

July 1, 2021

Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP) Committee
Boston Metropolitan Planning Organization
10 Park Plaza
Boston, MA 02116

Subject: FFY 2022 UPWP Studies

Dear Members of the UPWP Committee and the Boston MPO:

As transportation advocates working to support a more equitable, efficient, and sustainable regional transportation network, we request that you support inclusion of Study M-5, Congestion Pricing in the approved list of studies for FFY 2022. The results of the study are long overdue for our region and are necessary to help our transportation leaders assess equitable ways to address congestion.

Congestion remains a serious concern with implications for public health, environmental justice, quality of life, workforce retention and recruitment, and transportation reliability. Recently published research from Texas A&M Transportation Institute confirms what we have all observed: congestion is back.

Congestion on our roads and bridges afflicts residents and the workforce in every community served by the MPO. It is an economic disincentive to business location and investment. And traffic has returned to near pre-pandemic levels on many of our roads.

The proposed M-5 Study description is as follows:

Purpose: This long-term conceptual study would enhance understanding of the potential benefits of congestion pricing schemes and applicability to the Boston region, and help inform regional conversations and the development of scenarios for the Long-Range Transportation Plan using travel demand modeling. It would examine the benefits, equity and sustainability implications, and other elements of different examples of congestion pricing, including the recently approved congestion pricing system in New York City and the cordon system in London. While the future of any congestion pricing scheme in the Commonwealth is uncertain, decisions should be made in an informed context, and this study would enhance the understanding of the ability for a congestion pricing system to self-fund and/or generate new funding for other entities such as transit agencies. This work would be grounded in previous conceptual work by various entities including MassDOT, and would consider uncertainties relating to the impacts of the pandemic.

This research is timely. In recent years, the Commonwealth has laid the groundwork for this study through several reports that reflect research and stakeholder input. The 2018 report of the

Commission on the Future of Transportation in the Commonwealth included several relevant recommendations:

- “State and municipal roadway design and operation should prioritize person throughput, rather than vehicle throughput, so that limited corridor capacity is allocated to moving as many people as possible.”
- “Work with multiple stakeholders to better manage today’s traffic congestion – and the congestion challenges of the future. MassDOT should take the lead in convening key stakeholders, including other state agencies, employers, municipalities, local/regional planning organizations, and mobility service providers to tackle the challenges of congestion.”

The 2019 *Congestion in the Commonwealth* report laid out several priorities for next steps:

- “MassDOT will investigate the feasibility of implementing managed lanes on one or more highways in Greater Boston, assessing options for the addition of High Occupancy Toll lanes or other managed lanes on highways north, south and west of Boston.”
- “MassDOT and the Department of Public Utilities (which regulates Transportation Network Companies) should collaborate with other stakeholders who have proposed changes to current TNC fee legislation and explore whether a consensus can be developed both on how to change the fee structure to act as a form of congestion pricing for the fleet of TNC vehicles and on how best to invest the resulting revenue.”

Boston has been among the most congested regions of the country, but unlike most others, we are making scant progress in addressing this challenge. The experience of other regions is that pricing is an effective, proven tool to incrementally reduce peak demand. We need a congestion pricing study that holistically analyzes solutions to congestion in the Commonwealth, including expanding transit options in locations with congested road corridors.

The obstacles to investigation and implementation of workable solutions are primarily political and institutional. It is, therefore, important to establish a credible, non-political fact base to support sound decisions in the years to come. We recommend that the study analyze strategies to: mitigate impacts of a potential congestion pricing program on low- and moderate-income drivers; invest revenues in public transportation routes that provide alternatives to driving routes with pricing; and quantify the benefits and burdens to environmental justice populations.

The MPO, with its multi-jurisdictional membership and deserved reputation for objectivity, is an appropriate lead for this study. In addition, the MPO’s commitment to equity is essential as the study should incorporate impacts and benefits on environmental justice populations, who are harmed by the transportation status quo.

Thank you very much for your consideration.

Sincerely,

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