

## SUMMARY MEMORANDUM

To: Professor Sheldon Gen  
From: Monika Villanueva and Barbara Walden  
Re: Congestion Pricing in San Francisco  
Date: December 5, 2007

Congestion pricing is a package of various projects with the goal of reducing congestion, traffic, wait times, and environmental pollution within some of the most heavily trafficked areas of a city. Congestion pricing is not a new concept and has been used successfully around the world in the nation of Singapore and in cities like San Diego, and most recently, London. In all three locales, traffic decreased while traffic speeds and public transportation use increased.

The problem of congestion is quite apparent in the city of San Francisco. The City was recently ranked the 2<sup>nd</sup> most congested region in the entire nation and the fatal car accident rate in the downtown area is higher than the state's average. Current studies have also pointed to multibillion dollar losses due to excess fuel consumption in the City's busiest areas and businesses' lost revenue due to congestion. The City and County of San Francisco recently received a grant from the Federal Transit Administration in order to study the possibilities of implementing congestion pricing. Under consideration is the possibility of instituting fees for driving on Doyle Drive and in some areas downtown, and the implementation of special parking meters. The Board of Supervisors has charged a Mobility, Access, and Pricing Study team with investigating the applicability, acceptability, and possibility of instituting such a policy. Therefore, the policy is in the formulation stage of the policy cycle.

The multiple streams model to explain this policy process is applicable here. The coming together of a public problem, policy solution, and proper political climate has opened a window of opportunity.

There are potential problems within the formulation and adoption stages. Constituent will and business lobbying for example may make it difficult for this policy to be adopted. However, utilitarian values may prevail if public transportation and environmental issues are taken into consideration. San Francisco, being a leader among public policy innovation, could institute congestion pricing.

## **INTRODUCTION**

With its unique location by the water and near proximity to the ocean and mountains, San Francisco (the City) has grown to be a popular place to live and work. Not only has the City become the economic hub of the Bay Area, it has also become the locale for prime real estate. However, the City's growth is accommodated by problems, in this case, congestion. The San Francisco Bay Area has been ranked the 2<sup>nd</sup> most congested region in the nation (SFCTA, 2007). This congestion results in a number of negative impacts which include: inefficiencies and delays of time, degradation of the public transit system, barriers to growth, and increased environmental degradation, namely global warming. In addition, economic analyses have concluded that congestion delays have resulted in a \$2.3 billion loss due to fuel consumption and waste (Ibid). Congestion has also made certain areas of the City dangerous. In 2006 there were a total of 4,594 vehicle accidents in San Francisco with a concentration in the Downtown area. Since 67% of all trips are private-vehicle based, it makes sense to focus on solutions to this particular issue (SFCTA, 2007). It should be noted here that the City realizes the positive signs indicative of congestion. It often signifies more people working and playing in the City. However, as populations increase, officials recognize that something needs to be done (Ibid.).

To respond to these issues, the San Francisco County Transportation Authority and city officials updated the San Francisco Countywide Transportation Plan in 2004 to explore the idea of congestion pricing (SFCTA, May 2007). Congestion pricing is a tax incentive tool that is used to discourage drivers from driving and parking in certain parts of business city centers during specific times of day. More specifically, congestion pricing is itself a package of various congestion management projects. The scheme can take different variations, with fees that can change with location, time of day, day of week and specific drivers (Presentation, May 2007).

Revenues received from congestion pricing taxes are “typically reinvested in transportation improvements”, such as improving public transit (Presentation, May 2007). According to Button (2003), congestion pricing has the ability to “optimize the use of urban roads and ensure that its use would be restricted to those willing to pay for the congestion costs” (p. 113). The map in Appendix A shows the City’s possible pricing areas.

With a rational process approach, it is assumed that the objective of government policies is to benefit the greater part of society (Theodoulou and Kofinis, pp. 323-324, 2004). While this utilitarian ideal has been used in many social problem policies, it can also be applied to the problem of congestion. The belief is that while only those cars that drive into pricing areas will be charged, the good that this will do for the public and for the environment should outweigh the costs of setup and administration. The fees drivers pay may be an inconvenience for some, but a benefit for the community as a whole.

This paper will review and assess the policy currently on the agenda of San Francisco and predict the feasibility, popularity, and workability of said policy.

### *Background*

The City has looked to the success of congestion pricing in many cities and countries around the world and around the country. Singapore, a revolutionary nation in the area of congestion pricing, has used congestion pricing since 1975 (Christainsen, 2006). At that time, cars were affixed with prepaid stickers to allow drivers to travel throughout specified areas. In the 1990’s, Singapore began electronic pricing, allowing the city to collect fees from drivers, multiple times a day. Toll gates or gantries are set up around different parts of the country, especially in the central business district (CBD). Most cars are affixed with transponders that monitor drivers who pass through these gantries. They pay a few dollars for each passing and

this fee is based on the level and amount of traffic, as well as, the time of day. Those with no transponder or not enough money on their prepaid card are issued fines and penalties. When pricing was introduced, congestion in the (CBD) was cut by 50% and traffic speeds increased to 22 mph. Congestion pricing in Singapore, has primarily been used to alleviate congestion, not just raise revenue. However, with the money raised a new subway system was established (Ibid.)

Congestion pricing was also instituted in San Diego. There, drivers pay a fee for driving down a 10-mile stretch of Highway 91 (Bressi, 1991). During the first few months, planners assumed 30,000 transponders would be in use, however, the popularity greatly exceeded this number. People enjoyed the ease and convenience of the system, as well as the increase in traffic speeds. By early June, 50,000 transponders were in use (Ibid.). Other locales where congestion pricing has been implemented include Rome, Stockholm, and more recently, London.

In 2003 London implemented congestion pricing in its downtown area, which holds one of the densest concentrations of traffic, as well as jobs, in London (Nash, 2006 and Litman, 2006). Motorists are charged \$16.00 to drive between the hours of 7:00 am and 6:00 pm (Litman, 2006). Payments can be made in various ways, which include making payments at machines, through text messaging, and by purchasing passes (ibid). The system has resulted in increased traffic speeds, increased use of public transportation, and higher revenues than expected (ibid). Annual net revenues equate to \$200 million (San Francisco County Transportation Authority, 2007). Additionally, the program has reduced traffic by 30% (San Francisco County Transportation Authority, 2007). Congestion pricing has been generally embraced by the public, but has faced expected adversity from local businesses within the pricing zones (ibid). However, “economic theory suggests that congestion pricing should increase overall productivity and business activity by favoring higher-value activities over lower-value activities and reducing

congestion costs” (Litman, 2006, p. 8). In addition, studies conducted on congestion pricing impacts in London have failed to find any overall evidence of a loss of business revenues (Nash, 2006). San Francisco’s plan models the success of London.

## **POLICY CYCLE**

The timeline attached in Appendix B shows how the policy came about and the events which led to its current status. In 2005, San Francisco received \$159 million from the U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Transit Administration in order to address the county’s problems with congestion. As a result of the grant, the San Francisco Transportation Authority (the Authority) decided to conduct the Mobility, Access and Pricing Study (the Study). In 2006 the Authority selected PBS&J and IBM to help conduct the Study which began in 2007 (SFCTA, 2007). The creation and role of the Authority and other stakeholders is further explained in the following Stakeholder section. The Study explores the feasibility of implementing congestion pricing in the City. It is anticipated to take between 12-18 months to complete. Upon completion of the Study, the feasibility of the Study will be evaluated.

Currently, the congestion pricing policy is in the formulation stage. This type of formulation model that congestion pricing follows is routine, the stakeholders involved have high levels of knowledge of the problem (Theodoulou and Kofinis, 2004). Despite their knowledge of the congestion problem, city officials and other decision makers are also relying on the advice and recommendations of the different advisory committees. If the study is successful and the congestion pricing is feasible, its adoption and implementation will mitigate the congestion in downtown. However, alternatives are still being explored. In addition to congestion pricing in downtown areas, as mentioned earlier the city is considering imposing a fee along Doyle Drive and special parking meters with variable pricing methods throughout the

city. After the feasibility is successfully determined, it is likely that congestion pricing will be adopted and implemented in the city of San Francisco.

## **STAKEHOLDERS**

There are many different stakeholders involved in the policy process. Because the policy is still in the formulation stage, the major stakeholders to date have been institutional players.

However throughout the Study, meetings will be conducted to get input from the public.

Additionally, the Study will include input and coordination from advisory committees (SFCTA presentation, May 2007). Advisory committees involved in the Study include the Policy Working Group, the Technical Advisory Committee, the Business Advisory Council and the Stakeholder Task Force. Below is a brief background of major stakeholders involved. Appendix C provides a detailed table describing the role, power and interactions between the stakeholders.

### San Francisco Board of Supervisors

The Board was the main catalyst to get funding for the Study. In 2005 the Board applied for and received a grant from the U.S. Department of Transportation. The Board also governs the San Francisco County Transportation Authority (Bowman, 2006).

### San Francisco County Transportation Authority

The SFCTA is also known as the Congestion Management Agency, which is responsible for “developing and administering the Congestion Management Program” (About the Authority, 2007). The Authority is also the primary means of leveraging “state and federal transportation dollars to complement Prop K revenues and performs project delivery oversight to assist with project implementation” (About the Authority, 2007).

### US Department of Transportation

Through the U.S. DOT's Value Pricing Program (VPP), they are able to give grants to encourage "implementation and evaluation of value pricing pilot projects to manage congestion on highways through tolling and other pricing mechanisms" (USDOT, 2007). VPP is the "only program that provides funding to support studies and implementation aspects of a tolling or pricing project" (ibid).

### Public

The Authority is giving the public the opportunity to voice their opinions about the Study by holding public meetings through the yearlong process. Jones (1998) identifies valid public concerns (p. 264-268):

- people shouldn't be charged for congestion,
- congestion pricing isn't necessary,
- pricing will not get people out of their cars,
- pricing is another form of taxation; and
- it is not fair

Many local residents are in favor of congestion pricing, as they see the program as a solution to reduce the amount of cars in downtown during rush hour. However, some locals are very cynical of it. Commenting on the article published in the San Francisco Chronicle, a Castro District resident states, "You can't keep punishing people without offering them a *realistic* alternative" (San Francisco Chronicle, 2007). As expected, those who commute into the city are opposed to the money scheme. Another resident holds the same view as commuters and sees it as a tax targeted at "[themselves] and other San Francisco Residents who have to drive to get to work" Finally, those who live in possible pricing areas, those who carpool, and motorcyclists worry how the pricing package will affect them (Ibid.).

Theories of power that are demonstrated through this policy are group theory, the advocacy coalition framework, and even an elitist theory. Group theory in the form of pluralism is exhibited in this policy. Theorists acknowledge the decision-making role of institutional players in addition to the influential role of the non-institutional players (Garson, 1978). While the formal players will be responsible for making the final decision about congestion pricing in the city, the non-formal players, through public meetings and the different advocacy groups, are able to provide comments and technical support to influence the policy.

Sabatier's advocacy coalition framework can also be seen through this part of the policy process. Congestion pricing is a management tool that has been successfully implemented in other countries. Implemented over 35 years ago in Singapore, congestion pricing has been highly successful. Other countries have been able to try and mirror that achievement. As previously discussed, this policy is in the formulation stage and thus requires the input and coordination of many stakeholders beyond government. These governmental and non-governmental organizations are working together through different policy subsystems. Finally, congestion pricing can be viewed as the culmination of the belief system of people.

From a different perspective, congestion pricing may also be viewed as an elite theory policy. The scheme may appear to bear some of the characteristics of elitism, which include the uneven distribution of power and social goods and that decision makers are autonomous (Putnam, 1976). As described in some public reactions to congestion pricing, the policy has been depicted as a mechanism that is unfair and will only permit the wealthy to drive in the city. However, the policy is still in its formulation stage and the final decision has not been made. Additionally, the decision will be made based on the results of the study and the public will have their chance to comment at public meetings. While congestion pricing may have the appearance

of being an elitist driven policy, ironically, the City and the Authority are doing their best to get both public input and conclusive data that the policy will work.

## **POLICY PROCESS MODEL**

San Francisco's congestion pricing management package is currently in the policy formation stage. While the City is not the inventor of such a policy, it is an innovator in the sense that its officials have been prompted to adopt the policy based on the successfulness other jurisdictions have seen (Berry and Berry, 1999). The decision making process was rational in approach. By assessing the problem, listening to constituents, and probably facing their own congestion battles, City officials realized that there was a problem within City borders in terms of traffic, wait times, and parking troubles and set out to alleviate the problem for society. A list of alternatives has been made and criteria set. Some criteria considered have been cost, effectiveness, equity, acceptability, and risk. The table in Appendix D, shows a possible criteria-alternative matrix that may be used to assist in the decision making process.

It should be noted that rationalism may not completely fit the City's congestion pricing study, and Herbert Shimon's "bounded rationality" model may be appropriate in terms of information availability and political change (Gen, October 31, 2007). For example, some necessary information is limited. Town hall meetings to get opinions on congestion pricing may self select those who are against it or those who live in an area directly affected by the policy. In this way, City officials will not gain a complete understanding of how the public feels. Even given all of the correct and current information, politics may prevail. Despite all the data indicating the benefits of congestion pricing, if business groups or large members of the public seem against it, constituent power may win out.

In consideration of this policy, the theory that most explains the issue's process is the Streams Metaphor. John Kingdon's Streams Metaphor is shown by "windows of opportunity" opening in which all aspects required to create a meaningful policy fall into place or occur at the same time. Problems, policies, and politics meet each other in streams to solve a public problem (Cohen, et al. 1972). There is usually a focusing event that will draw attention to the policy problem or stream (Ibid. and Theodoulou and Kofinis, pp. 120-121, 2004). The policy stream consists of various proposals of solutions that are floated around various policy players. Furthermore, the policy stream in the political environment must acquiesce to certain conditions including political acceptability, tolerable cost, acceptance, and feasibility. The final stream is the political stream in which formal and informal actors interact with one another in a political climate of debate, discussion, and influence (Ibid.)

In this case, the problem stream, while not considered a great disaster, was evident in the multiple studies done on the worsening traffic conditions within San Francisco. As highlighted previously, the City is ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> in amount of traffic congestion in the nation and the fatality accident rate exceeds the average for California. The increasingly aggravated commuter force, lost revenues from parking meters, a call for a greener city, and the Federal Transit Administration's grant money awarded to the City brought public and private attention to this matter, allowing for political actors interested in these problems to finally act. Finally, the political requirement for this window came with a rather liberal and forward thinking Mayor and Board of Directors.

Another policy process that is applicable is the Systems Model. In this model, policy is innovated, formulated, approved, and evaluated in reaction to an input or demand from the environment (Theodoulou and Kofinis, 2004, p. 325). Furthermore, policy outputs may produce

new inputs causing the policy process to begin again. The model stresses the close relationship between the actors and the institutions in which those actors create and make decisions (Ibid.) Congestion pricing would be considered the output the City, as the institution, creates. The inputs are internal-technological, because the problem: traffic congestion and its ramifications, are occurring within the City and are mechanical in nature (Cobb, R. and Elder C. 1983). Based on the inputs of negative analyses indicating bad traffic congestion within the City's borders, the actors have reacted with the Congestion Pricing plan.

A process model that does not quite fit this policy is punctuated equilibrium. The congestion pricing policy is new to the city of San Francisco and solutions are persistently being considered. Incrementalism by design prohibits bold changes from taking place (Theodoulou and Kofinis, 2004, pp. 89-90). This policy package is clearly a bold change for the City. The congestion pricing study has tried to prevent incrementalism in that it has clear deadlines and benchmarks for significant progress. If and when the policy is adopted, incremental changes that may occur will be in the areas of increasing fees and expanding pay areas.

## **PROGNOSIS**

As described by Button (1998), there are reasons in which congestion pricing may be unsuccessful in San Francisco. High transaction costs may make congestion pricing not economically feasible (Button, 1998). Additionally, congestion pricing in one part of the Bay Area may potentially "distort the allocation of traffic" in the entire traffic network (Button, 2003, p. 113). Other issues may arise between the elected officials in support of congestion pricing and the constituents and stakeholders who are against the policy. Finally, questions on the table involve who will or will not be exempt from paying fees. These points will most likely be addressed in the Study.

Even if the Study demonstrates that congestion pricing is a feasible mechanism for mitigating traffic and being a source of revenue to improve public transportation, “[it] must be acceptable to [the] target populations” (Theodoulou & Kofinis, 2004, p. 131). The policy will encounter expected opposition from business advocacy groups and both local and transbay commuters who see this utilitarian policy as punishing those who must work and drive in specific areas. However, with the proper communication and accountability, the policy should become more appealing and accepted by the public.

Using ideas from other cities around the world, San Francisco has created a rational congestion pricing model that could benefit commuters, pedestrians, public transportation users, local businesses, and the environment. The “window of opportunity” has opened. City officials, traffic problems, and necessary funding to study the solutions all came together at the right time. Due to the fact San Francisco continues to be a leader among public policy innovation, as well as, information diffusion, we believe the congestion pricing policy will be adopted and become a policy that cities similar to San Francisco will use.

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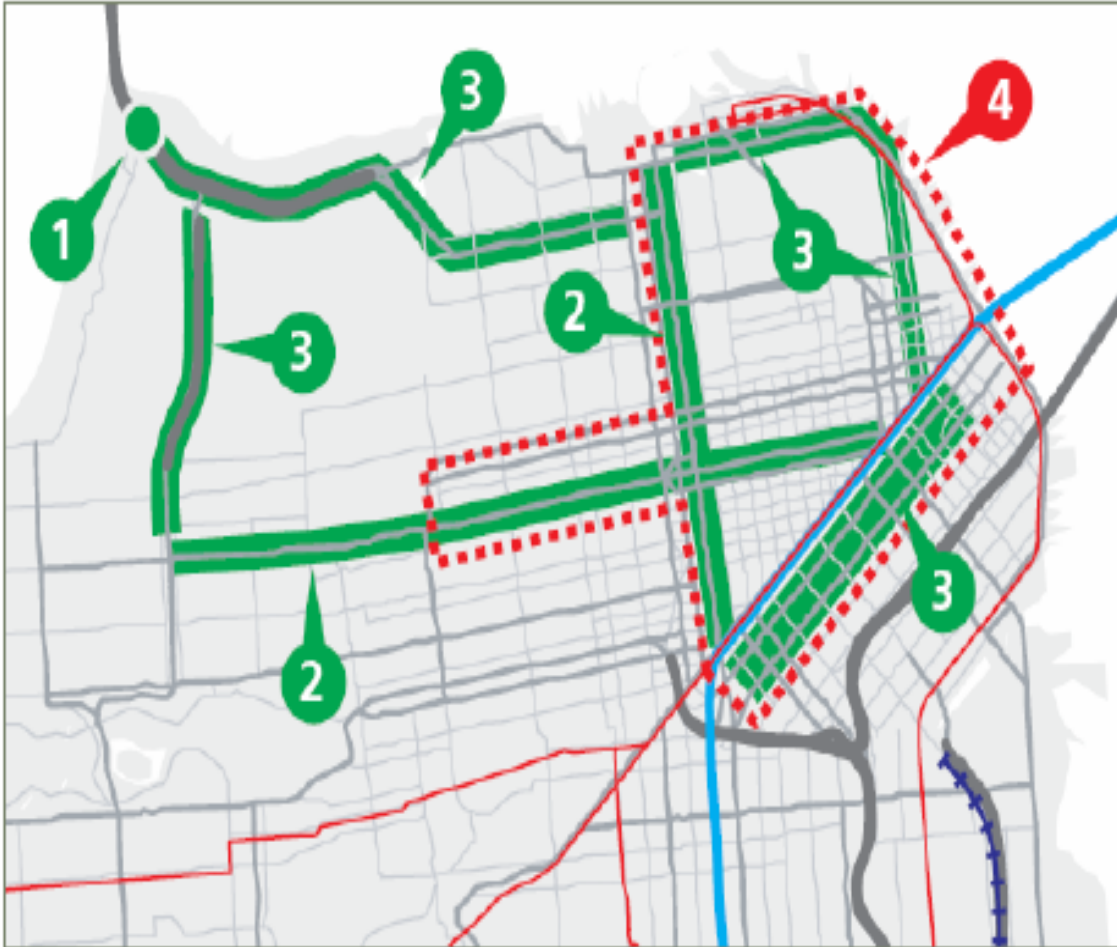
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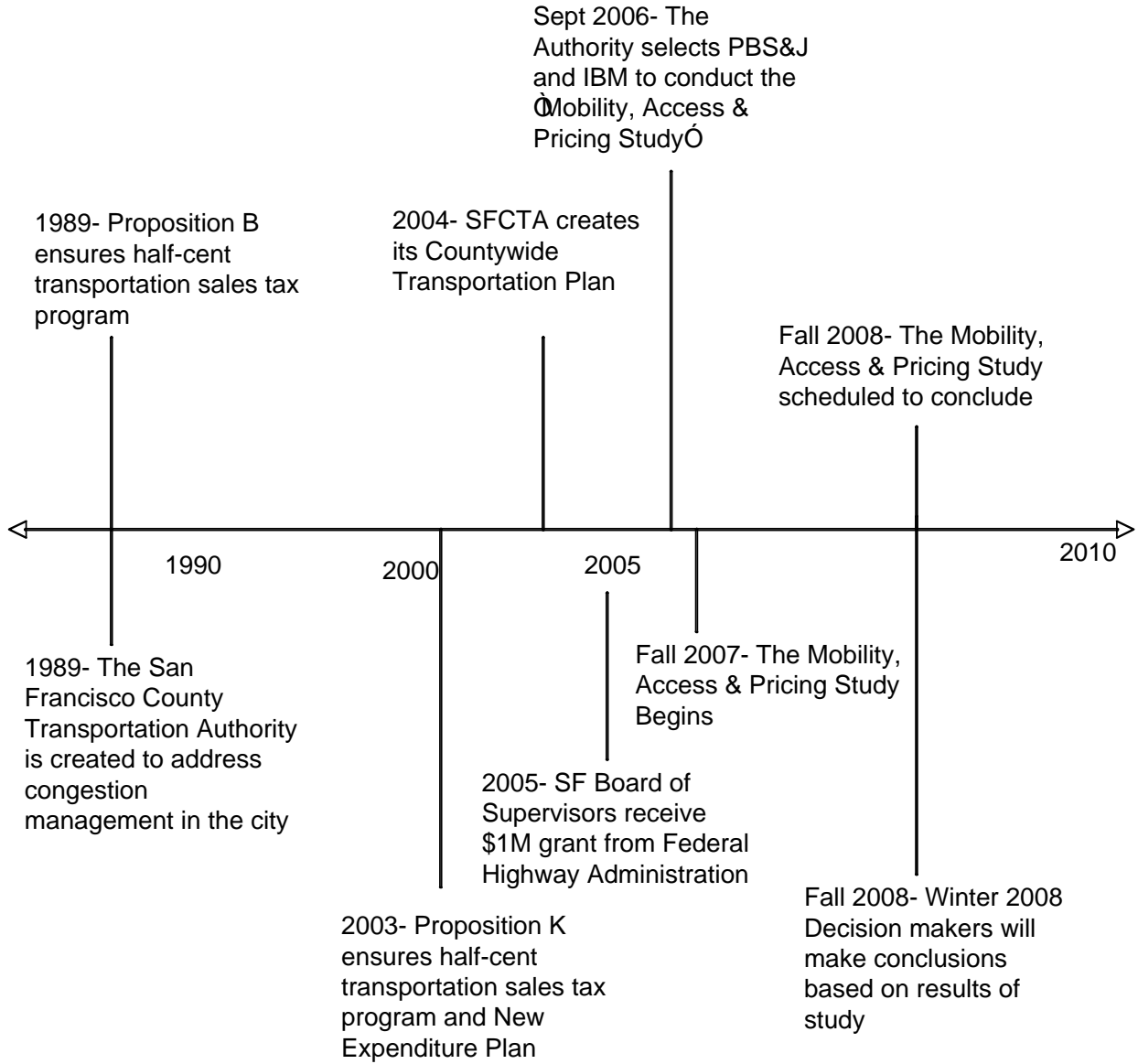
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## APPENDIX – A – Potential Congestion Pricing Area

1. Doyle Drive Value Pricing Program – Charges a toll fee
- 2,3 Arterial management – Signals
4. Smart Parking – Variable pricing, real-time information on parking availability



## APPENDIX B-TIMELINE



APPENDIX C – Stakeholder Analysis

<u>Policy Player</u>	<u>Role/Power</u>	<u>Stage of Cycle</u>	<u>Preference/Value</u>	<u>Motivation</u>
<b>Formal Players</b>				
SF Board of Supervisors	Governing Board of City	AS, A	1. Alleviate congestion 2. Raise City revenue 3. Improve environment of SF	Appease constituents
SF County Transportation Authority	Responsible for study	F	1. Alleviate congestion 2. Improve public transportation	Appease constituents
U.S. Department of Transportation	Awarded City with multimillion dollar grant for CP study	AS, F	Non-traditional methods should be studied in order to improve Highway system	Charged with responsibility of ensuring America's roads/highways are safe/technologically up-to-date
Mobility, Access & Pricing Study Team	Assess whether initiating congestion pricing is feasible	F	1. Traffic reduction 2. Improved environment	Direct mandate from Board of Supervisors and grant money
<b>Informal Players</b>				
Business Advocates	Interest group with lobby power	F	Congestion pricing would discourage people from shopping	Business profits
Transportation Planners	Provide expertise and advise decision makers	F, A	1. Alleviate congestion 2. Improve public transportation	Appease constituents
Opponent Commuters	Directly affected by policy	F	Would prefer to not pay to drive in certain portions of city	1. May not be able to afford to pay fees 2. Do not mind congestion
Proponent Commuters	Directly affected by policy	F	1. Most citizens approve across all income levels 2. Would pay to drive in city	1. Alleviate congestion 2. Save time 3. Help the environment

**APPENDIX D -**

**Potential Criteria-Alternative Matrix for Congestion Pricing in the City and County of San Francisco**

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Alt. 1: Do Nothing – Status Quo</b>	<b>Alt. 2: Charge fee for entering CBD</b>	<b>Alt. 3: Increase public transportation for routes and increased frequency</b>
<b>Costs:</b>	None	Minimal besides initial setup costs	Money for drivers, more trains and buses, and maintenance fees will be quite high
<b>Effectiveness – Will this policy lessen congestion in CBD</b>	Congestion will remain the same or worsen	Cities around the world have seen success using this policy	Most drivers will continue to do so even with improved transportation
<b>Equity: Commuters who do not drive</b>	They will not be affected other than possible degradation of services	Will not affect them other than a small increase in people on their trains/buses	Greatly help these people who rely on public transportation
<b>Equity: Commuters who can afford to pay</b>	They will not be affected but may remain in congestion	If they can afford to pay, this policy should not affect them negatively	If they can afford to pay, public transportation financing is negligible
<b>Equity: Commuters who cannot afford to pay</b>	These commuters will not be affected but may remain in congestion	Commuters may not be able to afford and therefore unable to drive and take care of their business	Commuters may be better able to afford fares, but otherwise would not see an equity change
<b>Equity: Members of the public in surrounding areas</b>	Cars may concentrate to surrounding areas	Less congestion, however areas still may be backlogged with CBD drivers/parkers	Transportation CBD would be used by all in surrounding areas
<b>Acceptability – Will this policy be acceptable amongst various stakeholders?</b>	It will be acceptable for the most part, although a growing % of the public is tired of congestion	A minimal fee should be popular amongst those who would like to lessen congestion and environmental degradation	Increase of public transportation should be acceptable for those who would like to lessen congestion and environmental degradation
<b>Risk</b>	Increased congestion/worsening environment	Risk is minimal, but can carry some risk depending on amount and type of charges	This option carries low risk as most people would prefer an improved public transportation system

Green: Criterion favors policy
Yellow: Criterion neither favors or opposes policy
Pink: Criterion opposes policy

<b>Summary of Results</b>	<b>Alternative 1 - Status Quo</b>	<b>Alternative 2 - Charge fee</b>	<b>Alternative 3 - Upgrade Public Transp.</b>
<b>Number of Green</b>	2	3	4
<b>Number of Yellow</b>	3	4	3
<b>Number of Pink</b>	3	1	1