

»»»» Next Gen Freeways



PLAN BAY AREA 2050



STRATEGY T5
FREEWAY TOLLING



METROPOLITAN
TRANSPORTATION
COMMISSION

In partnership with  Caltrans

Next Generation Bay Area Freeways Study

What We Heard — Summer 2022 Public Engagement

Policy Advisory Council
October 12, 2022



Refresher

- This study advances implementation of Plan Bay Area 2050 Strategy T5
- Kicked off in Feb 2022
- Duration ~2 years

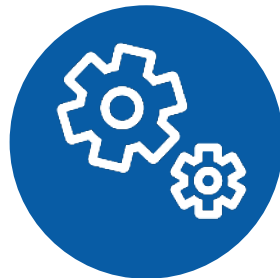
Three Main Components



Stakeholder
and Public
Engagement
(two rounds)



In-Depth
Technical
Analysis
(two rounds)



Exploration of
Operational
Deployment

Study Objective

The objective of the study is not to price the freeway network, but to identify whether pricing strategies can play a role in enabling a shared vision of a next generation freeway network.

Two Advisory Groups

- Staff-Level Advisory Group (includes five Council members)
- Exec-Level Advisory Group (includes Council Chair)



Today's Presentation

Recap Engagement Strategy

What We Heard

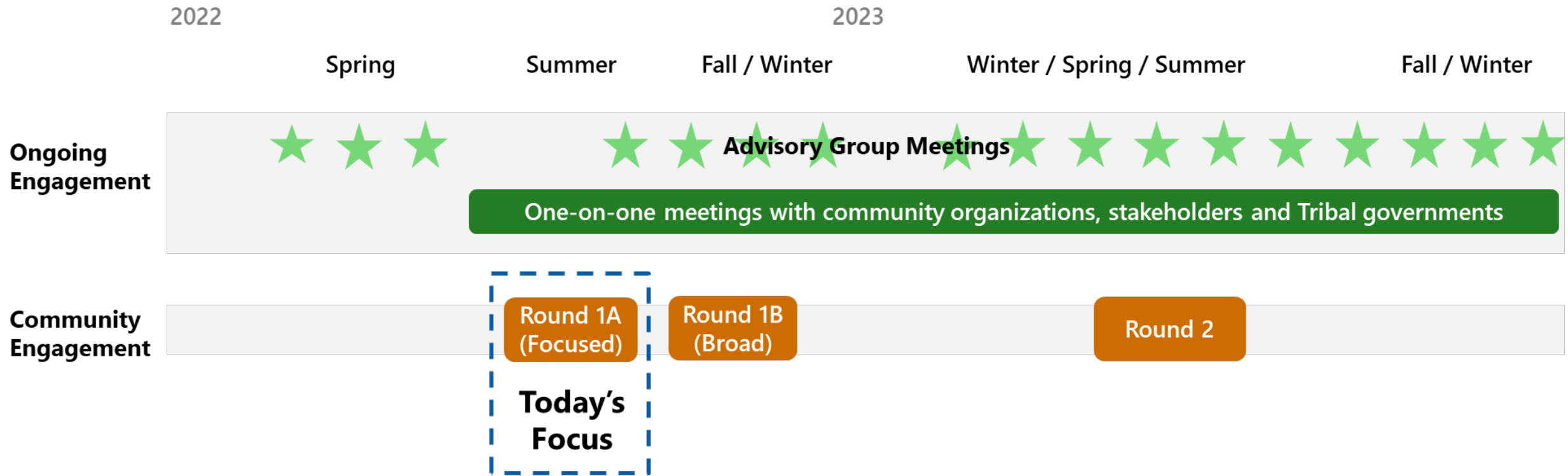
Next Steps



Recap Engagement Strategy



Engagement Timeline



Round 1A: Early Focused Engagement



Round 1A

OBJECTIVES

1. Understand the communities' visions of a next generation freeway network
2. Gain a more nuanced understanding of the perceptions and concerns with road pricing
3. Learn about complementary strategies that can make pricing more equitable

- Listening and learning early in the study to refine goals
- Deep conversations to help better understand concerns and formulate policy ideas
- Importantly, not trying to “sell” the idea of pricing
- Elevate voices of populations that may be disproportionately impacted



Round 1A Methodology and Demographics

Recruitment

- Comprehensive survey to screen potential participants
- Consultant (InterEthnica) leveraged their extensive contacts and breadth of existing relationships for recruitment

Discussions

- 15 1.5-hour discussions followed by travel survey
- Created safe spaces with neutral facilitation
- MTC staff as observers and no presentations
- 1 in-person group, 14 virtual groups in 5 languages
- 14 one-on-one interviews in English or Spanish (with day laborers and persons who are unhoused)

Demographics

(Total 115 Participants)

Race/Ethnicity:

32% Asian, 29% Latinx, 17% Black, 17% White; 7 indigenous members of tribes

Income:

- Under \$25K 24%
- \$25-50K 18%
- \$50-75K 29%
- \$75-100K 15%
- Above \$100K 15%

Occupations:

- Construction/landscaping (20)
- Students/Teachers (17)
- Trucking/Delivery (12)
- Janitorial (8)
- Day laborers (7)

Other Demographics:

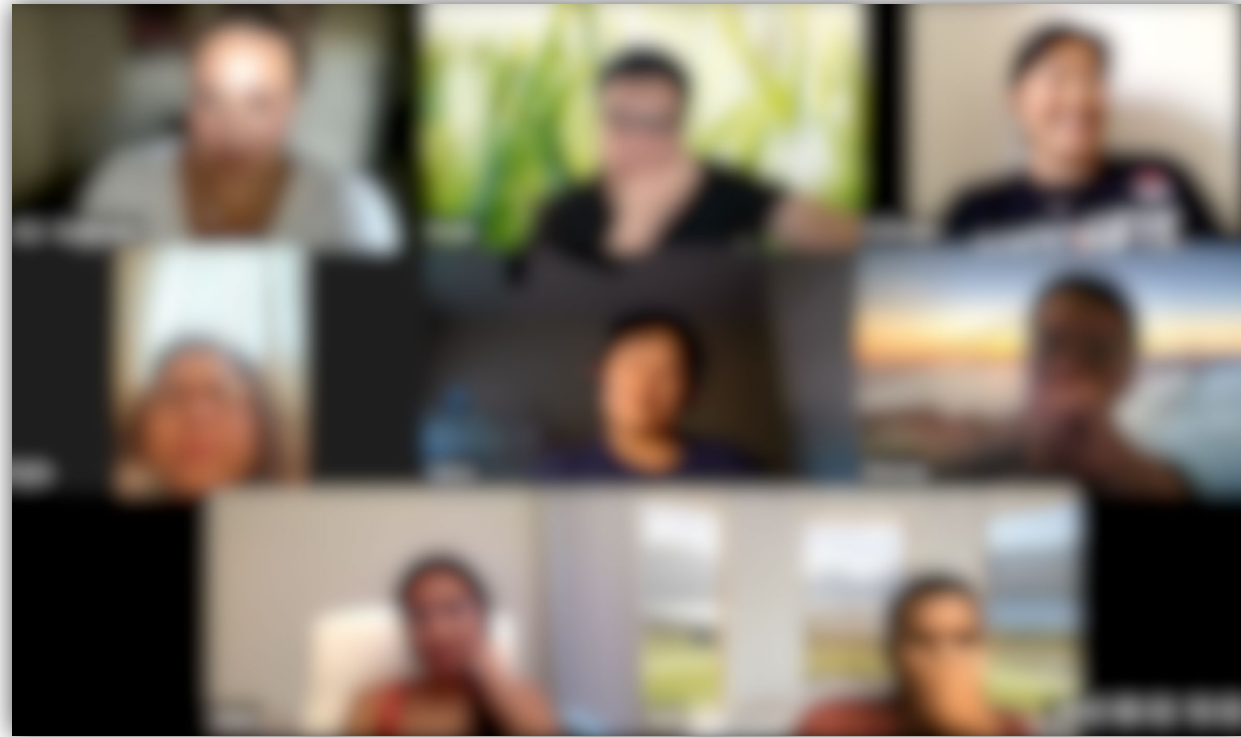
- 37 engaged in languages other than English
- 22 persons with disabilities
- 9 currently unhoused
- 23 persons above age 60

Geography:

- Santa Clara (33)
- Alameda (28)
- San Mateo (17)
- Contra Costa (17)
- Solano (14)
- San Francisco (3)
- Marin/Napa/Sonoma (3)



What We Heard



Key Takeaways: Communities' Visions of a Next Generation Freeway Network

- Less traffic, less congestion
- Freeways that hold more capacity, noting that the carpool/EV lanes currently feel inequitable
- Safer drivers, better merges and better maintained roads — citing these as reasons for traffic
- Good alternative options — for some, their vision of a perfect freeway trip is not having to take the freeway at all
- Better management of freight truck traffic — to specific lanes, at specific times or off the freeway entirely
- Less time in traffic = more time for family, friends and community, and better health, improved mental wellness, more economic opportunities

“Fixing all bottlenecks to reduce traffic. Speed limits for each lane to improve safety. Would give more time to stay at home with children, less time on freeways.”

- From a post-it note during focus group brainstorm exercise



Key Takeaways: Perceptions and Concerns with Road Pricing

- “We already pay for this” — perception of pricing as “double taxation”
- Deep belief that it will not reduce congestion — sounds like another “money grab”
- Concerned about inequities as those who need to drive have already been priced out of cities
- Pricing addresses the symptom, not the cause
- Happy to hear that equity would be a focus of policymakers, but many did not trust policymakers to keep that commitment
- Few could support pricing if provided with “proof” that it works and can be equitable
- Participants may be more open to pricing if other driving-related fees are removed

“This feels like death by a thousand cuts. Gas tax, raise in the toll. Everything is expensive. At what point can we stop paying a tax for being here? You are not making it easy for those who are not in the 1% to be here.”

- Female, Black, workforce development, 50-59 years old, Alameda County

Key Takeaways: Complementary Strategies that can make Pricing More Equitable

Participants first brainstormed burdens to help produce ideas for complementary strategies

- Financial burdens
- Forces unfair decision-making about traveling within the region
- Adverse mental and physical health impacts
- Negative impacts to freeway-adjacent neighborhoods due to traffic divergence

Complementary strategies started with transit first, then...

- Provide incentives for **not** using the freeway and for riding transit
- Shift the financial burden to large companies, especially tech
- Invest revenues into specific community projects – and communicate
- Pilot pricing in a wealthier location
- Develop income-based discount programs — with concerns

“We [construction workers] will likely be poorer, pinching pennies to go to work. Some of my construction friends already miss jobs because they couldn’t afford to pay for parking spots in a garage. Poverty will lead to mental health issues, which is already rampant in the construction industry and creates lots of alcohol/drug abuse.”

- Male, White non-Hispanic, Construction, 30-39 years old, Contra Costa County

Other Key Takeaways

- Participants agreed that freeways need to be reimagined and that equity should be at the forefront of the next generation of freeways
- There is deep mistrust with government institutions regarding equitable policy rollouts, taxation and transit improvements
- The concept of pricing was not met with positive reactions because participants felt that there is just so much to do first: regain the public's trust, provide excellent alternatives and address the perceptions that freeways are "already paid for"
- Participants demanded more details before they could form a more informed opinion – basic answers to where, how much and how pricing would be implemented
- Participants shared that this was "really bad timing" to talk about increasing the costs of their daily lives — freeway pricing on top of already higher gas prices, rents and inflation

“I could spend more time with my family, could prepare more good food, more time to rest, more time to put towards earning money for my family.”

- Mandarin-speaking female, mother, nurse, age 18-29, San Mateo County

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<https://youtu.be/v-ZuLCf2ydM>

Next Steps



Reflections on Engagement Round 1A Methodology

- Engagement method reached a richly-diverse audience while uplifting the voices of underrepresented communities
- Facilitation by experienced consultant who listened openly to people garnered honest conversations
- Small group setting enabled participants to be incredibly thoughtful — thinking out loud and doing the mental work to find their true feelings about pricing
- Robust dialogue where participants challenged themselves to think past initial reactions and grappled with ways freeway pricing could possibly work
- Participants were glad to have this opportunity to share in a small environment, to hear from their peers and have a voice on the matter early



Learnings for Future Engagement

1. Talking about road pricing proposals in abstract and without context leads to more questions than opinions; people want to understand key details of the proposal and potential impacts
2. We need to address some misconceptions head-on to have more productive conversations (e.g., more capacity does not fix congestion in the long term; clarify bridge toll revenues are used for)
3. Discussion of pricing in isolation does not paint the full picture — we need to discuss pricing in the context of trade-offs against the status quo or alternative proposals
4. Clear frustration with both unaffordability and traffic (and lack of viable alternatives) — “pathway” proposals must address both



Next Steps — Community Engagement

	Methods	Objectives
Round 1B Fall 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public webinars (with traditional and digital promotion) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reach a broader audience Inform public about existing/future challenges with respect to freeways Gather further input on goals
Round 2 Spring/Summer 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focused discussions Potential in-person workshops Public webinars 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduce potential pathway ideas and initial analysis findings Refine pathways with public feedback
Ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> One-on-one meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reach stakeholders, community-based organizations and Tribes
Other	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Statistically valid poll in 2023 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> TBD



Next Gen Freeways



What's Next?

Round 1B Webinars

Oct/Nov 2022

Pathways Development

Fall/Winter 2022-23

Technical Analysis Round 1

Winter 2023

Public Engagement Round 2

Spring/Summer 2023

Thank You.

Questions?

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