
News Release

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An equity first approach is a necessary foundation for road pricing strategies, study shows

Transportation access poses one of the biggest barriers to closing the equity gap, but Southern California has the opportunity to turn this challenge into an opportunity with a thoughtful and inclusive approach to pricing strategies and other mobility innovations, new research shows.

Mobility Innovations and Pricing (MIP) is SCAG's first study to emerge from the diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives the organization has instituted during the past 18 months. The study relies heavily on input and information gathered during a series of workshops SCAG hosted in partnership with community-based organizations (CBOs) to better understand the barriers faced by underrepresented populations.

"Increasing community participation is crucial to the policymaking process, and this project embodies SCAG's commitment to closing the equity gap. Therefore, underscores our belief that equitable planning requires healthy meaningful feedback from all communities," said Kome Ajise, Executive Director of SCAG.

The MIP study builds on a key congestion reduction, financial, and environmental strategy within SCAG's 2020-2045 Regional Transportation Plan, *Connect SoCal*: The use of road-user pricing to reduce congestion and improve air quality in one of busiest transportation regions in the United States. Previous SCAG studies have shown that the typical Angeleno wastes more than 100 hours per year stuck in traffic.

Under a pricing strategy, drivers pay a fee for the usage of certain roads, in some cases paying a lower rate or avoiding fees altogether based on traffic patterns at the time. Since heavily used transportation corridors are often located near disadvantaged communities, the concept of road pricing can provide benefits to underrepresented populations by reducing congestion and harmful vehicle emissions that come with it. At the same time, without a clear focus on equity, road pricing could put a disproportionate burden on those same populations.

The study highlights CBO led workshops, which resulted in a series of recommendations that can increase equity, including financial relief for drivers who might be disproportionately burdened by road pricing programs and don't have access to other reliable travel options. These could range from discounts or subsidies to exemptions for road users in low-income households. Other options include maximum daily charges for drivers that need to make multiple trips on a priced road each day, credits for those who use transit or other sustainable modes of transportation, and a waiver of fees associated with obtaining transponders or processing payments.

Although infrastructure investments and system improvements funded by revenue reinvestment are also key to mitigating the impact of road pricing on underserved communities and gaining community support, the study's CBO led engagement surfaced the importance of exploring concepts like "community credits," providing transportation credits to low-income households residing within specific communities to use for any mode of transportation. These concepts can potentially contribute to setting the framework for universal basic mobility for the SCAG region.

"While the travel needs for historically underserved communities are diverse, the transportation barriers that marginalized populations face are relatively consistent," the report states. "Transportation systems mirror broader societal inequities that disproportionately burden marginalized groups with the worst public health, personal safety and economic outcomes of our society."

Ajise said the study shows that a pricing strategy, done the right way, can be a tool to meet the needs of underserved communities.

"Input from all communities is critical to any kind of road pricing strategy, to ensure that we're actually enhancing equity and not more barriers or challenges for underserved populations," he said. "Based on what we learned from CBOs, we were able to look at congestion and traffic patterns through the lens of the unique travel needs of these communities – the goal being to design an equitable transportation system that maximizes mobility and environmental benefits in places that need them most."

For more on *Mobility Innovations and Pricing*, visit scag.ca.gov/mobility-innovations-and-pricing.

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About SCAG

SCAG is the nation's largest metropolitan planning organization, representing six counties, 191 cities and more than 19 million residents. SCAG undertakes a variety of planning and policy initiatives to plan for a livable and sustainable Southern California now and in the future. For more information about SCAG's regional efforts, please visit www.scag.ca.gov.