

John Niles Comments to PSRC General Assembly, June 7

Thank you for this opportunity. I'm John Niles, a 30 year resident of Seattle, a transportation research consultant, research associate for Mineta Transportation Institute in California, and an advocate for cost-efficient transit as noted in your agenda packet.

I'm appearing today as a big fan of what PSRC, the State DOT and our State Transportation Commission are doing -- with Legislative authorization -- to bring road use fees with off-peak discounts -- permanent tolls -- to this region and this state.

Because of rising fuel efficiency and electric vehicles, these fees will inevitably, over decades, take over from falling gas tax collections. A version of road use fees may end up eventually being called a VMT tax, but "road usage fee" is better. This means paying public costs of infrastructure O&M and replacement for how much you drive every day -- and also where and when you drive. This is a key idea for transport financing in our time and onward.

Endorsement of these new forms of road tolls back in 2010 by this General Assembly lets PSRC forecast that expressway congestion around here in 2040 will be lower than today. That's remarkable!

The electronic tolling of the SR 520 bridge is a good example of gaining knowledge now of how road use fees work in practice. It's traffic-smoothing, transit-use-incenting, and revenue-raising simultaneously.

I'll conclude with an invitation that is pertinent to the T-2040 PSRC forecast that the private vehicle market share of all regional trips will still be dominant in 2040 -- 83%, similar to what it is now, 86%. Cars will still be doing most of the people movement in 2040 -- about half solo drivers, the other half HOV.

So I'm now actively working with our local but nationally-known electric vehicle expert, Steve Marshall, to ramp up a new non-profit called Center for Advanced Transportation and Energy Solutions, CATES.

We in CATES are already working with the University of Michigan, Joint Base Lewis McChord, HUD Region 10, and many others to conduct an integrated assessment of how much zero emission electric vehicles will contribute to the three E's of sustainability -- environment, economics, and equity.

CATES sees potential reduction of today's \$16 billion per year in State gasoline consumption as a key contributor to our economic vitality and national security. We can power many more of our cars not with petroleum, but with zero-carbon, hydro-generated electricity, a trend now beginning.

Here's the invitation: CATES is working with the Next Fifty Celebration of the 1962 World's Fair to produce a public forum Friday September 7 on electric vehicles and the telematics that empowers them, a Forum titled "Beyond Oil."

We've lined up energy guru and author Amory Lovins from Rocky Mountain Institute; Bob Lutz, creator of the Chevy Volt EV; Bryan Mistele CEO of real-time traffic forecaster INRIX; connected vehicle experts; and other participants from across the country.

September 7, Seattle Center, Save the Date, Beyond Oil. You are all invited. Details will become visible this summer. Thank you.

Questions? jniles@aboutcates.org <http://www.aboutcates.org>