

Summary for QuickRide Focus Groups

Description of Project

Three focus groups were held during the month of August to discuss the current QuickRide program and potential changes in the pricing structure. The first group was comprised of commuters that used Northwest 290 (NW 290) for the commute. The second group was commuters that use Interstate 10 West (I-10) for the commute (one participant was a QuickRide dropout). Collectively, the participants in the first two focus groups are referenced as “commuters.” The third group consisted of current QuickRide Users.

Comments by Focus Group Participants

- **Commuters had little or no knowledge of the QuickRide program.**

Each group of commuters was asked what they knew about QuickRide. Only one participant in the NW 290 group knew about the QuickRide program. She knew about the program because her parents participated. Only one person in the I-10 group knew details about QuickRide – she was the one QuickRide dropout. One commuter using I-10 believed QuickRide was a vanpooling service. Another participant mentioned he had heard of the program but did not know any details about it.

More focus group participants knew there were restrictions on the number of persons in the HOV during specific hours. Most knew by reading the freeway signs, because an acquaintance received a ticket for not having HOV3 during restricted hours, or by remembering the original media description when the restrictions went into effect. Some had learned about the ability to use the HOV lane during the HOV3 times with HOV2 but did not know about the toll.

When the reasoning behind pricing HOV2 during HOV3 restricted hours was explained, some participants were persuaded the concept was a good idea. Others were still suspicious the program is just another way to charge money for a facility that is already paid for with other funds.

When asked how to best communicate information about QuickRide, the following suggestions were offered:

- Television announcements
- Print media
- Electronic freeway signs
- Radio during peak hours
- Public service ads
- Employer benefit programs
- Bill stuffers

- **Commuters favor a lower toll for QuickRide access.**

Both commuter groups favored a toll lower than \$2.00 per use. Suggested prices ranged from \$0.50 to \$1.00. One participant noted that a QuickRide toll should not be more than the typical toll on the (HCTRA) toll road.

Participants in the NW 290 focus group raised a concern that QuickRide is affordable only for those that drive expensive cars, and suggested the program is not fair to people who do not have as much disposable income as others.

The participants in both commuter groups said QuickRide would be of greater interest if the toll was reduced or if single occupant vehicles could have access for a price.

- **QuickRide Users are comfortable with the current toll.**

All QuickRide Users participating in the focus group believe the \$2.00 toll is a good price for the timesavings. The participants in the focus group believe the rate is equitable. At the same time, the QuickRide Users do not want the current toll increased.

- **Commuters and QuickRide Users value travel timesavings on HOV.**

The most important benefit for using the HOV lane is to save travel time. The perception of several focus group participants was that HOV lane saved as much as 50 percent of total commute travel time.

Another important benefit of the HOV lane is safety. Reliability was not as highly rated as travel timesavings and safety.

Many of the participants in the NW 290 and I-10 commuter focus groups commented on the need or ability to be flexible. Many could adjust commute times to avoid the most congested periods.

Opinions of Pricing Options

- **Time of day pricing received mixed reviews.**

The participants in the NW 290 focus group had mixed opinions about the various pricing options. In general, the group perceived \$2.00 per use to be too high a price to pay; and some members of both groups felt the suggested prices in the examples were too high. Pricing by time of day was generally not well received, and several participants said they would be inclined to adjust commute times to avoid paying.

The I-10 group noted that time of day pricing cannot be too complicated (or too graduated) but this group liked time of day pricing over congestion pricing. The group also liked the idea of adding SOVs and time of day pricing together. There was concern about where and how time would be established – and if different times would apply to different points of access.

The QuickRide Users are concerned about where they would be charged. The members of the focus group said it is only fair to charge when a user enters the HOV lane, not when exiting because people access the lane further inbound (for example getting on I-10 inbound at Gessner as opposed to Highway 6). Focus group participants believed users end up entering the lane at a later time than the users farther outbound but are not being ticketed by METRO police for getting on as HOV2 after 6:45 AM.

- **Concept of congestion pricing is hard to explain.**

The concept of congestion pricing was not easily explained. To many, the idea of raising price as congestion in the HOV lane rises is counter-intuitive. Many commented “why pay to get access to a congested HOV lane?”

The NW 290 group noted the need for signs if congestion pricing is to be implemented. The signs will have to be far enough back to give the driver warning of the price. Signs and radio were mentioned as means to communicate dynamic pricing. The NW 290 group liked the idea of combining SOV access with congestion pricing.

In general, the focus group participants had a difficult time grasping how information can be presented in time to make an informed decision about QuickRide each day. Many are concerned about paying for access to an HOV lane that may be congested with no way to exit.

In general, there is a lack of confidence in technology to support the idea of dynamic, variable pricing and a lack of confidence in the ability of METRO to effectively patrol and enforce the HOV lane.

- **Commuter support SOV access to HOV; QuickRide Users are opposed.**

There was a more favorable reaction to allowing SOV access to the HOV with a toll. Several participants in both commuter focus groups said they would be willing to pay a fee to get access when driving alone. Both commuter groups included advocates of SOV access.

Every participant in the QuickRide User focus group is opposed to SOV eligibility for access to the HOV lane even at a higher price.

- **Flat rate pricing received modest support.**

Two participants in the commuter groups like the idea of flat rate pricing. One participant suggested she would like this pricing if she used the QuickRide program regularly. The other participant suggested breaking the flat rate into usage blocks. For instance 1-5 rides can be sold for a certain flat rate and 6-10 rides are sold at another flat rate. This would combine usage and the flat rate scheme.

Overall the current QuickRide Users did not like the flat rate pricing option. Several cited the fact that they use it infrequently, vacation would cut usage and others have carpools that each have QuickRide passes and share the cost of the program.

- **I-10 focus group participants believe distance should be a factor in any pricing option.**

Most of the I-10 group (7 out of 9) agrees that distance is a factor when charging a toll. The focus group participants said that users who access the HOV at Highway 6 should have to pay more than the people that are getting on at Gessner.

Additional Information about HOV Operations

- **All focus groups supported expanded hours for the HOV lanes.**

There were no objections in any of the focus groups regarding expanding the hours of the HOV lane. Several mentioned they would like to see the HOV lane going both ways, 24 hours a day. One participant believes that people think the HOV lane is under utilized because most of the day they see an empty concrete lane. Another member suggested that the HOV lane close only for one hour between inbound and outbound traffic. She perceives this should be ample time to switch the flow of the lane.

- **Focus group participants believe enforcement of HOV lane restrictions can be improved.**

The QuickRide User focus group was particularly critical of the consistency of enforcement of the HOV lanes on I-10 and NW 290. Several persons raised concerns about the safety of existing procedures.

- **QuickRide Users are complimentary of the assistance of METRO in registering for the program.**

Each QuickRide User said he or she found it easy to get information about QuickRide, either by going to the METRO website or calling METRO. The users complimented the courtesy and responsiveness of the METRO staff.

- **QuickRide Users are tolerant of the inconsistencies in program administration.**

However, the QuickRide Users were not complimentary of program administration. Correspondence is not timely and errors are often made on bills. However, the QuickRide Users said the benefits of the program outweigh the inconveniences.

QuickRide Users recommend allowing flexibility in the program, to permit QuickRide tags and transponders to be transferable to multiple cars within a carpool or within a family.

Attachment

Participant Characteristics

The following is a description of the participants in each group including gender, age, income level, education, marital status, number in household and forms of transportation.

The first two groups are commuters who do not use QuickRide. A commuter is defined as someone who uses the specified freeway at least four weekdays inbound from 6:00AM – 9:00AM or outbound from 4:00PM to 7:00PM for at least six months. Group 1 is commuters using Northwest 290. Group 2 is commuters using I-10. Current QuickRide Users from both corridors comprise the third group.

Group 1: Northwest 290 Commuters

	Gender	Age	Income Level	Education	Marital Status	Number in House	Forms of Transportation
1	Male	46	\$50,000 - \$75,000	College Graduate	Single	1	Ride with carpool
2	Male	31	\$35,000 - \$49,999	Some College	Married w/children	4	Ride with carpool
3	Male	67	\$35,000 - \$49,999	High School Graduate	Married	2	Ride with carpool
4	Male	50	\$50,000 - \$75,000	Master or Ph.D.	Married w/children	4	Drive alone
5	Male	30	\$50,000 - \$75,000	Some College	Married w/children	4	Drive alone
6	Female	56	\$50,000 - \$75,000	College Graduate	Single Parent	2	Drive alone
7	Female	27	\$50,000 - \$75,000	Some College	Single Parent	3	Ride with carpool
8	Female	46	\$50,000 - \$75,000	Some College	Married	2	Drive alone or Ride with carpool
9	Male	34	\$50,000 - \$75,000	College Graduate	Married w/children	5	Drive alone

Group 2: Interstate 10 West (I-10) Commuters

	Gender	Age	Income Level	Education	Marital Status	Number in House	Forms of Transportation
1	Female	46	\$75,000 - \$99,999	Masters or Ph.D.	Married w/children	4	Ride with carpool
2	Male	36	\$10,000 - \$14,999	High School Graduate	Roommates	2	Drive alone, bus, ride with carpool
3	Female	59	\$75,000 - \$99,999	College Graduate	Roommates	2	Ride with carpool
4	Male	67	\$35,000 - \$49,999	College Graduate	Married	2	Ride with carpool
5	Male	49	\$35,000 - \$49,999	College Graduate	Married w/children	4	Ride with carpool
6	Male	33	\$50,000 - \$75,000	Some College	Married w/children	4	Bus
7	Male	41	\$35,000 - \$49,999	High School Graduate	Single	1	Drive alone and Ride with carpool
8	Female	25	\$75,000 - \$99,999	Some College	Other	3	Ride with carpool
9	Female	41	\$35,000 - \$49,999	Some College	Single	1	Drive alone
10	Male	44	\$50,000 - \$75,000	Some College	Roommates	2	Ride with carpool
11	Female	50	\$35,000 - \$49,999	College Graduate	Married	6	Ride with carpool

Group 3: Current QuickRide Users

	Gender	Age	Income Level	Education	Marital Status	Number in House	Forms of Transportation	Freeway Used
1	Female	62	\$75,000 - \$99,999	Some College	Married	3	Drive alone, carpool	I-10
2	Female	37	\$75,000 - \$99,999	Some College	Married w/children	4	Drive alone, bus, carpool, slug	I-10
3	Male	48	\$75,000 - \$99,999	Some College	Married w/children	4	Bus, carpool	NW 290
4	Male	40	\$50,000 - \$74,999	Masters or Ph.D.	Married	2	Drive alone, picks up slug	I-10
5	Female	39	\$75,000 - \$99,999	High School Graduate	Married w/children	4	Bus, carpool	NW 290
6	Female	45	Over \$100,000	College Graduate	Married w/children	n/a	Drive alone, bus	NW 290
7	Male	25-34	Over \$100,000	Masters or Ph.D.	Married w/children	3	Park and ride bus	NW 290
8	Female	48	Over \$100,000	Masters or Ph.D.	Married w/children	3	Carpool	I-10