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5 things to know as Portland-area freeway tolling plan moves forward

By Andrew Thenen | The Oregonian/OregonLive | Posted June 26, 2018 at 05:00 AM | Updated June 26, 2018 at 10:30 AM

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Andrew Thenen/Staff

Oregon should further study how to charge drivers who use congested stretches of **[Interstate 5 and 205 in the metro area](#)**, a state committee said Monday. But the region's tolling future will likely go far beyond those two bottlenecks.

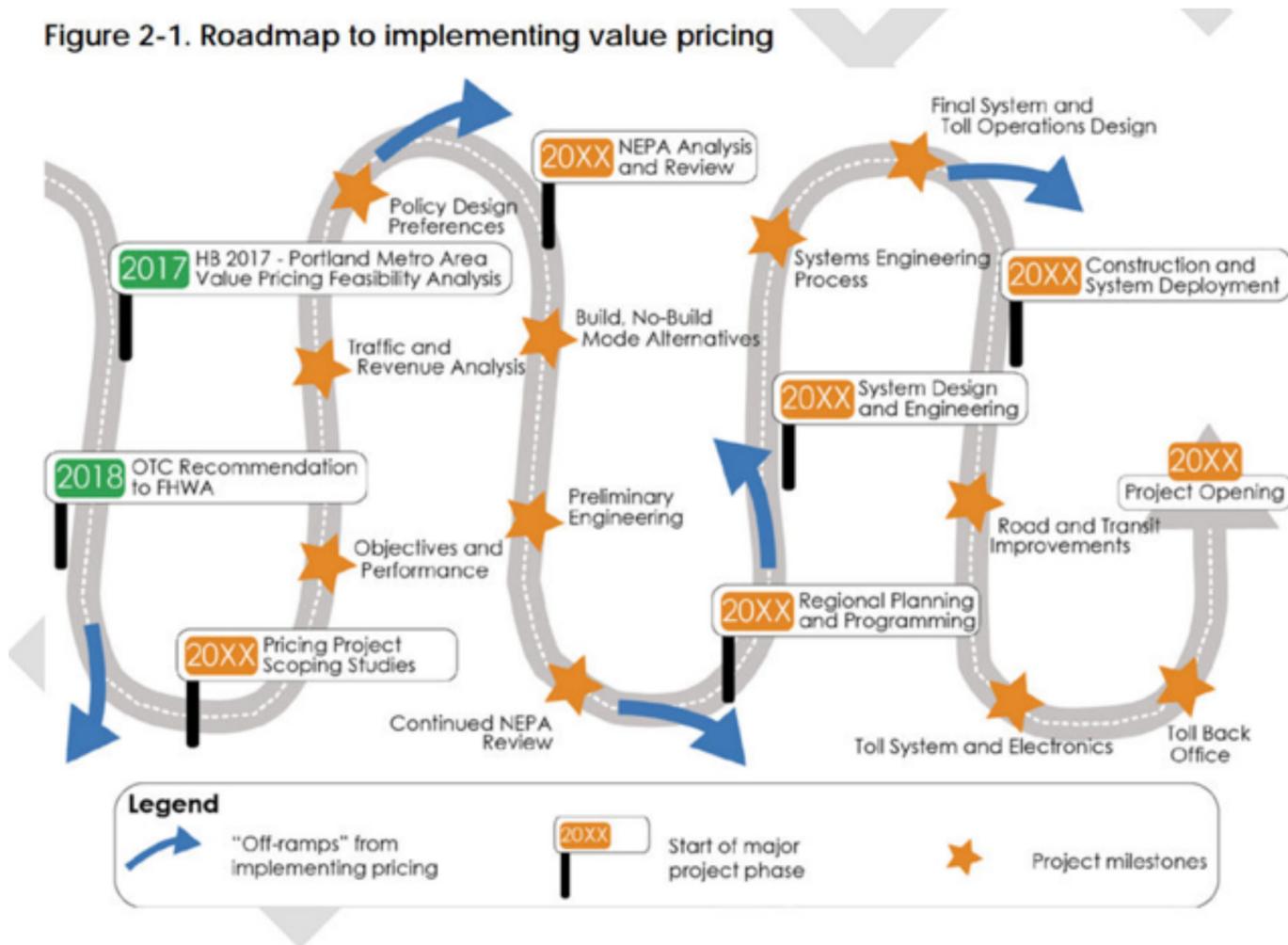
That was one of the main takeaways from the final meeting of a **[committee tasked with offering recommendations](#)** for how to toll the metro area's busiest highways. The \$5.3 billion statewide transportation package approved in 2017 set the road fee plan in motion. The committee of government, industry and transit-related stakeholders met six times since November.



The Oregonian/File

Now, the Portland area's tolling future rests in the lap of the state's transportation commission, which must send a formal proposal to federal highway officials by the end of the year.

Figure 2-1. Roadmap to implementing value pricing



This ODOT map shows the meandering road that could -- or could not -- lead to tolling on area highways

"I think we have more than enough to chew on," Alando Simpson, one of two state transportation commissioners who sat on the committee, said at the end of the meeting.

Commissioners will hold a public meeting July 12 in Portland.

Tolls are likely years away, perhaps as far as a decade from now.

But a key first step is in the rearview mirror. Sean O'Hollaren, the other transportation commissioner involved in the tolling legwork, hinted larger conversations remain.

"We have to build capacity," he said during closing comments. That may mean new highways, new transit options, and outside-the-box thinking.

Everyone, including Clark County commuters, will have to pay their share.

"Transportation is not an entitlement," he said, "It costs money."

Here are some of the key issues:



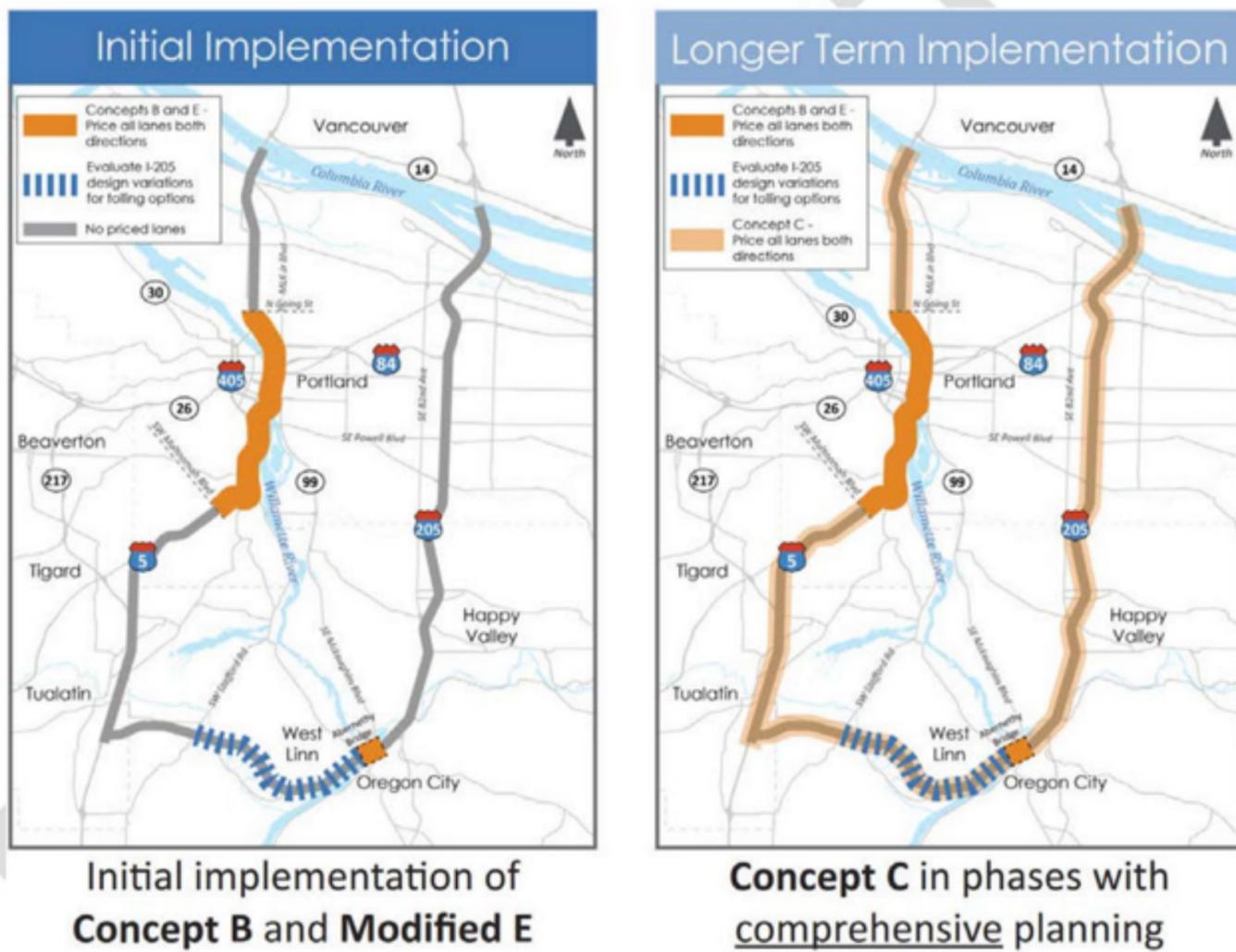
The norm on I-5 in Portland during rush hour commutes (The Oregonian/File)

WHAT TO DO ABOUT DIVERSION -- Several members of the advisory group expressed concern about toll-averse drivers ditching the freeway to save some cash. That type of diversion is already happening on local streets in Clackamas County as drivers turn to Waze or adjacent streets for alternatives around congested highways. Some fear that problem will be exacerbated in North Portland if tolls don't extend all the way to the Interstate Bridge.

The initial recommendation from state officials included studying tolls between the Alberta/Going exit on the north side and the Multnomah Boulevard exit to the south. Chris Trejbal, an Overlook Neighborhood Association representative, testified before the committee Monday and said the concerns were real. He is not opposed to tolls.

"What we are opposed to is creating a system that will encourage people to divert into Overlook and North Portland," he said. Those concerns seemed to register. The advisory group said Monday that more wiggle room is needed on where tolling boundaries on I-5 should start.

Figure 2-2. DRAFT PAC recommendation to the OTC



BOTH HIGHWAYS TOLLED -- While the state commission could decide to make wholesale changes, it appears Oregon will at the very least move forward with a phased-in approach to study tolls on Interstate 5 through the Rose Quarter and a stretch of I-205 in and around the Abernethy Bridge, which spans the Willamette River between Oregon City and West Linn. The advisory committee overwhelmingly supported a plan to pursue that option. Committee members, including freight interests like Jana Jarvis with the Oregon Trucking Association, backed the plan to study those two projects concurrently.

"Our sense is you need to do both in order to understand the traffic flow," Jarvis said of adding tolls on I-5 and I-205. The long-term plan would include potential tolls on the entirety of I-5 and I-205 in the metro area, stretching south to Wilsonville.

Some of the committee members pushed to move forward with tolls on the entirety of both highways from the beginning. TriMet and the city of Portland's representatives on the committee backed that plan. Its support was split, however, with half of the 18 committee members present opposing it.

FUTURE TOLLS -- The advisory group said it supported further analysis of tolling I-84, I-405, Oregon 217, and U.S. 26. The vast majority of committee members either supported that plan or said they would accept it.

TRANSIT REQUIRED -- Committee members said transit improvements must be made to give residents of Clackamas County, in particular, options to avoid paying a toll if they choose to stay off the highways. Paul Savas, a Clackamas County commissioner, said it was an "imperative" that transit options be in place along the 14-mile stretch of I-205 before tolls arrive.

The tolling plan must also investigate how to limit the financial blow for low-income folks in the area, but what that may look like is unclear. The congestion pricing plan is expected to be variable, meaning it would incorporate higher or lower tolls on drivers depending on how congested the highway is at a given time.

The ferry Kalakala is pushed by a tugboat past the raised 11th Street bridge on the Hylebos Waterway, early Thursday morning, Jan. 22, 2015, in Tacoma, Wash. The ferry was towed two miles from the Hylebos Waterway, where it has been moored for a decade, to the graving dock on the Blair Waterway where it will be scrapped. The sleek, silver ferry was the symbol of Seattle in the days before the Space Needle. (AP Photo/The News Tribune, Peter Haley)

ADDING CAPACITY -- The state must develop a plan for future highway and public transportation capacity increases, the committee said. The Portland area is expected to add nearly half a million people by 2035. O'Hollaren, the state transportation commissioner, said the new capacity could be ways to connect U.S. 26 to U.S. 30 and North Portland. Future capacity increases may include ways to better use the area's rivers.

"Maybe ferries can come back," he said. "We really need to look at all of it."

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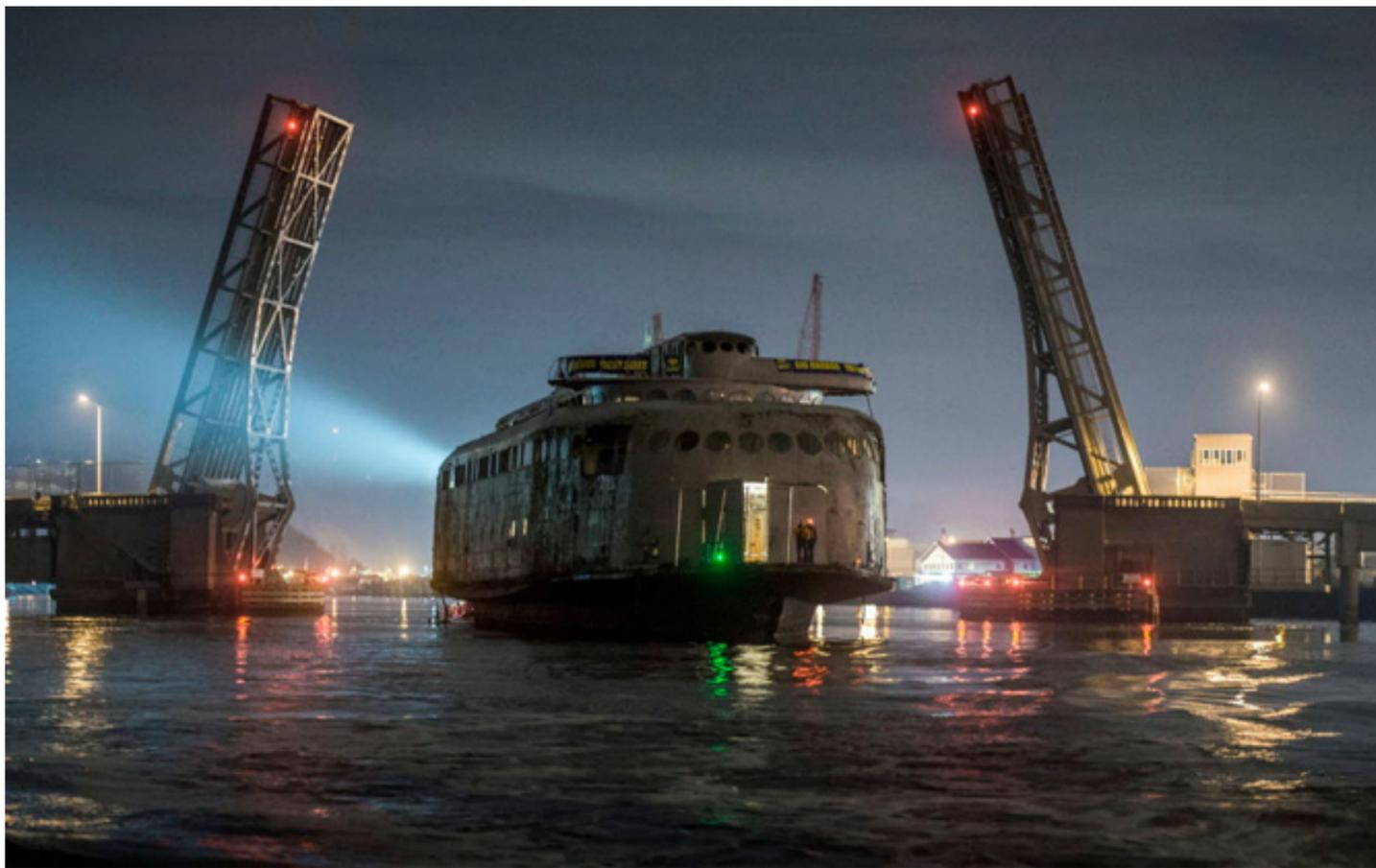


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