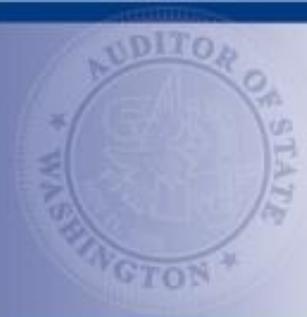


# Performance Audit: Highway Tolling

Washington State Department of Transportation



Overview and Objectives / March 2012



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## Audit Overview

Like many states, Washington increasingly uses tolls to reduce traffic congestion and to raise revenue for major transportation construction projects. Tolls are charged in the Puget Sound region at the Tacoma Narrows Bridge and the SR 520 Bridge over Lake Washington, and for the State Route (SR) 167 High-Occupancy Toll Lanes. Tolls are expected in the future on Interstate 405, the SR 99 Tunnel, SR 509, the I-5 Columbia River Crossing, and the I-5 Express Lanes.

The State Transportation Commission sets toll rates, and the Department of Transportation's Toll Division manages the tolling program, including system development and procurement, financial planning and management, and day-to-day operations. The Division hires contractors to assist in these duties.

In December 2009, the Department contracted with a private company to develop a statewide customer service center and to handle all back-office functions, such as billing and accounting. Problems with Tacoma Narrows Bridge customer accounts and delays in starting tolling on the SR 520 Bridge over Lake Washington raised questions about the new statewide integrated tolling system. Department officials estimate the state lost about \$1 million per week in toll revenue on SR 520 between April 2011, when tolling originally was expected to begin, and the actual start in late December.

## Objectives

Because tolls are an increasingly important transportation revenue source and are central to the Department's "Moving Washington" transportation management framework, the State Auditor's Office is conducting a performance audit to answer the following questions:

What lessons can be learned from WSDOT's challenges in implementing all-electronic tolling in Washington?

- What challenges did the Department experience, and what caused them?
  - ✓ What could it have done differently?
  - ✓ How has WSDOT responded?
  - ✓ Should the Department take additional actions to ensure the success of the tolling program?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of tolling operations models in other states, and what should Washington consider as tolling evolves?

## Timing

We plan to publish the results of the audit by the end of 2012.