

## **Summer Fairs & Festivals Comment Summary**

In an effort to reach out to communities up and down the Eastside Corridor, WSDOT attended 10 summer fairs and festivals between June and August 2009. Each event provided a unique opportunity for the project team to engage with the public, provide information on the Eastside Corridor Tolling Study and gather critical feedback from interested parties. The WSDOT outreach booth included interactive elements, design visualizations, informational handouts and comment forms. Staff members were available to discuss the project, answer questions and encourage attendees to complete comment forms.

A total of 282 comment forms were collected at the following summer fairs and festivals:

- Puyallup Meeker Days – 42
- Bellevue Strawberry Festival – 81
- Boeing Safety Fair (Kent) – 4
- Boeing Safety Fair (Renton) – 5
- Mercer Island Summer Celebration – 51
- Kent Cornucopia Days – 34
- Renton River Days – 14
- Tukwila Days - 6
- Bothell River Festival - 23
- Kirkland Farmer's Market - 22

The feedback received at each festival varied, reflecting a range of divergent themes from communities along the I-405/SR 167 corridor. This section includes a brief summary of the comments collected at each event.

### *Puyallup Meeker Days*

The majority of comments received or noted from Puyallup Meeker Days were in favor of express toll lanes for the Eastside Corridor. Many of the comment forms referenced the success of the 167 HOT Lanes Pilot Project. A few comments criticized the HOT lane system on SR 167, citing infrequent access points and lack of enforcement for crossing the double white lines. In general, the comments were positive about tolling as a method to alleviate congestion on I-405.

### *Bellevue Strawberry Festival*

Feedback collected at the Bellevue Strawberry festival was positive in regard to adding express

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toll lanes on I-405 as a means to reduce congestion on the Eastside Corridor. A number of comments requested additional mass transit options both as an addition and alternative to express toll lanes. Several attendees indicated concern that express toll lanes would discriminate against low income populations.

#### *Mercer Island Summer Celebration*

The majority of Mercer Island attendees expressed support for express toll lanes on I-405. When asked how often they would use the toll lanes, an overwhelming percentage said less than three times per month. A large portion of the comments requested that the revenue collected be reinvested in the Eastside Corridor.

#### *Kent Cornucopia Days*

Most of the comments collected at Kent Cornucopia Days were in favor of express toll lanes. Those who conveyed support frequently cited congestion relief as the primary factor. Several comments critiqued the SR 167 HOT lane Pilot Project for its limited access points and related safety concerns. Several comments requested that WSDOT only add lanes to the existing system and not remove any general purpose lanes.

#### *Renton River Days*

Attendees at Renton River Days were generally supportive of express toll lanes. Many of the comment forms referenced the SR 167 HOT lanes and several acknowledged the need to alleviate congestion on I-405. Time savings was particularly important, with the majority of attendees citing 20-30 minutes as a significant travel time savings and motivating factor to use express toll lanes.

#### *Boeing Safety Fairs (Kent & Renton)*

Attendees at the Boeing Safety fairs were familiar with the SR 167 HOT lanes and mostly supportive of expanding express toll lanes to I-405. Improving traffic flow was the most frequently mentioned benefit of implementing an express toll lane system.

#### *Tukwila Days*

The comments collected at Tukwila Days expressed overwhelming support for an express toll lane system on I-405. A few concerns emerged including safety issues, requests to not toll existing lanes, and issues related to 2+ versus 3+ HOV lanes.

#### *Bothell River Festival*

The majority of Bothell River Festival attendees indicated support for an express toll lane system on the Eastside Corridor. The majority of those in favor of express toll lanes indicated congestion relief as a top priority, while many of those in opposition referenced transit as a preferred investment.

### *Kirkland Farmer's Market (comment forms combined)*

Attendees at the Kirkland Farmer's Market voiced a wide array of opinions on an express toll system for the Eastside Corridor. While the majority of attendees were in favor of express toll lanes, many also indicated they would not use the system frequently. Concern for low income populations was also a recurrent theme.

## **Key Themes**

The following section summarizes collective key themes from feedback collected at the 2009 summer festivals. Direct quotes are italicized to highlight the tone of the comments. WSDOT will include these public comments and other input in the final study report to the Legislature in January 2010.

### **Express Toll Lanes on I-405 are a good idea**

The majority of the comments collected at the 2009 summer fairs and festivals expressed support for implementing an express toll lane system on the Eastside Corridor. Improving traffic flow and alleviating congestion were frequently cited as the primary reasons to expand HOT lanes to I-405.

- *“Yes, traffic is already too congested in this area; we need to improve the accessibility.”*
- *“Yes, I'm all for a tolling alternative to help build additional lanes. It would help relieve traffic by giving people an alternative and might convince more people to use mass transit.”*
- *“I think this is an excellent idea that would add reliability to average commute times.”*
- *“I use this corridor to visit customers every day. I lose hours of productive time weekly stuck in the transitions. I would gladly pay money for less time on the roads.”*
- *“Many times the HOV lanes seem very underutilized when they could help to alleviate some congestion in the mainline.”*
- *“I think it's an innovative way to reduce congestion and raise revenue.”*
- *“Yes. Having the option to use carpool lanes would benefit everyone, whether they are in the regular lanes or using the toll option.”*

## Access Points

Attendees frequently criticized the placement and number of access points on the SR 167 HOT Lanes. Safety concerns were frequently cited as a significant issue in relation to access points. Access concerns were especially prominent in communities near the SR 167 corridor.

- *“Make access points bigger. There is not enough time and space to get from the on ramp on the right side, into the HOT lane on 167.”*
- *“I would not mind opening up the carpool lanes to tolls for single drivers, but do not like the HOT lanes where you can only enter and exit at certain points.”*

## Transit/Environmental

Support for mass transit and an overall reduction in the number of vehicles was a recurrent theme at the summer festivals. In general, attendees questioned the environmental benefits of express toll lanes and argued mass transit options should be included or considered as an alternative to express toll lanes.

- *“No, promoting mass transit, fewer car trips, and other alternatives is more important...it’s better for health and environment.”*
- *“No. Too many cars on the road already. This would encourage more people to drive rather than carpool/bus.”*
- *“Toll lanes should be integrated into a light rail system.”*
- *“Put money into rail/light rail/other mass transit options instead”*
- *“Yes, adding new lanes would be nice, but having alternative way of transportation would be even better (light rail, etc)”*
- *“Any infrastructure investment to improve transit options is good.”*

## Fairness

A large percentage of comments indicated concern that express toll lanes will favor affluent populations and not benefit low-income groups.

- *“Letting people pay their way into better/faster lanes favors higher wage earners over lower wage earners who can’t afford to pay and doesn’t help mass transit.”*

- *“Anything to speed up our commute is a plus. However—it does seem to create a driving “class system” where some may not be able to afford the option.”*
- *“These are “Lexus lanes,” designed for the rich while the poor still have to drive in the slow lane.”*
- *“Tolls will benefit the wealthier members of society.”*

### **Toll Revenue**

Public comments reflected overwhelming support for re-investment of toll-generated revenue in the Eastside Corridor.

- *“The revenue could help pay for much needed I-405 improvements.”*
- *“As long as the funds collected are put aside for improvements for the area where collected.”*

### **Time Savings**

When asked how much travel time savings would make it worth it to pay a toll, the majority of the comments indicated 15-20 minutes, while a significant amount said 30 minutes and several said 5-10 minutes.

### **Preserve existing lanes**

A number of comments requested preservation of existing general purpose lanes.

- *“I think it would be a good idea if it does not reduce availability or number of the existing free non-HOV lanes for single drivers.”*
- *“We need more actual lanes, not a relabeling or reallocation of existing lanes.”*