Puget Sound Traffic Choices Study

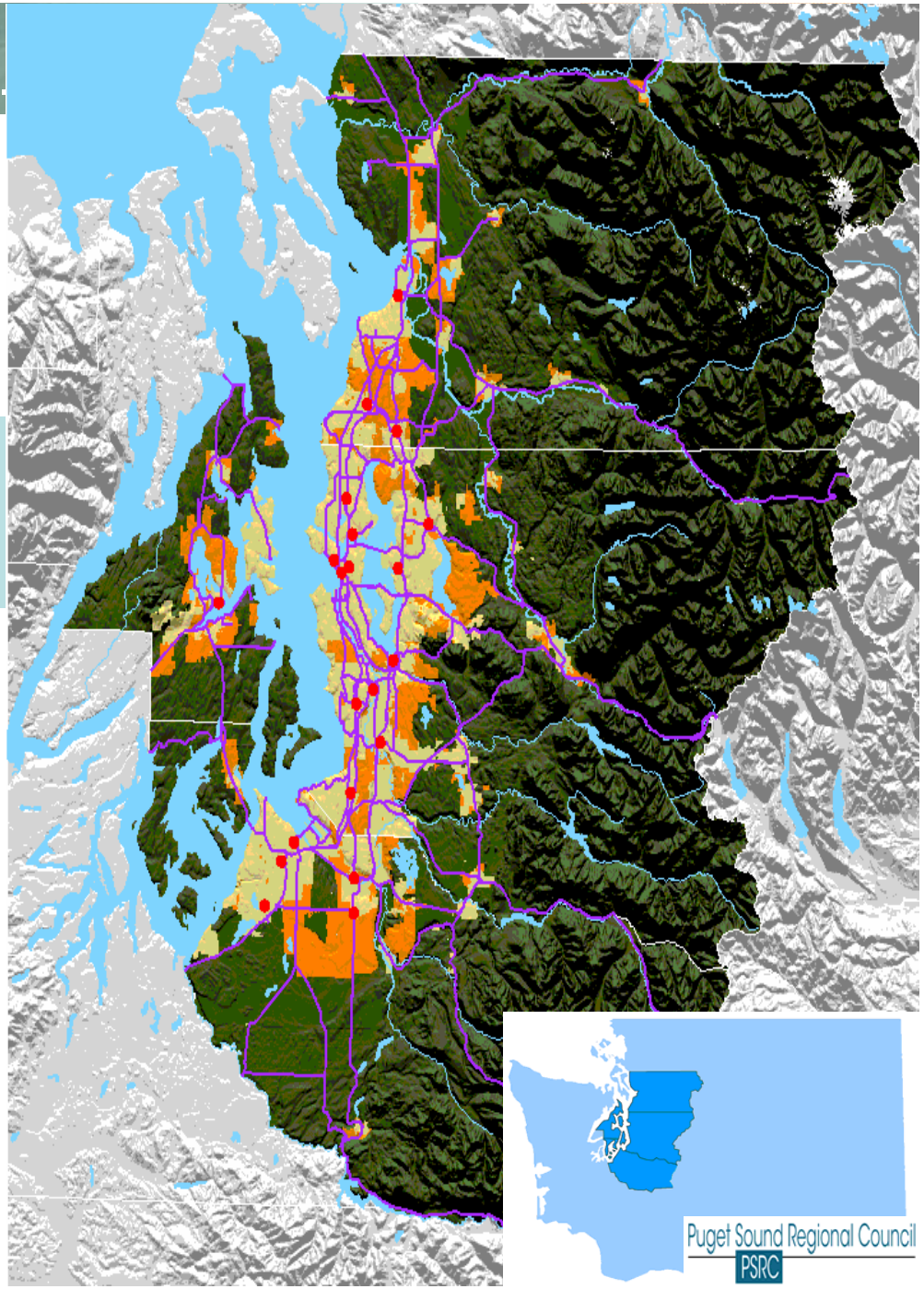
Transportation Research Forum
47th Annual Forum, New York, NY

March 23, 2006

Puget Sound Region

Puget Sound Regional Council
Metropolitan Planning Organization
designated under federal legislation

- 3.4 million people
- 1.8 million jobs
- 16,300 sq. kilometers
- Expecting significant growth over the next 25 years
- New growth will largely occur within existing urban areas



Existing Road Finance System

- **System is financially weak**
  - Poor fiscal elasticity of the gas tax, especially with new fuels
  - New capacity costs are rising with urbanization, and preservation and maintenance costs are rising as system ages
- **System performance is declining**
  - Congestion, road conditions deteriorating
  - Land use regulation, transit policy not obviating the problem
- **Gas tax (and other tax-based) finance perceived as unfair**
  - Expensive new capacity that benefits targeted taxpayers
  - Requires cross-subsidies, among regions, types of users
  - Hence, public support for general tax increases is ambiguous

Future of Road Finance?

- **Conventional road finance is a vicious circle**
  - We levy an average charge on all mileage...
  - …creating localized congestion during peak periods
  - The congestion prompts road authorities to build
  - But the low charges cannot cover the costs!
- **Demand pricing can break the circle**
  - Charges are levied selectively on certain vehicle-miles
  - Controls excessive congestion during peak periods
  - Demand pricing generates the revenue to build capacity when it is really needed
  - Revenue is collected from those who burden capacity

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Traffic Choices Study

The Traffic Choices Study is a federally funded pilot project that will test new ways to combat traffic congestion and fund transportation.

Our region will develop a better understanding of the policy and technical issues associated with road pricing, which will inform updates to the region's plans and influence decisions about our future.

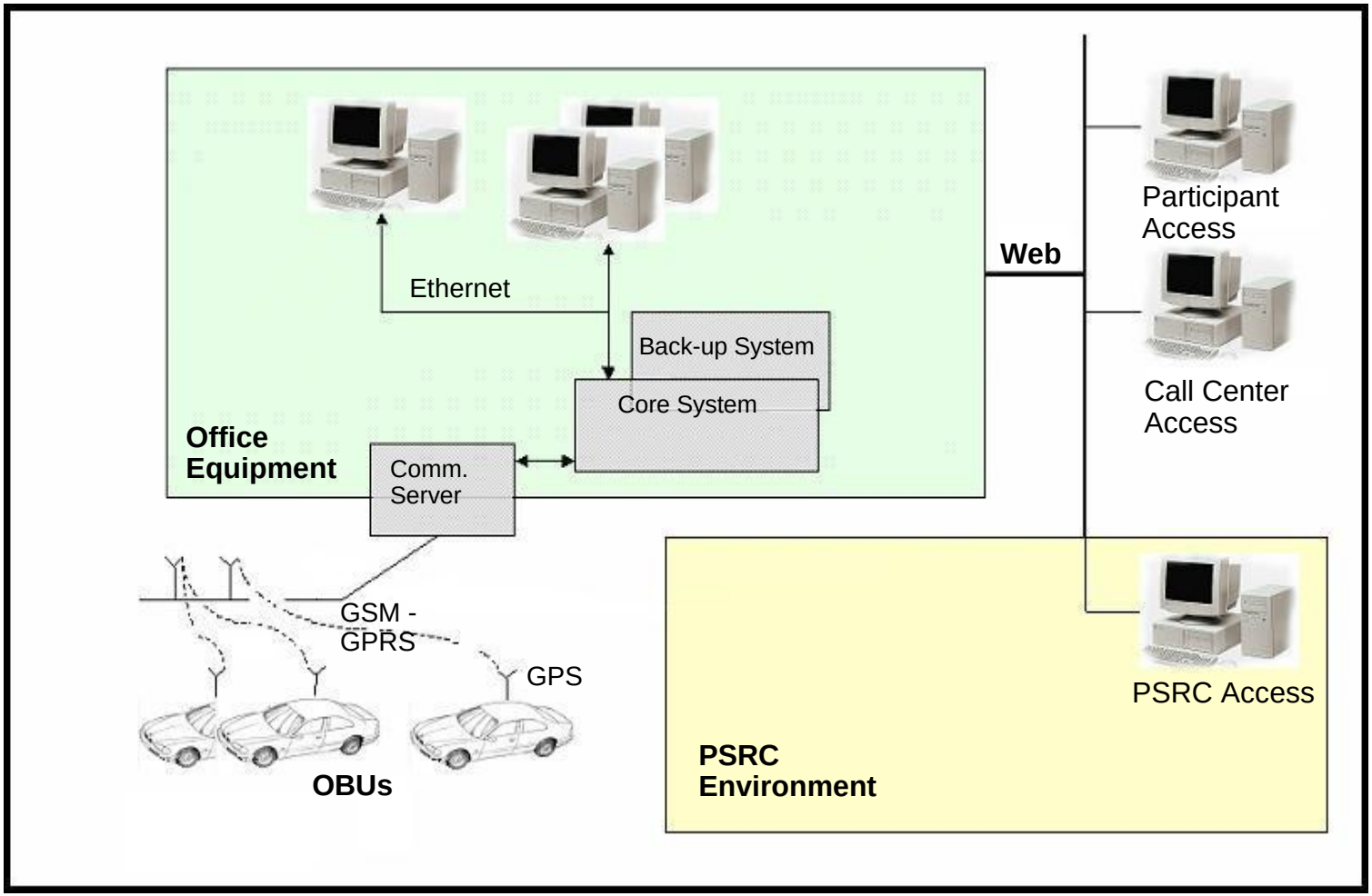
Project Objectives

- Familiarize real people with the concept of road pricing
- Learn whether drivers will pay to use a variety of roads
- Develop a better understanding of the policy and technical issues
- Test technology and program design

Key Attributes of the Project

- Study effects of system-wide congestion pricing on traveling public within controlled research environment
- Groundwork for one future finance option for Puget Sound's roadway network
- Use of existing off-the-shelf technology
  - Proven, tested, safe equipment and installation
  - Secure, reliable back office system
- GPS-based tracking of vehicles; GPRS/GSM communications to central office
- "Hold-Harmless" billing using participant Endowment Accounts

Overview of Main System Components



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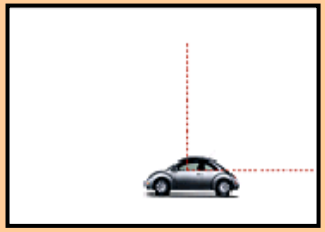
Start-up Period

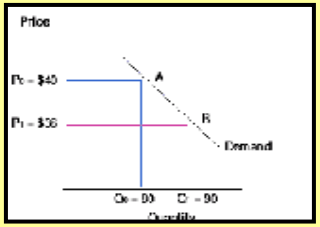
- Enroll participants
- Install in-vehicle equipment
- Baseline data collection
- Loaded system test
- Develop household travel budgets

Active Period



- In-vehicle toll display
- Driver modifies travel or pays toll
- Vehicle charged for road use
- Tolls levied against endowment accounts
- Participants keep unspent account balance

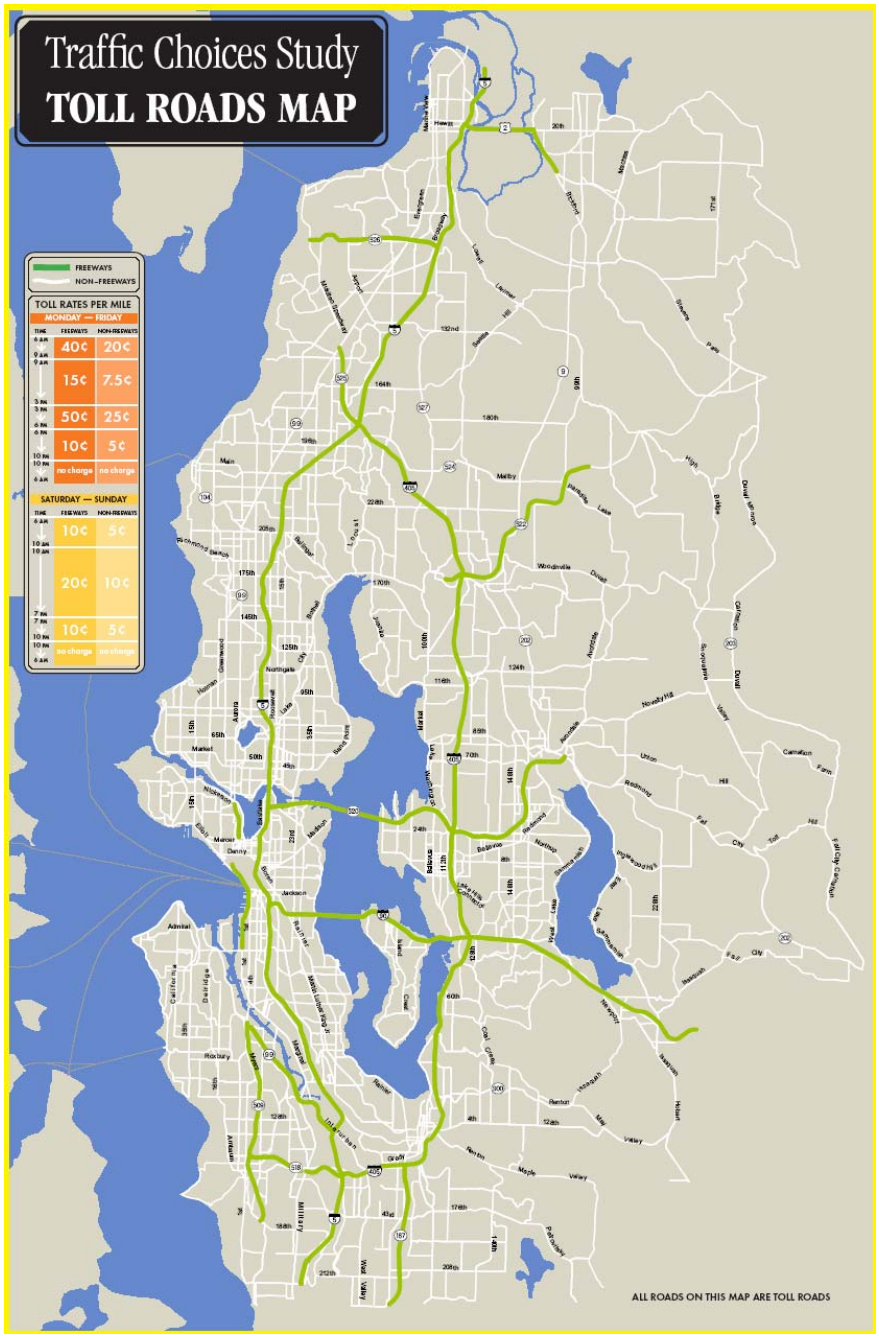
Analysis Period



- Calculate price elasticities
- Behavioral response
- Technical documentation
- Examine policy areas
- Full documentation of all aspects of the project

Priced Roads

Highways and Major Arterials



Toll Schedule

Tolls vary by:

–road facility type

–weekday versus weekend

–time of day

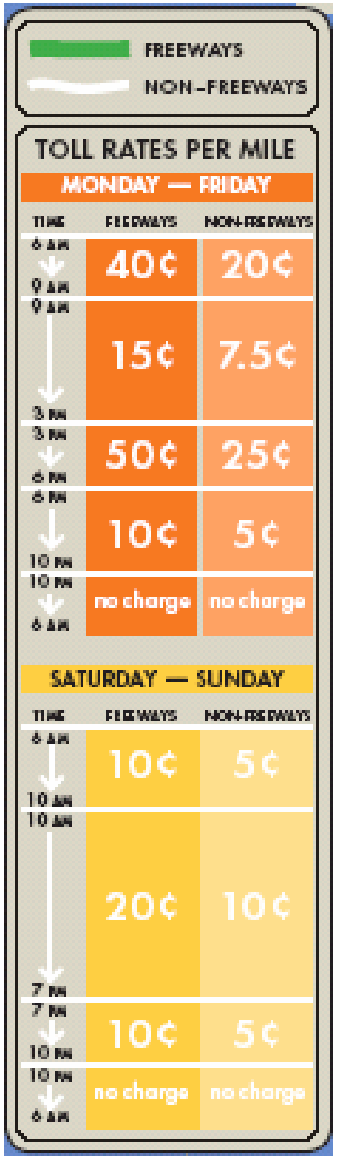
AM Peak - higher tolls

Midday - lower tolls

PM Peak - higher tolls

Evening - lower tolls

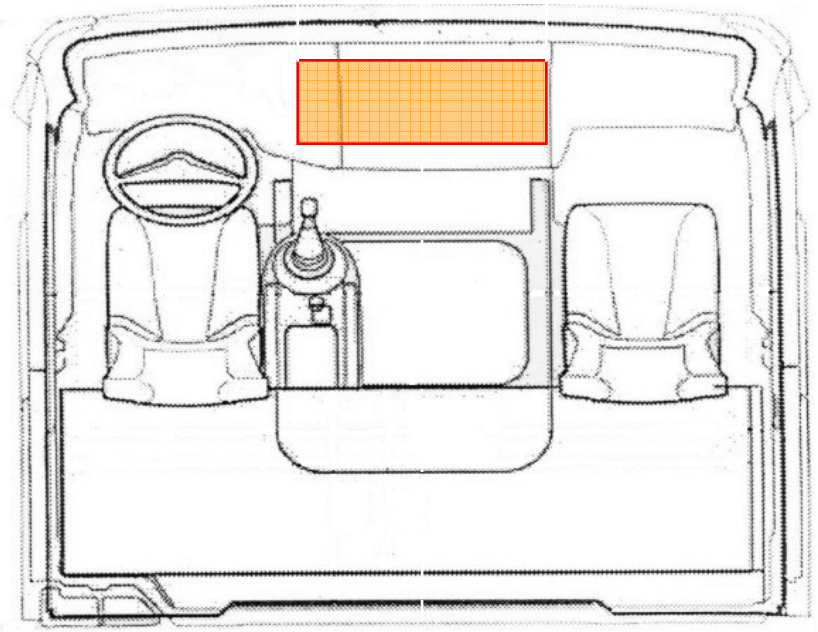
Night - zero tolls



The On-Board Unit

- Internal GPS module
- Internal GPRS module
- Stores 8,000 link digital road network
- Software matches GPS signal returns to road links
- 2X16 character display (road name and toll/mile)

Mounting location



OBU Tolling Display

First Line:
The toll sum for each trip is displayed.

Second Line:
The name of the link and costs per mile is displayed.

Deployment: Some findings to date

- Core technology for satellite-based toll systems is mature
- Quality of the underlying geodata base is a crucial factor
- At times, GPS signal reception may need to be augmented with additional positioning technologies
- Arterial tolling systems have different design requirements than a freeway only systems
  - Short length trips may result in a few trips without sufficient location data
  - Digital characterization of roadway network is significantly more complex
  - On board unit storage limitations, a solvable problem
  - Enforcement…
- Significant deployment issue is the installation of hardware

Deployment: Verification and Payment

- Will GPS be sufficient to meet a standard of proof to allow billing and enforcement?
- Occasional users and non-banking individuals impose challenges for any Electronic Payment System
- Enforcement may require other facility use verification (DSRC, video capture, mobile enforcement).
- Trade-off between verification and protection of privacy –issues with technology implications that influence the underlying economics of system design

Deployment: Fairness of Road Pricing

- Direct use charging addresses existing horizontal inequalities
  - Across users groups (e.g. vehicle classes)
  - Across geography (e.g. urban/rural)
- Other equity concerns (across income classes) may remain, and are best addressed through a comprehensive treatment of both revenue and expenditure policies
- Road financing that improves overall economic efficiency leaves society with greater resources available to address equity

Deployment: Privacy

- Privacy questions involve what data leaves the vehicle, and what safeguards are in place to limit its availability and use.
- It will be possible to design an approach where only “generic” facility use data is used by a central billing system.
- Audit/dispute functions could be preserved through temporarily storing data within the vehicle.
- Ultimately, any charging system must be technically verifiable and legally enforceable, within bounds of what is politically acceptable.

Outlook

- Project demonstrates general feasibility of GPS-based solution for tolling applications in US
- Successful operational results may influence long-term planning and policy making in the Seattle region and elsewhere
- Important policy questions such as privacy and equity will be better understood
- Large-scale deployment of a GPS-based tolling solution depends on a viable business model and public acceptance of underlying concepts

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