

520 Tolling Implementation Committee Final Summary and Assessment of Public Comments September 24 – November 30, 2008

Section 1: Introduction & Executive Summary of Public Comments

In June 2008, the 520 Tolling Implementation Committee was directed by the Washington State Legislature to examine tolling options for the 520 and I-90 corridors and to engage the public and local jurisdictions in providing input regarding specific tolling issues.

An initial round of tolling scenario analysis and public outreach was conducted during the summer, and yielded over 2,700 public comments. Overall, comments expressed support for the concept of tolling, although Mercer Island residents were generally opposed to tolling I-90. Additionally, the majority of comments received were in support of tolling in 2010, rather than 2016, and for tolling both 520 and I-90. Many respondents were concerned that good decisions be made regarding how tolling is implemented, with key factors including diversion, transit service and traffic congestion. Respondents also advocated different route choices, possible toll exemptions, and other important details of implementing a tolling plan.

In November of 2008, revised versions of the original four scenarios, as well as five additional new scenarios, were introduced to the public. An official public comment period began during this time as well. To capture public comment and feedback, the team launched an online web survey, conducted a statistically-valid phone survey, and also employed traditional comment gathering methods such as public open houses, printed comment forms, and a 520 tolling website and email address. Multiple letters and statements on tolling were also submitted by members of the public and local jurisdictions. Overall, more than 10,500 public responses were received, including over 5,330 narrative comments. In addition, over 1200 people participated in the phone survey.

This report summarizes the key themes heard from the public in response to the second round of tolling scenario analysis. When possible, the report summarizes:

- All narrative comments
- All narrative comments, excluding petition comments
- Comments received via open house comment forms and verbal comments
- Narrative comments received via the tolling web survey

How does current public comment respond to the committee's evaluation criteria?

Based on legislative direction, the 520 Tolling Implementation Committee established five major criteria to use for evaluating tolling scenarios:

- How much revenue is generated (and when)
- The “reasonableness” of the toll
- The diversion effects of a bridge toll
- The performance of the bridge
- The impacts a toll may have on lower income bridge users

The 520 Tolling Implementation Committee will use public comments, along with other input, to help evaluate tolling scenarios. The following describes how public comment received during this comment period responds to the five evaluation criteria.

How much revenue is generated (and when)

Public comments received so far show a general trend toward generating revenue sooner, rather than later, particularly if this results in lower toll rates for travelers. Many respondents stated their support for tolling as a funding source, and many specifically stated that tolling should begin in 2010, rather than waiting until 2016. Many members of the public are interested in generating revenue to fill the funding gap and in minimizing the cost to drivers. Mercer Islanders oppose tolling I-90 to pay for SR 520 improvements.

The “reasonableness” of the toll

Few respondents directly commented on the “reasonableness” of the toll. Some said they thought the toll rates provided in the scenarios were reasonable, while others said that toll rates of \$3 or more were too high, and requested toll rates in the \$0.50 to \$2 range. Among those that opposed tolling, most opposed any toll, while a few said the annual cost to their family would be too high given the proposed toll rates.

There is also a segment of people who oppose tolling because they consider it similar to a tax, think that existing taxes should pay for 520, or say it isn't right to pay a toll on an existing bridge that has previously been paid for.

The diversion effects of a bridge toll

Many respondents and jurisdictions were concerned with the diversion effects of a bridge toll. People from the north and south communities were concerned about diversion around the lake, while Eastside and some west side communities were concerned about diversion to neighborhoods streets as a result of segment tolling. Diversion and congestion concerns were present in comments from all geographical areas.

The performance of the bridge

While most respondents did not address bridge performance, those that discussed variable tolling were often interested in improved traffic and reduced congestion. Most respondents appear to understand the connection between variable tolling and improved

traffic flow. Overall, the need for bridge replacement and concerns about connecting roadways were mentioned more often than bridge performance.

The impacts a toll may have on lower income bridge users

Many respondents were concerned with potential impacts to lower income bridge users. The majority were concerned about either their own, or another's, ability to pay a toll if using a tolled bridge facility on a consistent basis. A minority of respondents suggest that low income bridge users be exempt from tolls, while more respondents said that particular tolls should not be implemented due to possible adverse effects on lower income residents. Many respondents suggested that increased transit options should be provided for those unable to pay the toll or that a free alternate route should always be available. A number of comments were received from Mercer Island residents, which stated that placing tolls on I-90 would impose an undue financial hardship on Islanders.

There was also concern about the effects of tolls to middle-income family budgets, and how it may limit people's ability to get to work.

After carefully evaluating all tolling scenarios, and all public comments received, the 520 Tolling Implementation Committee will submit a report outlining its findings on tolling to the State Legislature in January 2009.

Section 2: Analysis of Public Comments

Comment Totals and Sources – By the Numbers

Overall, more than 10,500 public responses were received, including 5,337 narrative comments. It is worth considering a few caveats when reading this report. The first is that the individuals providing input are self-selected, and thus interested in the topic. As such, this report is not representative of the public-at-large. Further, a petition was received from the “No Toll on I-90” group, comprised primarily of Mercer Island residents, which includes over 2,390 comments.

A general breakdown of comment sources were as follows:

- Via email or website: 212
- Via open house comment forms: 28
- Via open house verbal comments: 42
- Via standard mail: 21
- Via web survey: 2624
- Via “No Toll on I-90” petition: 2397
- Via “No Toll on I-90” petition (additional comments): 9
- Via Tolling Implementation Committee meetings and briefings: 4

This summary is organized to help readers understand how those efforts may have shaped the common themes and findings. When possible, the report summarizes:

- All narrative comments
- All narrative comments, excluding petition comments
- Comments received via open house comment forms and verbal comments
- Narrative comments received via the tolling web survey

Web Survey

The 520 tolling web survey served as the primary comment tool during the second round of public outreach. The web survey was located on the www.build520.org site, and was also advertised via web ads placed on the websites of several local media outlets, including: *The Seattle Times*, *The Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, *KING5.com*, and *KIROtv.com*. It also served as the primary comment form for the open houses.

Over 7,800 individuals participated in the survey, with over 2,600 of these individuals also providing narrative comments. The results of the web survey showed support for tolling, variable tolling, tolling beginning in 2010, and for tolling both bridges. Specifically, the results showed that:

- Respondents support tolling to help fund the bridge by a nearly 2:1 margin. (59% to 30%)
- Support for tolling increases to 69% when respondents learn about electronic tolling and the fact that there will be no toll booths.
- Respondents support tolling in 2010 if it results in lower tolls and financing costs by a nearly 3:1 margin. (60% to 23%)
- Respondents support tolling both bridges with lower toll rates (61%) and also support tolling in order to achieve faster trips. (61%). It is important to note, however, that 39% of respondents opposed these two ideas.
- Respondents support variable tolling by more than a 2:1 margin. (65% to 31%)
- Reduced rates on weekends are favored by 65% of respondents; while 55% of respondents favored reduced mid-day rates.
- The top three responses of what people would do when a toll is charged were:
 - Pay the toll: 30%
 - Take another route: 26% (with 61% of these respondents choosing I-90)
 - Take transit: 17%

Bridge use statistics

- Almost 50% of respondents stated that they generally use 520. Approximately 25% use I-90, and just under 20% of respondents reported that they use both bridges.
- 24% of respondents are regular commuters, reporting that they use one of the bridges five days a week. Nearly as many respondents (22.5%) reported that they didn't use either bridge during the previous week. 18% of respondents reported that they used one of the bridges one day during the previous week.

- Of those respondents who drive on the bridges, 79% do so on weekdays, and over half (54%) do so on weekends.
- The afternoon commute is the most typical travel time (64%), followed by the morning commute (50%). Mid-day and evening use is also relatively high with 41% and 33% respectively.
- 67% of respondents reported that they drive alone. This is followed by carpooling with household members at 33%, and taking the bus at 23%.
- Work is the primary reason people use the bridge, with 56%, followed by recreational activities at 34%, and 27% for shopping.

Phone Survey

In addition to the tolling web survey, a statistically-valid phone survey was conducted during the month of November. The phone survey was administered to a stratified random sample of 1,204 respondents (with an overall margin of error of +/- 3%) who drove across the lake in their personal vehicle at least one day in the last week:

- Used just 520 Bridge in last week (n = 230)
- Used just I-90 Bridge in last week (n = 317)
- Used both bridges in last week (n = 254)
- Used neither bridge in last week (n = 403)

To reduce sample bias, at least four attempts were made to establish telephone contact at different times of the day and days of the week with every randomly selected phone number. Overall, the phone survey showed support for tolling in order to help fund the bridge, as well as support for electronic and variable rate tolling. More specifically, results showed that:

- Respondents support tolling to help fund the bridge by over a 2:1 margin. (65% to 30%).
- Support increases when participants learn about electronic tolling and no toll booths, with 34% *somewhat more likely* and 39% *much more likely* to support tolling the 520 Bridge.
- Participants support variable rate tolling, with two-fifths (41%) expressing strong support and 29% medium support.
- Respondents support early tolling in 2010 if they know it results in lower tolls and financing costs (58% to 36%); more so among those who use just the 520 Bridge (62%).
- Support for early tolling in 2010 drops if they know it results in faster travel times on 520, but slightly slower travel times on I-90 during the peak commute times (51% to 39%).
- Sixty-two percent support tolling both bridges if they know it results in increased speeds on both bridges, but this is less true among who use just the I-90 Bridge (47%).
- Sixty-one percent support tolling both bridges if they know it results in lower toll rates when compared to tolling just the 520 Bridge, but this is less true among those who use just the I-90 Bridge (47%).
- Support for tolling both bridges goes up by 6% among those who use just the I-90 Bridge (47% to 53%), if they know that revenues from I-90 tolls will also be used to make improvements to the I-90 Bridge.
- The one thing people are mostly likely to do when a toll is charged is:
 - Pay the toll (38%)
 - Take another route (17%)
 - Change time of trip to when toll is lower (16%)
 - Take transit (9%)

- Of those who indicated that they would take another route, the following were indicated:
 - Take I-5 or I-405 (50%)
 - Take 522 (20%)
 - Take I-90 (17%)
 - Take local streets (12%)

Bridge use

- Frequency of bridge use:
 - 520 Bridge users – 27% use five or more days a week
 - I-90 Bridge users – 42% use five or more days a week
- AM peak (47%), mid-day (46%), and PM peak (48%) travel times were equally represented, with evening (16%) and overnight (3%) travel times being much less likely.
- Seventy-one percent of respondents reported that they drove alone when using the bridge(s) during the last week. This was followed by carpooling with household members (33%), carpooling with non-household members (12%), and taking the bus (6%).
- Commuting to and from work was the primary reason people used the bridge (51%), followed by recreational activities (27%), and running errands/shopping (22%).

Respondent demographics

- Gender:
 - Male 47%
 - Female 53%
- Age:
 - 18-24 3%
 - 25-34 9%
 - 34-44 21%
 - 45-54 28%
 - 55-64 24%
 - 65 and older 14%
 - Refused 2%
- Income:
 - Less than \$55,000 12%
 - \$55,000 to less than \$90,000 21%
 - \$90,000 to less than \$150,000 26%
 - \$150,000 or more 18%
 - Refused 25%
- Race/ethnicity:
 - White 82%
 - Non-white 13%
 - Refused 5%

Website

The committee launched a website, www.build520.org, as a portal for providing information to people and collecting input. The website includes information about the 520 bridge and the 520 bridge replacement project, traffic congestion on the 520 bridge, funding options, electronic tolling, variable tolling for congestion relief, and the tolling scenarios under consideration by the committee. The website also features announcements of upcoming committee meetings and open houses, an online comment form, contact information for the committee (mail, email, and phone), and a library of additional tolling information resources. During this time period, more than 11,637 unique viewers visited the www.build520.org website.

Open Houses

The committee advertised and held three open houses in communities around Lake Washington to provide information on the nine tolling scenarios. Open houses were announced to the public with display advertisements in 11 local newspapers in advance of each nearby open house. A postcard announcing open house dates was mailed to 20,000 residents from mailing lists related to the 520 bridge project. An email announcement was provided to addresses on 520 and other related project mailing lists, and the open house dates were provided on the committee website.

The number of attendees and comments received at each open house are as follows:

November 12

Bellevue City Hall (Bellevue)

Attendees: 68

Verbal comments: 17

November 13

Gould Hall, University of Washington (Seattle)

Attendees: 23

Verbal comments: 11

November 17

Stroum Jewish Community Center (Mercer Island)

Attendees: 130

Verbal comments: 14

Open House Comments: Verbal comments

Forty-two verbal comments were submitted at the three public open houses. The nature of these comments is briefly summarized below:

Bellevue

Verbal comments related to bridge financing, traffic diversion, exemptions and the setting of toll rates.

University of Washington (Seattle)

Verbal comments expressed support for tolling as a means to reduce congestion and improve the environment.

Mercer Island

Verbal comments received at the Mercer Island open house expressed staunch opposition to tolling I-90 and included requests for exemptions for those travelling to and from Mercer Island.

Open House Comments: Comment form

Most attendees were encouraged to provide comments through the Web survey, though 28 general comment forms were received from open house attendees. The comment forms captured several key themes, including:

- Mercer Island residents should be exempt from tolls.
- Tolls would negatively impact businesses on Mercer Island, as well as individuals who work on Mercer Island.
- Mercer Island residents do not have alternatives routes of access to essential services.
- Support for light rail and high capacity transit.

Committee Meetings

The public was also invited to the Committee's work sessions, during which the tolling scenario analysis was discussed in greater depth. These meetings were held on:

- September 30, 2008 (Kirkland City Hall)
- November 10, 2008 (Redmond City Hall)

Jurisdictional Briefings

The 520 Tolling Implementation Committee and staff have presented information to numerous elected officials, jurisdictions, and stakeholder groups during the fall of 2008. These included meetings with community and civic groups such as the Redmond Rotary, along with local city councils and elected representatives. Briefing sessions allowed committee staff members to answer questions about the tolling options under consideration and to record comments and concerns from a range of stakeholders.

Media releases and media coverage

The 520 Tolling Implementation Committee was the subject of more than 15 newspaper, radio, or television pieces and several blog postings during the fall of 2008. Newspaper coverage included articles in the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, *Seattle Times*, *Redmond Reporter*, *Mercer Island Reporter*, *Bellevue Reporter*, and many other local papers. Several television and radio news outlets, including *KING 5* and *KUOW*, announced the open houses and explained the committee's tasks to their audiences. News coverage discussing the committee is posted on the website at www.build520.org/tolling_news.htm.

Comments from local jurisdictions

The 520 Tolling Implementation Committee received formal letters or statements from several local jurisdictions, agencies and groups, outlining their concerns and priorities for any future tolling option on the 520 bridge. A list of the jurisdictions that submitted formal comments, as well as a brief summary of the key points put forth by each jurisdiction is provided below. The complete text of each letter can be found on the committee's website at www.build520.org or in the attached appendix.

The following jurisdictions, agencies, and groups submitted formal comments to the 520 Tolling Implementation Committee:

- City of Bothell
- City of Mercer Island
- City of Renton
- City of Lake Forest Park
- Mercer Island School District
- City of Issaquah
- SeaShore Transportation Forum
- No Toll on I-90

City of Bothell

The City of Bothell expresses concerns regarding the reliability of diversion data for the SR 522 corridor and urges further analysis that takes into account recent growth in the area and the role of transit in SR 522 corridor. The City also suggest multiple mitigation measures, including improved transit service and capacity, improved park and ride facilities, and improved capacity on the SR 522 corridor.

City of Mercer Island

Two letters, as well as a formal resolution, were received from the City of Mercer Island during the comment period. The City states its resolute opposition to the imposition of tolls on travel to and from the City. The City requests that the Tolling Implementation Committee formally evaluate tolling scenarios that include exemptions for travel to and from Mercer Island.

City of Renton

The City of Renton thanks the Tolling Implementation Committee for its thorough and transparent evaluation of tolling alternatives and also expresses its appreciation that concerns over funding for the I-405 Stage II work program have been addressed. The City urges the Committee to continue to evaluate the potential for diversion to local arterials as a result of tolling and construction on I-405.

City of Lake Forest Park

The City of Lake Forest Park urges the Tolling Implementation Committee to consider the following mitigation measures to address diversion to SR 522 as a result of tolling on 520: improved transit service and increased capacity, communications outreach and signage

programs, and an arterial ITS system to improve traffic flow along the SR 522 corridor. The City also expresses support for the monitoring of diversion effects on SR 522 once tolling begins.

Mercer Island School District

The Mercer Island School District expresses opposition to tolling on I-90 and states that tolling on I-90 will negatively impact District teachers, staff and students, and will represent an undue financial burden on the District.

City of Issaquah

The City of Issaquah conveys its support for tolling 520, as well as a combination of HOT lanes and free lanes on I-90. The City also urges policymakers to provide funding for enhanced transit services on the Eastside, specifically light rail along the I-90 corridor.

SeaShore Transportation Forum

The SeaShore Transportation Forum, which is comprised of cities at the north end of Lake Washington, states its concern that tolling on 520 will result in increased traffic congestion on arterials north of the lake, most notably, SR 522. The SeaShore Transportation Forum expresses support for mitigation measures such as increased transit service, improved park and ride facilities and infrastructure improvements, and requests that these measures be implemented prior to the start of tolling on 520.

No Toll on I-90

The No Toll on I-90 group, primarily comprised of Mercer Island, submitted a petition with nearly 2400 signatures. The group expresses its staunch opposition to tolling the I-90 bridge and states that doing so would negatively impact Mercer Island residents, businesses, and organizations.

Overarching Key Themes: Open-ended/Narrative comments

This section of the report highlights the themes from the written comments. Readers should keep these within context of the phone survey's statistic validity.

The following themes are representative of the 5,337 narrative comments received during this time period. All comments were carefully read and categorized according to their content, and the ten most commonly identified themes are listed below, along with brief descriptions of the types of comments represented in each category.

As previously discussed, the Committee received a petition with nearly 2,400 signatures from the "No Toll on I-90" group, which is primarily comprised of Mercer Island residents. The petition message was categorized as representing the following key themes:

- 520 project funding
- Cost of living
- Concerned regarding diversion to I-90
- Tax burden
- Exemptions for traffic to and from Mercer Island
- Opposition to tolling I-90

- Mitigation measures
- Tolling Implementation Committee
- Local/regional governments
- State legislature
- Process/decision making
- Concerned about social justice/fairness
- Concerned about geographic equity/fairness

The following section highlights common themes from the input. Two different tables of “top ten themes” are provided to illustrate the input by source, and in total, so that readers can see how results vary when the “No Toll on I-90” petition is excluded. Please note that comments were assigned to multiple categories if appropriate.

Table 1: Most Common Themes – Includes All Narrative Public Comments

Themes	Percentage of Comments**
Tax burden	49%
Opposes tolling both bridges	48%
Process/decision-making	47%
520 project funding	44%
Concerned about environmental/social justice/fairness	43%
Exemptions for Mercer Island residents	43%
Concerned about geographic equity/fairness	42%
Local/regional governments	42%
Cost of living	42%
Concerned with diversion to I-90	41%

**Percentage of more than 5,337 comments, including all narrative public comments received

Table 2: Most Common Themes – Excluding “No Toll on I-90” Petition

Themes	Percentage of Comments***
Generally favors tolling	20%
Tax burden	20%
Generally opposes tolling	20%
Opposes tolling both bridges	17%
Process/decision-making	15%
Support for increased transit service	13%
Favors tolling both bridges	12%
Appropriate use of funds	10%
520 project funding	10%
Public involvement	10%

***Percentage of more than 2,920 narrative public comments, excluding “No Toll on I-90” petition

Characterization of Common Themes in Narrative Public Comments

What have we learned?

First, when considering the findings of the public outreach conducted in the fall of 2008, it is important to keep a few things in mind:

While the results of the web and telephone survey indicate support for tolling in general, as well as the concepts of early tolling and tolling both bridges – the narrative responses received via the web survey, public open houses, www.build520.org and the “No Toll on I-90” petition demonstrate opposition to tolling the I-90 bridge.

The public is generally supportive of using tolls to pay for the replacement of the 520 bridge, but has concerns that funds will not be used appropriately. Public comments also express support for removing tolls once the bridge is paid for. Comments indicate support for tolling, provided that both the costs and benefits of tolling are fair and equitable. Those opposed to tolling I-90 feel that tolling I-90 to pay for the replacement of 520 is not fair, in terms of costs incurred or benefits provided.

Generally favors tolling

Respondents characterized within this category indicated they were in favor of the idea of tolling to fund the 520 bridge and improve the flow of traffic. These respondents have different opinions about which routes should be tolled, when, and under what circumstances, but they generally agree with the concept of tolling.

“I strongly support tolls being added to 520 between Seattle and Bellevue. I think this is a responsible solution to pay for the roadway by those who use it.”

“I want tolls! You either pay with money or with time. I'd rather pay with money.”

Tax burden

The majority of these respondents said that taxes in this region are already high, and felt that tolling would add to this burden. Many suggested that existing tax revenues should be used to fund transportation improvements.

“I don't think a toll should be required considering the amount of gas tax we are already paying that supports roads. You need to find another way to build the bridge without additional costs to those already paying taxes.”

“It's just another tax and I pay enough already. Find another way.”

“NO Tolls. We cannot afford them. Taxes are out of control. A toll is also a form of taxation.”

Generally opposes tolling

These comments expressed overall opposition to tolling. Some saw tolling as a “tax” and others saw it as a “double tax.” Many stated that the state either does or should have other funding methods for transportation projects. Some respondents felt that tolling was not affordable, either for themselves or for other drivers.

“No tolls, of any kind, not on any state highway... No tolls in Washington state!”

“I find tolling to be distasteful and just one shuffling step away from extortion.”

Opposes tolling both bridges

The majority of these comments oppose a toll on the I-90 bridge. Some opposed a toll on I-90 as a way to fund improvements to a different corridor, while others said it was important to have a non-tolled alternative route across Lake Washington, and still others felt it would hurt Mercer Island residents.

“People that use 520 should be responsible for paying for the new bridge.”

“If funds are required to build the 520 corridor then the users of the 520 bridge should bear that burden alone. Tolling the users of I-90, especially those on Mercer Island who have no other options, is unfair. I would support tolling on I-90 to build a new I-90 bridge, as it was done for the original bridge.”

Process & decision-making

Many respondents were interested in or concerned about how tolling decisions are being made. These comments often mentioned the State of Washington, state legislature, or the 520 Tolling Implementation Committee. Some comments more generally discussed leadership or project delivery.

“Make a decision and move forward.”

“How did you predict or forecast the changes in traffic and destination that you’re using, and how congestion and speed will change?”

Supports increased transit service

Many respondents were also interested in increased transit service. These respondents often said that increased transit service would be a necessary complement to tolling on 520. Others expressed general support for transit service, including both bus and rail service on 520, I-90, and throughout the region. Some respondents advocated using toll revenue to fund transit improvements. A smaller set of respondents indicated specifically that they were opposed to funding transit with toll revenue, while most comments that referenced transit indicated support for alternatives to paying a toll.

“Get a better bus system! It shouldn't have to take me three buses and two hours to make a twenty minute commute to the Eastside!!!! Come on, Seattle, get with the program!”

“I strongly support increased transit and bicycle facilities across the 520 bridge.”

Favors tolling both bridges

Comments expressed a straightforward preference that both the 520 and I-90 bridges be tolled. Many of these comments said that tolling should begin on the two bridges at the same time, and prior to construction beginning on 520. A subset of these respondents expressed concern about diversion effects or concerns that revenues would be lower if only the 520 bridge is tolled.

“Tolling both bridges is critical to not creating unnecessary trip diversions and to creating incentives to shift modes of travel to more sustainable alternatives (bus, bike, carpool, etc.).”

“I support tolling both bridges, because if only one is tolled, the other will be clogged.”

Appropriate use of funds

Comments in this category generally urged strict oversight of tolling revenue. Some comments expressed skepticism that tolling revenue would be used appropriately. While some respondents voiced support for spending tolling revenue on transit programs or mitigation measures, others vociferously opposed this idea and felt that tolling revenue should only pay for replacing and/or maintaining the bridge. Many respondents stated a preference for removing tolls once the 520 bridge is fully paid for.

“Charge us to replace it and only use the money for a replacement and stop the tolling after it’s paid for.”

“Tolls on the bridge should go to the bridge. Be very careful to avoid scope creep of the project.”

520 project funding

Comments frequently included questions or comments related to funding the replacement of the 520 bridge. Many respondents offered alternative ideas for funding the project, including raising the gas tax, increased property taxes, or requesting additional federal funding.

“I believe in paying for infrastructure with taxes, but we should be raising the gas tax to pay for an expanded 520 - NEVER IMPLEMENT TOLL ROADS!!”

“Maybe the funding should be a combination of tolls and taxes based on where primary users of the bridge reside.”

Public involvement

Comments generally indicated dissatisfaction with the online tolling web survey. Respondents felt that certain questions were biased in favor of tolling and that the survey was designed to show public approval of tolling. Many respondents stated that the questions asked seemed to indicate that tolling had already been decided upon. Other comments advocated additional public involvement measures.

“The ‘survey’ is extremely biased in favor of tolling. In fact, given the questions asked, I believe it is completely invalid as a measure of public opinion regarding tolling.”

“Do you realize how biased this survey is? The majority of the questions do not allow a reasonable answer if you are opposed to tolling altogether.”

“Get the estimates first: cost + time. Publish them, and then ask us about our options. Open-ended surveys don’t add too much value.”

Concerned about social justice/fairness

These respondents were concerned about all motorists ability to pay the toll. Many asked how the Committee is considering the needs of low-income residents, while others were opposed to tolling because it would place an undue burden on low-income residents. Many of these comments were concerned about the ability of fixed-income Mercer Island residents to pay for a toll on I-90 bridge, though some were concerned about residents from other areas. A few requested exemptions for low-income travelers.

“Tolling unfairly burdens students and poor people. Find other ways to improve the bridge - INCOME TAX perhaps? People who make more and can afford more should pay more...”

“The tolls should be reasonably low so that low income people can afford to commute to jobs in situations where it is not feasible to use public transportation.”

Exemptions for Mercer Island residents

A specific set of respondents said that there should not be a toll for travel to or from Mercer Island. Of these, many advocated not tolling I-90 at all, while others requested an exemption for Mercer Island travel or Mercer Island residents. Most comments expressed that Mercer Island is a unique situation with no alternative route available to reach essential services.

“Residents of Mercer Island must have relief from tolls on I-90.”

“Consider a special rate for Mercer Island residents, since they are "trapped" on the island and have no choice but to use I-90 to leave the island.”

Concerned about geographic equity/fairness

The majority of comments falling under this category were Mercer Island residents concerned about paying more than their fair share of the tolls to fund a new 520 bridge they would not use. A few comments expressed concerns about the fairness of impacts to their neighborhoods and questioned why other areas in the region are not paying to replace the 520 bridge.

“I think people who drive the road should help pay for the road.”

“I feel like tolling the I-90 bridge is taxation without representation. We are not getting the benefits of a new bridge yet we are being asked to pay for one.”

Local/regional governments

Respondents in this category made comments related to local and regional governmental bodies and agencies. Many respondents expressed frustration over perceived mismanagement of taxes already collected and expressed concern that the government is merely seeking to collect more money from the general public.

“Seattle government has run amok. This is NOT the will of the people.”

“It is criminal how this county and city cannot budget normally and must lie to the public every chance they get to raise taxes.”

Cost of living

Comments expressed concern over the rising cost of living and stated that tolling would add to this burden. Many Mercer Island residents commented that the costs of certain goods and services would likely rise if a toll were to be put in place on I-90.

“As a 38 year island resident I have loved and contributed to my home community. Now a single and senior citizen, I am learning to live on a strictly limited income - while watching my small saving 'melt' in the recent economic implosion. To pay an I-90 toll would be a bitter hardship or unsupported burden for those of us who, now aging, made our financial plans assuming no added transport cost! Please: NO TOLL!”

“Especially in this economy, tolling will have a negative impact on businesses and families.”

Concerned with diversion & traffic congestion

Comments identified concerns about diversion to other major roadways, such as I-90, I-405 and SR 522, as well as traffic congestion along local arterials. The majority were concerned that tolling would adversely impact their travel along alternate routes. Some respondents also expressed general concerns about traffic congestion in the region, or did not think tolling would improve congestion.

“Tolling is a terrible idea, all its going to do is seriously increase traffic on I-90 and other alternative routes.”

“You need to toll both bridges or traffic will come to a dead stop on I-90 and those of us who need to use that bridge will be out of options.”

“I think that tolls on 520 will be disastrous for Bothell and Kenmore as more and more people take 522 to avoid paying the toll. There isn't the infrastructure to support it. Bothell will be so congested that the downtown improvement area will be a joke.”

Geographic representation of public comments

The 520 Tolling Implementation Committee received public comments from residents throughout the region. Including all comments recorded, public comments were received from residents of the following areas:

Table 1: Geographic Area – Percentage of comments received

Geographic Area	Percentage of comments received
North end	3%
West side	20%
South end	6%
Eastside	14%
Mercer Island	48%
Other/Unknown	8%

Key themes by region

While there were many similarities in responses from around the region, comments showed some notable geographical differences. The following broadly describes the issues and concerns from written comments that appeared unique or more strongly represented in regional areas.

North end

The north end area includes comments from respondents in the cities of Bothell, Kenmore, Lake Forest Park, and Woodinville. North end respondents were more likely to mention diversion and traffic congestion, specifically along the SR 522 corridor. Many comments expressed concern that tolling on 520 would result in traffic congestion along SR 522 and local arterials.

West side

The west side includes comments from the City of Seattle. Respondents from this area were more likely to be concerned about climate change and environmental issues. Seattle residents were also more likely to favor tolling on both bridges, and were largely in support of providing transit alternatives.

South end

The south end area includes comments from the cities of Renton, Newcastle, and Issaquah. South end respondents were more likely to mention diversion and traffic congestion on I-405, and were somewhat less likely to be in favor of tolling.

Eastside

Eastside respondents include comments from Kirkland, Redmond, Bellevue, and Sammamish. Comments from the Eastside were somewhat less likely to favor tolling both bridge, and we somewhat more likely to comment on alternative means of funding the project.

Mercer Island

The vast majority of Mercer Island respondents were opposed to tolling the I-90 bridge. Mercer Island respondents were also more likely to mention geographic equity, cost of living, social justice issues, taxes, and diversion to I-90.