel Hiatt: A takeaway is that details do matter. If we're talking about exemptions or definitions. With this process we can only get so far. But one of the reasons we have you all is to make sure we consider those details early.

Q: Member of the public: If you think about it in more abstract way, the curb lane is another lane. We are using different lanes in different ways. Slower flow might not be congestion. Ants deal with congestion. When you have an ants nest and source of food and limited right of way you have ants coming and going along this pathway. Their flow is consistent. Second of all when there is greater demand, fewer ants leave so they don't have congestion. In some sense the ants can handle the change in traffic by nature of social organization. How will this impact our social organization,

particularly as we come into a world with changing use of vehicles? How will we manage that mobility? We need to have a broader perspective. Like with mobility as a service. How do we coordinate all that?

PAC Member: Make sure revenue goes to bike and pedestrian improvements as well.