

Frequently Asked Questions

Why is Congestion Pricing being considered in Virginia?

We can't build our way out of congestion, but we can manage it. Right now the average commute time in Virginia is 26.5 minutes—the seventh highest in the nation. Congestion Pricing will help reduce this congestion in areas of the commonwealth, including northern Virginia and Hampton Roads.

How much is the charge?

Prices vary for each road, due to supply and demand. For example, if all toll lanes were full, the toll price would be high due to the high demand. If the toll lanes were less full, prices would fall because of the decrease in demand. If the lanes were not congested at all, then there may be no tolls. This system, in which prices rise and fall every few minutes, is also called dynamic pricing.

Some roads do use a preset schedule of tolls. The advantage is it's predictable and simple. However, dynamic pricing helps to consistently maintain an optimal traffic flow. With dynamic pricing, the toll fee is adjusted in real-time until optimal traffic flow is achieved. For example, in San Diego the express lane fees for an 8-mile section typically range from \$1 to \$4.

Is Congestion Pricing equitable?

Surveys conducted for current Congestion Pricing projects show that drivers of all income levels use priced express lanes. Although many low-income users don't choose to use the tolled highway every day, they support having the option.

For instance, a parent racing to avoid the financial penalty associated with being late for pick-up at a day care facility, or for work, is often pleased to have the option of paying a fee to bypass gridlock in the regular lanes. In fact, a high level of support for San Diego's HOT lanes comes from the lowest income users (70 percent support).

Will adjacent free roads get more congested due to diverted traffic?

It is true that when toll rates are raised on toll roads, some drivers do divert to free alternatives. *However*, when Congestion Pricing is introduced on previously congested highways, some traffic may actually be *reduced* on parallel arterials, because certain travelers who were previously deterred by highway congestion may decide to shift back to the priced highways once the congestion is eliminated and throughput has increased.

Also, the introduction of tolls during rush hour will be accompanied by an expansion of transit capacity and a continued availability of High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) options—so single occupancy vehicle drivers can choose to use transit, carpools or vanpools instead of diverting to the free roadways.

Do people have flexibility to change the time when they travel?

Contrary to popular belief, on average, more than half of rush-hour drivers in metropolitan areas are not commuting. In other words, there is far more schedule flexibility than is commonly understood.

The rise of the Internet, PDAs and teleworking are attributable to the fact that employees these days have more flexibility when it comes to working outside the four corners of their offices.

If more employees had the option and incentive to shift their trip times—even by 30-45 minutes—it would significantly reduce traffic congestion. It is expected that employers will respond positively to Congestion Pricing by offering their employees more work schedule options (i.e. teleworking, off-peak period shifts, etc).