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Symposium on Congestion Pricing Options

This morning we hosted an introductory symposium on Congestion Pricing Options for Los Angeles County. The event drew nearly 100 attendees representing transportation agencies and elected officials offices from the throughout the region.

During the session, staff presented an overview of the concept of congestion pricing, examples of successful implementation in the United States and abroad, and initiatives being considered for LA County as directed by the Board. In addition, staff described the critical importance of establishing a communicative and collaborative partnership with meeting attendees as we move forward with the proposed initiatives.

These presentations were followed by a robust Question & Answer session with a panel that included members from Caltrans and SCAG. Discussion items included a broad range of topics, such as the specifics of the experiences of London and San Diego, the level of environmental and business community support for congestion pricing and the criteria for selecting the high occupancy toll (HOT) lane projects. Other topics included the process for assessing congestion pricing charges, potential alternatives to increase roadway capacity and how to address equity issues and use of revenues.

The symposium acknowledged the importance of these topics and emphasized the need to provide commuters with more reliable travel choices. The topics that were discussed at the symposium are among the many others that will be addressed in detail in the Congestion Pricing Operating Plan for Los Angeles County that will be developed by a team of consultants during the next 12 months, pending Board approval during the April 24, 2008 meeting. This operating plan will recommend at least three congestion pricing alternatives that could be implemented in the County by 2010 and will include a concurrent, integrated extensive public education and outreach program.

May Day Marches

There are two May Day marches for the Civic Center area scheduled to arrive from various directions on Thursday, May 1, 2008. Staff anticipates that there will be major service disruptions due to the street closures planned for that day. Early estimates anticipate 20,000 – 30,000 people will participate in the marches. The LA Department of Transportation has contingency plans for expanded closures if crowd size is greater than expected. Bus Operations Control will be working on the detour notices and notifications will be sent out as soon as they are finalized.

Media Inquiry into Public Transit Wi-Fi Technology

The Daily News is preparing a story on the use of Wi-Fi around the nation and particularly on public transit. The reporter was told that we are taking a wait-and-see position because of the rapid change of wireless technology, and the competitive environment of providers offering cable, DSL, wireless, cellular and satellite - and current Wi-Fi demand falling well below promised expectations.

The reporter was told that in 2006, we did send out a Request for Proposals to Wi-Fi the Metro Orange Line to companies willing to install, operate and maintain the system at little or not cost to us. No companies were interested at that time, citing ridership, demographic and length of trip as a concern. The reporter also was told that as for Wi-Fi, experience with the use of municipal systems has not come close to projections for 15-30 percent usage. Instead, it is about one to two percent. Use on transit systems shows that only longer trips (80-plus minutes) have garnered customer demand.

Staff believes that our customers are better served by taking advantage of existing satellite wireless providers, who are better equipped to provide more reliable service over greater distances and at more competitive prices. Staff will continue to track the progression of this technology in the event this concept becomes more feasible in the future.

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