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SEATTLE CONGESTION PRICING STUDY PHASE 1

Engagement and Communications Best Practices White Paper

May 2019



SEATTLE CONGESTION PRICING STUDY PHASE 1 | ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATIONS BEST PRACTICES WHITE PAPER

Prepared for the Seattle Department of Transportation

Lead author:



In cooperation with:



Daniel Firth

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Table of Contents

	Page
Introduction.....	3
Summary of Congestion Pricing in Other Cities	4
Overview of Best Practices in Public Engagement and Communications	5
Approach to Communications	10
Next Steps for Seattle	15

Table of Figures

	Page
Figure 1 Congestion Pricing Peers	4
Figure 2 Gestation Process for Road Pricing (reproduced from Goodwin, 2006)	5
Figure 3 IAP2 Spectrum of Participation (International Association for Public Participation, 2004)	6
Figure 4 Vancouver Mobility Pricing Goals.....	7
Figure 5 MoveNY Queens Benefits Factsheet	8
Figure 6 “It’s Time” Metro Vancouver Instagram Posts.....	9
Figure 7 Stages in Policy Development	10
Figure 8 Communications and Messaging Milestones in Policy Development.....	10
Figure 9 Communications and Messaging Milestones: Exploration.....	11
Figure 10 Communications and Messaging Milestones: Program Development.....	13
Figure 11 Communications and Messaging Milestones: Approval Process and Implementation.....	14

SEATTLE CONGESTION PRICING STUDY PHASE 1 | ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATIONS BEST PRACTICES WHITE PAPER

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INTRODUCTION

The City of Seattle is exploring congestion pricing as a way to address traffic congestion, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and create a more equitable transportation system.

Congestion pricing is based on the idea that traffic congestion comes with high costs to society and to individuals in the form of air and climate pollution, traffic collisions, and slower commutes for everyone. When tolls are charged—especially when based on demand so that the more congested a road becomes, the higher the fee to use it—some people make changes to some of their trips. To avoid tolls, they may choose to drive during off-peak times, shift to carpools or transit, or combine trips.

This paper provides context for the City of Seattle as it begins exploring congestion pricing options, including lessons learned from other cities around the world and best practices in public engagement. It includes the following sections:

- Summary of congestion pricing in other cities
- Overview of best practices in public engagement and communications
- Possible approach to engagement and communications for congestion pricing in Seattle
- Potential next steps

Because communications and messaging is deeply connected to social, cultural, economic, and political contexts, best practices and lessons learned from other cities should be considered illustrative but not definitive.

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SUMMARY OF CONGESTION PRICING IN OTHER CITIES

Congestion pricing has been studied, proposed, or implemented in cities across the globe. Select cities referenced in this paper are included in the table below.

Figure 1 Congestion Pricing Peers

City	Name	Description and Notes
Singapore	Electronic Road Pricing (implemented)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cordon pricing implemented in 1998 Congestion pricing has been a major component of traffic management and emissions reduction plans since 1975
London	Central London Congestion Charge (implemented)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Area pricing implemented in 2003 Prior to adoption, funding for public transport was unreliable and congestion levels in central London were extremely high
Stockholm	Congestion Tax (implemented); called “Environmental Charges” during pilot period only	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cordon pricing approach; policy had been considered for 30 years prior to pilot Six-month pilot began in 2006 and was made permanent in 2007 following a referendum
Vancouver	Mobility Pricing (proposed); also referred to as “Decongestion Pricing”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Two concepts are under consideration: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Regional congestion point charge with charge points at or near some—or all—regionally important crossings, complemented by further point charges at locations within the Burrard Peninsula Varying distance-based charges throughout Metro Vancouver Independent Commission gathered and incorporated feedback independently of government decision-making agencies to inform recommendations Preliminary recommendations provided by the Mobility Pricing Independent Commission in May 2018
New York City	Congestion Pricing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New York was the first U.S. city to propose charging all motorists for driving in its congested core Fix NYC’s plan proposed a phased approach: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Phase One: Investing in transit connections between the central business district (CBD) and outer boroughs and suburbs; Phase Two: Placing a surcharge on taxi and for-hire vehicle trips in the CBD; and Phase Three: Implementing a zone pricing program for trucks followed by all vehicles entering Manhattan’s CBD below 60th Street.

OVERVIEW OF BEST PRACTICES IN PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATIONS

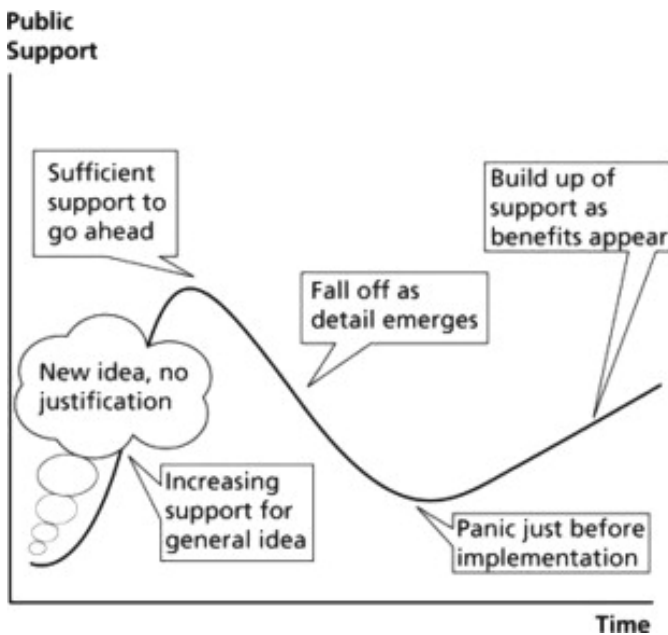
Public Perception of Congestion Pricing

Stockholm, London, and Singapore have all successfully implemented congestion pricing programs. While each city has unique engagement challenges, Stockholm’s implementation demonstrated that once the idea of congestion pricing was introduced, explained, and tested (through a limited trial period), nearly two-thirds of the population supported it.

Once a detailed proposal is established—but before full implementation—public support is usually low. There may be several reasons for this. For example, the disadvantages of pricing may suddenly become more evident than the potential advantages, or fears may develop that the technical system will be overly expensive or fail to work. Figure 2 illustrates the curve of public support for road pricing, inspired by a similar experience of public perception during London’s congestion pricing implementation.

Once a system is in place, public support generally increases. There are two possible explanations for this: (1) the system works and people are happy with the benefits, or (2) their initial fears are not realized. This is often described as “familiarity breeds acceptability.”¹

Figure 2 Gestation Process for Road Pricing (reproduced from Goodwin, 2006)



¹ Centre for Transport Studies: Stockholm. 2014. The Stockholm congestion charges: an overview. <<http://www.transportportal.se/swopec/cts2014-7.pdf>>

Levels of Engagement

In any public process, there is a spectrum of opportunities to engage core audiences and use their input to shape the overall outcome of a proposed policy. Figure 3 illustrates these levels of engagement as described by the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2).

At the outset of any policy that has a public impact or benefit, policy developers should outline the key opportunities for engagement throughout the process and articulate how those opportunities can influence the process.

Figure 3 IAP2 Spectrum of Participation (International Association for Public Participation, 2004)

		INCREASING IMPACT ON THE DECISION				
		INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOAL		To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision making in the hands of the public.
	PROMISE TO THE PUBLIC	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision. We will seek your feedback on drafts and proposals.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work together with you to formulate solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.

Communications Themes

Based on best practices in public involvement and communications and an understanding of the ebb and flow of public understanding, the following communications themes should be applied in developing a congestion pricing policy.

Goal- and Solution-Driven Messaging

In developing communications that are both goal and solution-driven, agencies should:

- Identify a focused set of goals that a congestion pricing program will achieve (i.e., what is the problem pricing will solve) and use these goals as the messaging focus throughout exploration, policy-making, and implementation; and
- Ensure that key messages are developed with transparency to foster trust and encourage public engagement.

Congestion pricing programs are most often motivated by the goal to reduce traffic congestion in a central business district. In some cities, this message is framed around improving air quality and reducing GHG emissions. Often, pricing programs are communicated as a response to the

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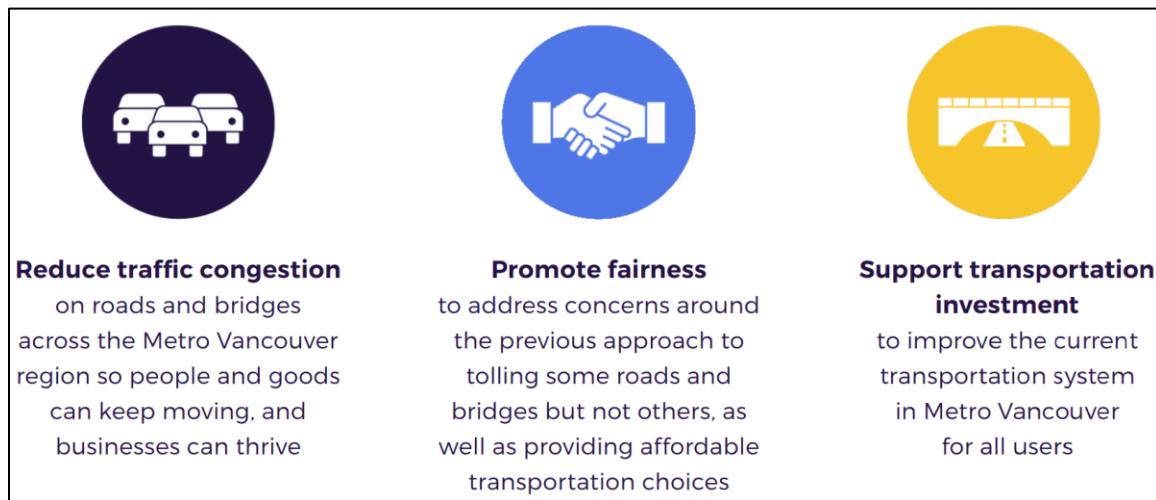
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problem of congested roadways and increased travel times. Singapore, London, and Stockholm all successfully implemented congestion pricing with the explicit goal of traffic management.

Stockholm and London both established clear communications around goals and objectives early in their processes. Though public support varied throughout the program development phase, high-level communications around specific goals was consistent, and in Stockholm, public support ultimately skyrocketed after implementation of a pilot program.

Vancouver, BC is considering pricing options and used the messages and graphic shown in Figure 4 to clearly and concisely articulate its goals. Note that these messages were focused on how mobility pricing (Vancouver's nomenclature) is solution-oriented.

Figure 4 Vancouver Mobility Pricing Goals



Understanding Audiences and Stakeholders

As a core principle of developing any communications or engagement plan, understanding audiences and stakeholders is critically important in the early phases. Shortly after developing strong goals and messages, agencies should:

- Engage a variety of audiences early and regularly, especially potential supporters and skeptics and populations that may be adversely affected (or have a perception of adverse effect) by a proposed policy;
- Develop partnerships with organizations that reach a variety of stakeholder groups;
- Conduct outreach to different geographies, especially outside the urban core; and
- Develop and grow awareness of the program with trusted spokespeople and thought leaders from a variety of organizations and perspectives.

Equity is an important component of exploring congestion pricing proposals and how potential policies are developed and communicated. Vancouver incorporated equity metrics in their mobility pricing proposal, noting that discussions of equity demanded they start with clear objectives and specific strategies for how pricing-generated revenue would be used.²

² City of Vancouver. August 2018. Workshop presentation.

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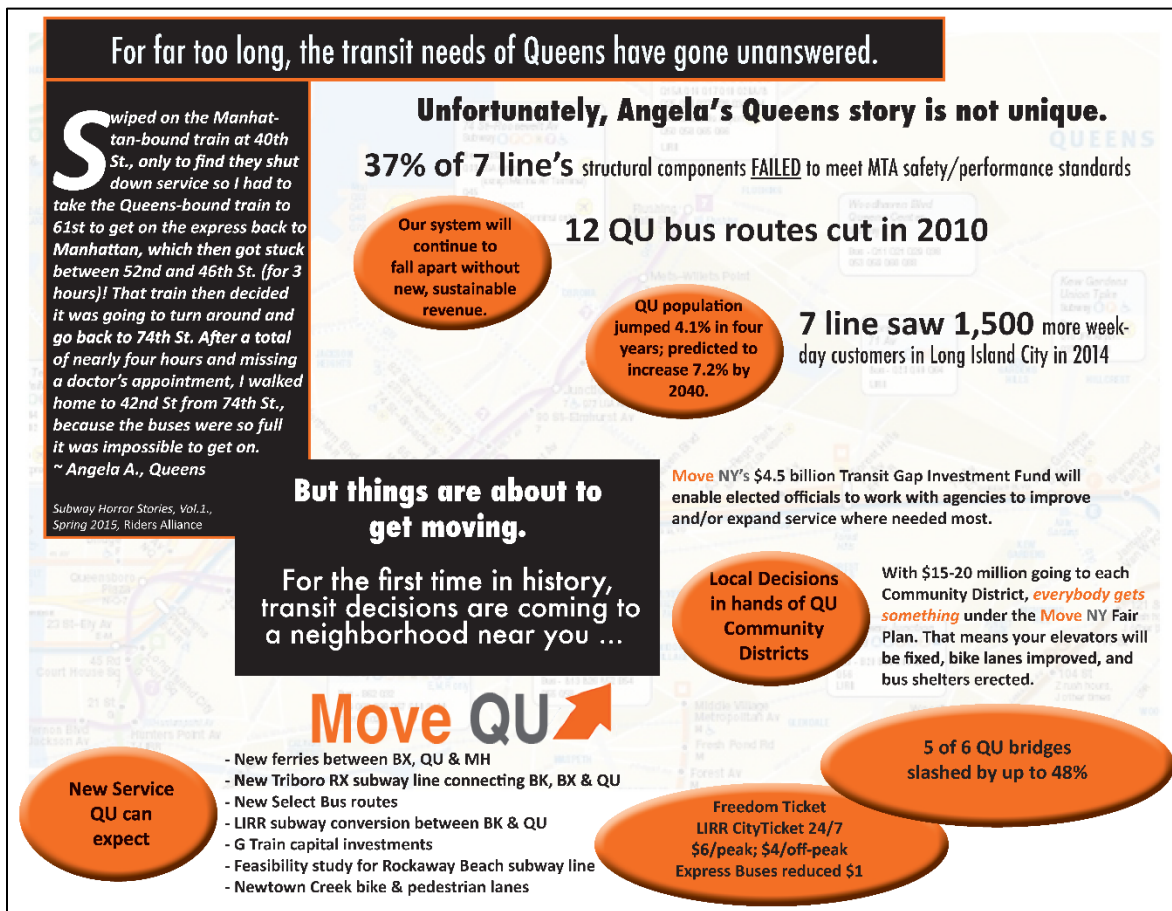
Ensuring engagement with all audiences—especially potentially disproportionately affected audiences—means that any public engagement approach must lead with equity. (See the Draft Pricing and Equity White Paper for specific recommendations about equitable engagement.)

Engagement with different market segments should seek and incorporate feedback—especially issues and concerns—from many stakeholder groups. One possible process suggests that the lead agency should:

- Anticipate the issues and concerns of different groups;
- Meet with stakeholder groups proactively to gather and incorporate direct feedback, and actively seek out and engage skeptics and critics;
- Address issues and concerns in developing a potential congestion pricing policy;
- Communicate how feedback from stakeholders is incorporated.

Tailored communications materials should focus on demonstrating an understanding of each group’s concerns, what options they have, and how they will experience potential benefits. Figure 5 shows pro-pricing advocacy group MoveNY’s fact sheet, which lists benefits that the outer borough of Queens could expect from a congestion pricing program.

Figure 5 MoveNY Queens Benefits Factsheet



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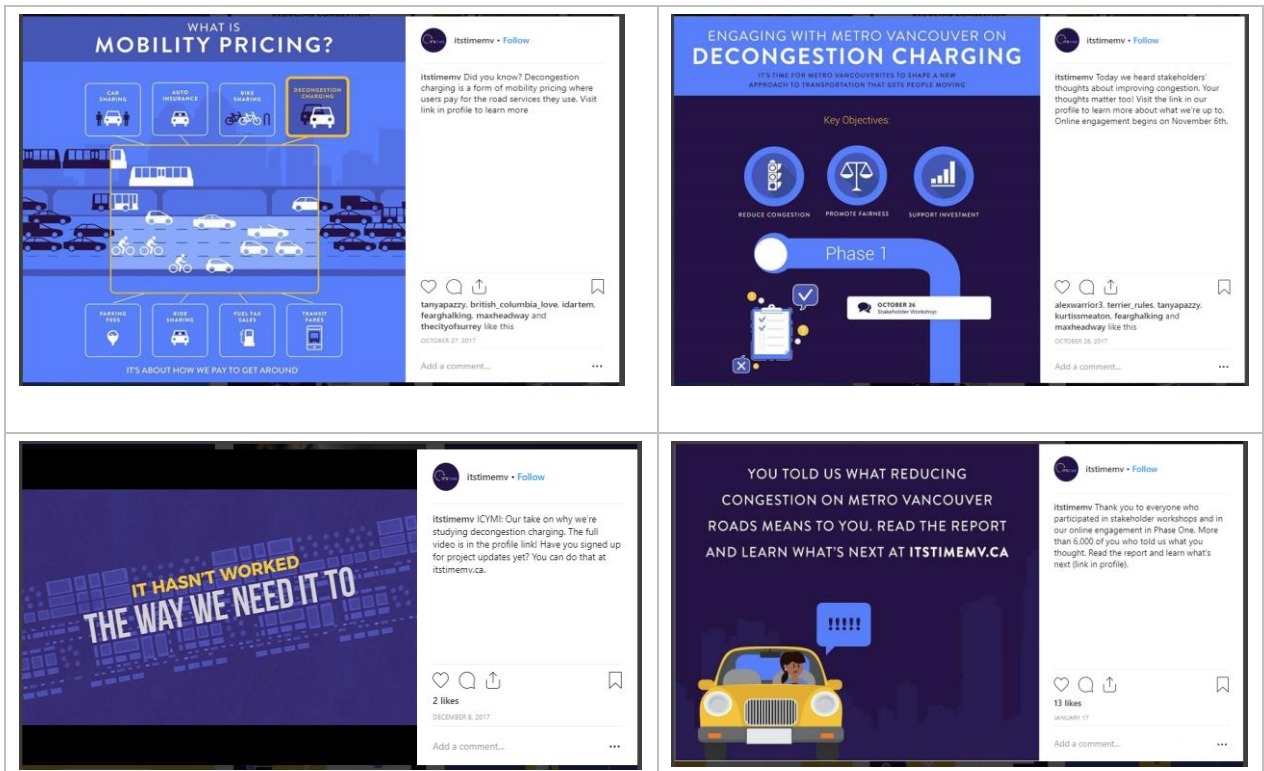
Clear Communications and Materials

Following development of clear goals, consistent messaging, and an understanding of audiences and stakeholders, the next step in effective communications is to develop collateral that supports the goals and messaging, is tailored to specific audiences, and reflects the stage of policy development. This information should respond to the needs of key audiences and be developed in easy-to-understand language and formats that clearly articulate core messages. Principles for effective communications materials include:

- Ensure communications and materials use consistent, top-line messages throughout the life of the project;
- Use traditional media sources (e.g., television, radio, newspapers) to reach the broader public to tell the story and illustrate the purpose and need of a potential policy;
- Leverage social media, including through project partners, to seek input and feedback and to grow awareness among broad segments of the population.

Tools and media to reach people are constantly and rapidly changing; therefore, the tools and strategies to deliver information will continue to evolve. In Vancouver’s recent mobility pricing engagement process, social media and online platforms were used to gather feedback, as well as traditional public engagement methods including in-person open houses and workshops. Below are some examples of the types of visual messages and graphics included in Vancouver’s “It’s Time” campaign (implemented by Vancouver’s Independent Mobility Pricing Commission) posted to the social media site Instagram.

Figure 6 “It’s Time” Metro Vancouver Instagram Posts



APPROACH TO COMMUNICATIONS

Communications should evolve throughout the development of a congestion pricing policy. Figure 7 shows the policy development process, from the problem definition and exploration stage through the implementation stage. Figure 8 illustrates the parallel processes specific to communications. As mentioned above, the problem statement or goals for congestion pricing should remain consistent throughout the development of the policy, while communications and engagement strategies should evolve and build upon previous stages. The following sections outline effective communication and stakeholder engagement steps for each stage of policy development.

Figure 7 Stages in Policy Development

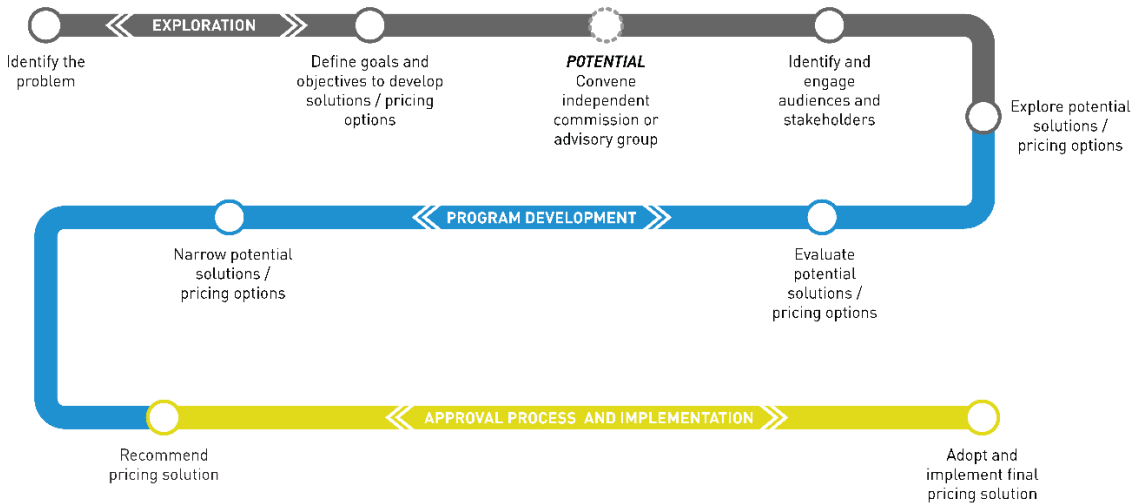
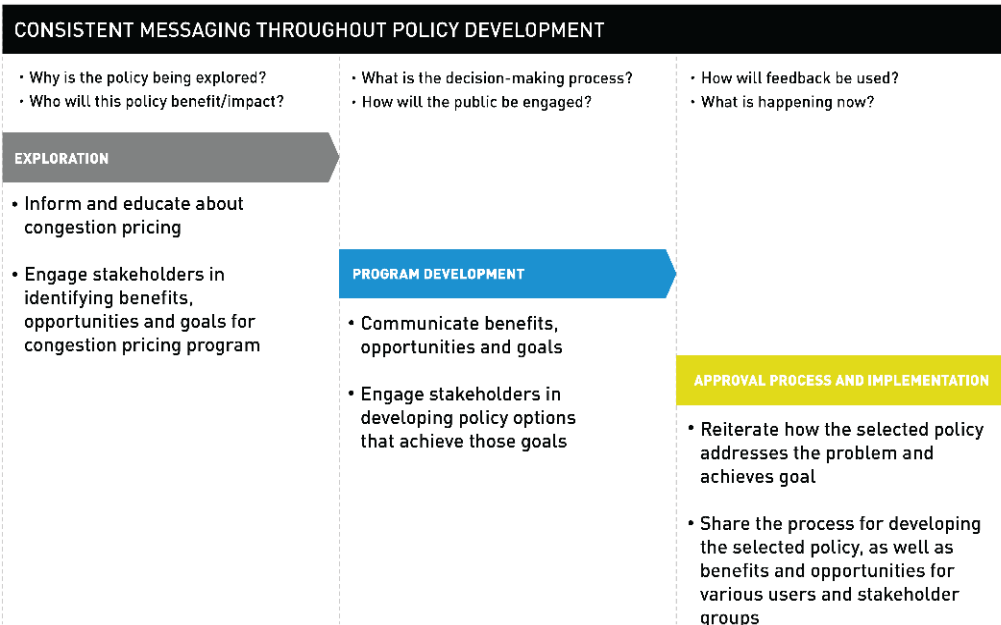


Figure 8 Communications and Messaging Milestones in Policy Development



Stage 1: Exploration

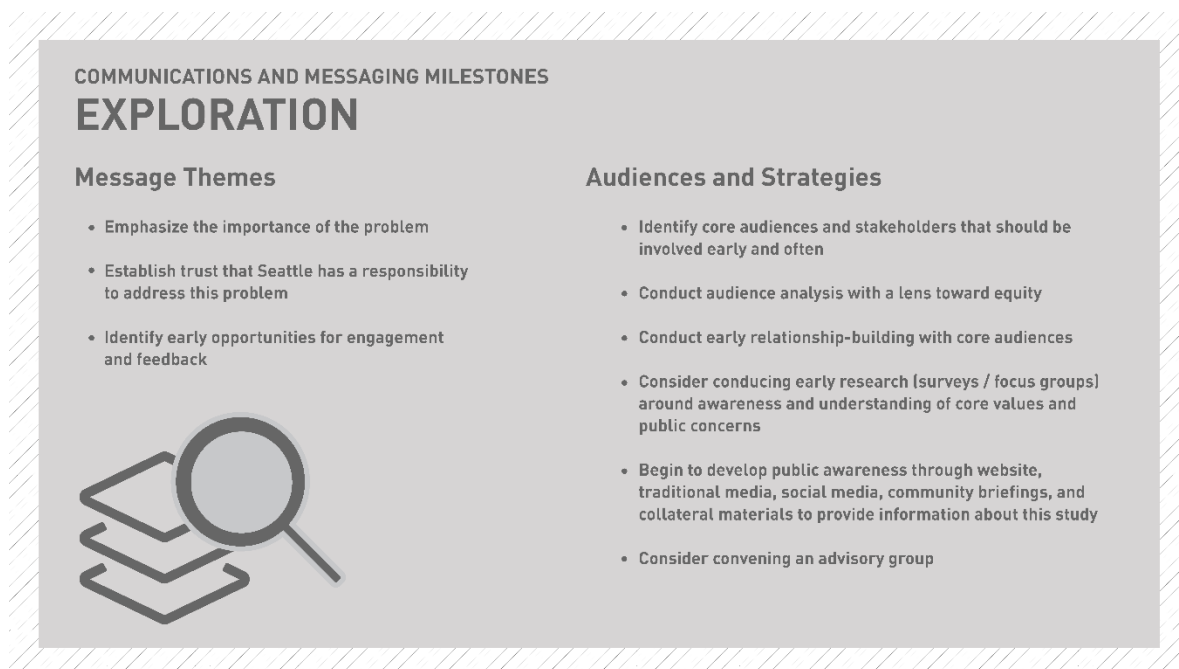
The exploration stage of policy development includes the following steps:

- Identify the problem
- Define the goals and objectives in order to find potential solutions to the problem
- Establish criteria—tied to the program goals and objectives—to evaluate the solutions
- Present an initial set of policy options for consideration

During this stage, core audiences and stakeholder groups should be identified and engaged in defining the goals and objectives. Because the goals and objectives will inform the criteria by which to evaluate potential pricing options, a range of stakeholders should be engaged and broad public feedback should be sought and incorporated. People should understand how they are being engaged and their opportunities for informing the policy options in order to build trust and allow for productive stakeholder and public engagement at later stages of the process.

Figure 9 summarizes the key themes and communications strategies appropriate for the exploration stage.

Figure 9 Communications and Messaging Milestones: Exploration



LESSONS LEARNED: EXPLORATION STAGE ENGAGEMENT

New York’s Stakeholder Skepticism and Limited Early Engagement to Outer Boroughs

New York City’s initial pricing proposal was viewed as a tax, with no clear communication of specific benefits for different stakeholder groups.³ Skeptics and stakeholders in outer, more auto-oriented boroughs were not engaged early in the process—many in these areas believed they would bear a disproportionate financial burden, relative to Manhattanites south of 86th Street. There was also little trust that revenue generated would be used to fund transportation improvements.

Sam Schwartz has stressed that engagement of the outer boroughs and known skeptics was especially important in the development of the MoveNY pricing program. The outer boroughs were strongly opposed to the initial proposal, but incorporating their concerns eventually led to a more equitable policy and the ability to help people understand “what’s in it for them.”

Edinburgh’s Mixed Messages and Weak Consensus about Congestion as a Problem

In Edinburgh, Scotland, there was only weak consensus that congestion was a big and present issue. Public messaging focused on congestion as a future problem. Edinburgh communicated a very large number of goals and objectives for implementing a congestion pricing plan, which confused the public. The city’s congestion pricing plan ultimately lost public support.

Stage 2: Program Development

During the program development stage, potential options identified during exploration will be more fully evaluated and public feedback will be sought and incorporated. The following steps should occur at this stage of the process:

- Consider establishing an advisory group or similar body to provide input for this and future stages
- Evaluate solutions developed during the exploration stage
- Seek public feedback on those solutions and the evaluation
- Develop recommendations to final decision-makers

Figure 10 summarizes the key themes and communications strategies appropriate for the program development stage.

³ Sam Schwartz. August 2018. Workshop presentation.

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Figure 10 Communications and Messaging Milestones: Program Development



LESSONS LEARNED: PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT STAGE

Vancouver's Independent Mobility Pricing Commission

Vancouver established a fully independent Mobility Pricing Commission to explore the pros and cons of congestion pricing (known as mobility pricing or decongestion pricing in Vancouver), to gather feedback and public input, and to provide recommendations to Vancouver's policy-making bodies. Vancouver's engagement program was inclusive but executed on a tight timeline, which made educating the public and stakeholders on the purpose and principles behind congestion pricing and its associated terms somewhat challenging. Ideas such as "mobility pricing" (how we pay for all mobility) and "decongestion charging" (paying for road use to manage congestion) were new to most people. Although it had many strengths, the independent commission's separation from local and regional transportation agencies made it difficult to describe congestion pricing in the context of other transportation measures and improvements.

Washington Road Usage Charge Pilot Project

After over 10 years of policy exploration and examination, the Washington State Transportation Commission is currently conducting a pilot test of a potential statewide road usage charge to evaluate whether such a charge is a viable replacement for the state's gas tax. This pilot was launched during the program development stage and will inform state legislators during the implementation phase. While the pilot is still underway and final conclusions are not yet available, over 5,000 drivers across the state expressed interest in being part of the 2,000 driver participant pool, a much higher degree of interest than anticipated. This is an example of a highly participatory process that provides an opportunity for deep engagement and feedback in the development of a complex and controversial potential policy.

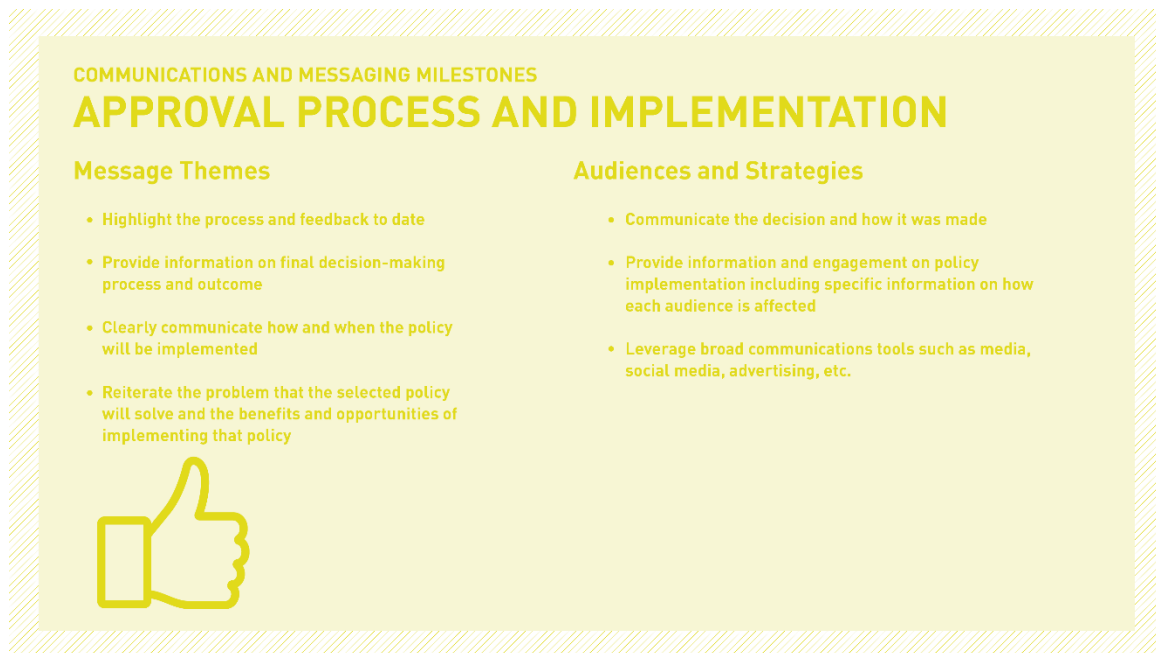
Stage 3: Approval Process and Implementation

The approval process and implementation stage would include a recommendation, potentially from an independent commission or other advisory body, and selection of a pricing strategy for adoption and implementation by the decision-making authority (in this case, the City of Seattle). Implementing congestion pricing in Seattle would require approval by a majority of Seattle voters, and there may be a role for the Washington State Transportation Commission in setting rates.

Once a system is implemented, travelers (not limited to drivers) need a strong understanding of how the system works, how much they are charged, and how to access other transportation options.

Figure 11 summarizes the key themes and communications strategies appropriate for the approval process and implementation stage.

Figure 11 Communications and Messaging Milestones: Approval Process and Implementation



LESSONS LEARNED: APPROVAL PROCESS AND IMPLEMENTATION STAGE

London's Congestion Charge

London's Congestion Charge Zone (CCZ) was implemented and operational in early 2003. Although at times still controversial, it remains in place 15 years later and has significantly reduced congestion in central London. In 2007, Ken Livingstone, who was the mayor of London and champion of the CCZ, provided insights on why London's congestion charge was so successful. Livingstone cites five key factors, four of which include core principles of communications, messaging, and stakeholder engagement:

"Overall, the scheme is a success and has worked better than I hoped, with far fewer teething problems than I expected. Yet congestion charging has always been a controversial policy, and others thought it too risky to undertake. In order to implement the scheme it was necessary to:

1. Build and maintain sufficient public and stakeholder support for the scheme during its development and introduction;

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2. Conduct meaningful consultations with a readiness to make changes to the scheme;
3. Provide additional public transport services to enable motorists wishing to switch to alternative choice of transport;
4. Provide widespread public information and specific traffic management measures on the inner ring road and also outside the zone to minimize potential problems at the scheme launch which could have undermined its credibility; and
5. Deliver the scheme quickly so that its benefits could accrue to London as soon as possible. The inevitable disruptions associated with implementation were offset by experience of benefits after implementation during my first term, giving Londoners the opportunity to express their views on the congestion charge at the ballot box.”⁴

Stockholm’s Pilot Introduction Leading to Implementation

Stockholm was successful in implementing a congestion pricing system by first implementing a pilot program. Prior to the pilot, public acceptance was very low. Through that pilot, stakeholders and the public experienced congestion pricing first hand, saw its value, and began to accept the system. Although often effective, a pilot project can be an expensive and high-risk strategy—pilots can have high associated costs, and public buy-in can falter with negative experiences during a pilot and/or the perception that their feedback has not been incorporated or reflected.

NEXT STEPS FOR SEATTLE

This white paper presents a snapshot of best practices and lessons learned from a select group of cities that have explored or implemented a congestion pricing policy. This paper is not a comprehensive summary of the pros and cons of such policies as they relate to communications and engagement, but offers considerations for the City of Seattle.

Suggested next steps for the City of Seattle are the following:

- **Define the key purpose and goals for congesting pricing and form an engagement and communications strategy around them.** This should be done as early as possible in the process, even if the full pricing strategy and policy is not yet developed. The purpose and goals form the foundation of long-term and consistent messaging used throughout program development.
- **Lead development of a full public engagement and communications strategy with equity.** In developing goals and messages and identifying audiences, core questions about equitable engagement must be asked, answered, and incorporated into plans and strategies (see Pricing and Equity White Paper for details and core questions to answer).
- **Situate congestion pricing discussions in the larger transportation context, including citywide transit investments, improved travel alternatives, and a commitment to moving people, goods, and services as efficiently as possible.** This is a critical communications element, as it relates to creating an equitable system. *Seattle Transit Blog* has already written, “Without better transit, the congestion charge begins to look less like an attempt to help everyone get around faster, and more like a

⁴ Livingstone, Ken. 2004. *Journal of Planning Theory and Practice*. The challenge of driving through change: Introducing congestion charging in central London.

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device to reserve street space for the wealthiest drivers.”⁵ If implemented in Seattle, pricing would be only one part of an overall strategy—and it may be the part that makes other mobility improvements possible.

- **Early and regular engagement of stakeholders.** As early as possible in any policy exploration and development process, the City must fully understand who the stakeholders and audiences are, what their concerns might be, and how to engage these groups in meaningful ways. As New York City learned, lack of early engagement of the outer boroughs fostered mistrust. London, on the other hand, found that early and honest engagement of key stakeholders was critical to the success of the Congestion Charge Zone.
- **Ensure authentic opportunities for feedback, and demonstrate how feedback is incorporated.** Development of any policy should include opportunities for feedback and input, and the communications and engagement strategy should articulate how that input will be used to shape a potential system. Public input must be reflected in the system design to demonstrate a commitment to listening and valuing feedback. The City should consider leading a regional values conversation as a way to guide the study and establish program priorities. This would also help the City of Seattle develop terminology and communications tools that reflect local values and concerns. A review of international road pricing approaches and technologies by D’Artagnan Consulting and the New Zealand Ministry of Transport supports this approach, noting that “a high-stakes policy like congestion pricing requires deep understanding of local geography and responsiveness to local conditions and concerns.”
- **Explore the possibility of establishing an advisory group to evaluate potential policy options.** In Vancouver, an independent commission was established to further explore policy options, seek and incorporate public feedback, and provide recommendations to the Mayors Council and TransLink Board of Directors. Fully independent commissions are not often used in the Puget Sound region, but advisory groups are frequently formed to help guide policy development for complex projects. If an independent commission or advisory group is established, it will be important to consider:
 - **Equity** – Ensure broad representation of stakeholders and audiences potentially impacted or benefitted
 - **Mission** – Ensure the group has an understanding of their mission and charge, and that the public also understands the role of the group
 - **Decision-making or recommendation authority** – Ensure that the group and external stakeholders fully understand and respect the recommendations or decisions made by the group to maintain trust in the policy-making process
- **Be prepared for support to decline as implementation approaches.** Plan the timing of implementation carefully to coordinate with transit service improvements and other projects or programs that improve transportation access.

⁵ Lawson, David. August 14, 2018. *Seattle Transit Blog*. Hearing about congestion pricing? Ask about transit investment. <<https://seattletransitblog.com/2018/08/14/hearing-congestion-pricing-ask-transit-investment>>

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