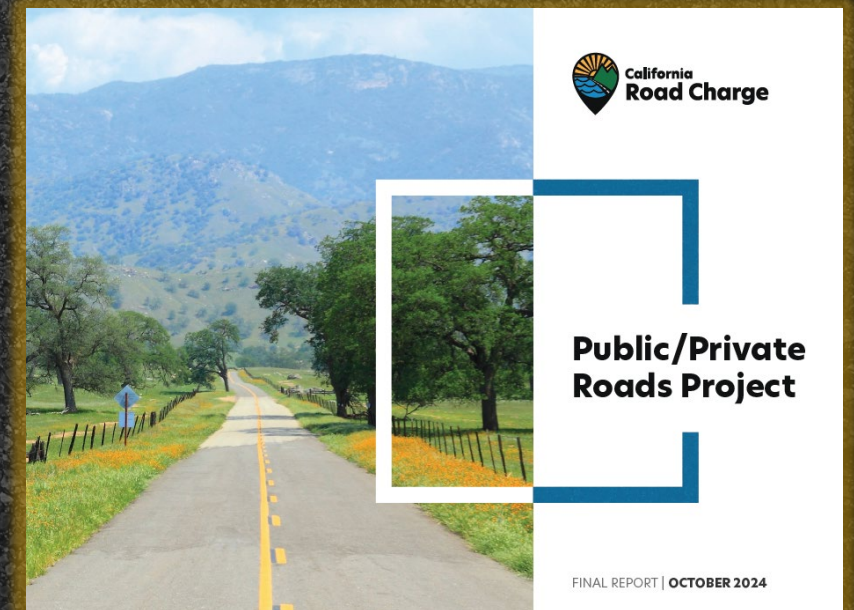




# California Road Charge

## Public/Private Roads Project

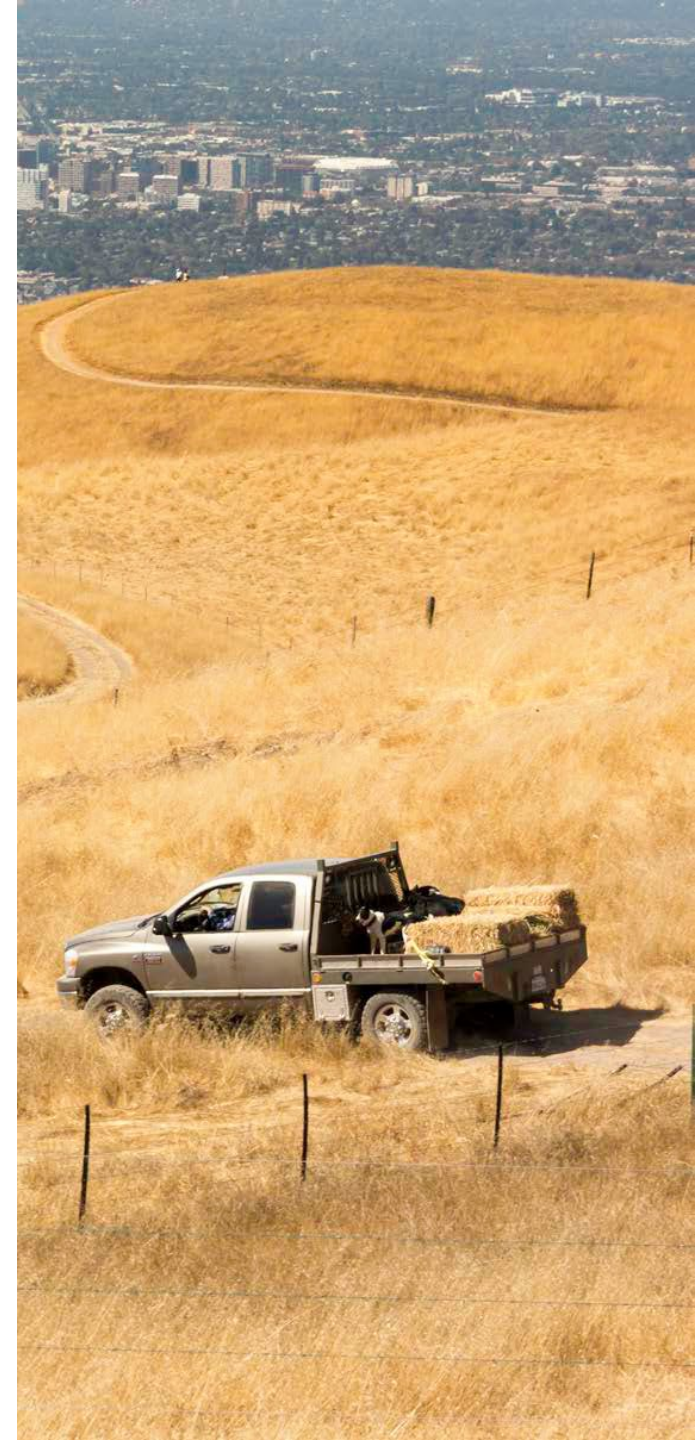
Final Report Overview  
April 18, 2025





# Project Goals

- 1) **PERSPECTIVES:** The Project focused upon the perspectives of two distinct populations of the state: rural and tribal communities. The primary objective was to engage participants from rural and tribal communities and bring their voice to the table, gather information regarding their use of public and private roadways, and investigate the unique impacts that a future Road Charge program might have upon these specific communities.
- 2) **TECHNOLOGY:** Members of the rural community are more likely to travel frequently on privately maintained roads, as are tribal community members on roads located on tribal lands. The Project tested the extent to which GPS technology could be leveraged to reliably distinguish between miles that were driven on public roadways, private roads, or roads traversing federally recognized tribal land.
- 3) **TOLLING:** This pilot explored the viability of a tolling agency serving as a third-party commercial account manager in a road charge system, by partnering in a small sub-pilot with California's Transportation Corridor Agencies (TCA, The Toll Roads).



# Recruitment Efforts

Rural and tribal communities are the most difficult groups in California to convince to participate in a pilot. With this in mind, the pilot incentive amount was significantly increased to \$250 and Caltrans employed different outreach strategies than previous pilots. Caltrans district Public Affairs helped identify small-scale opportunities for engagement with small local news resources. Large media was not pursued.

## RURAL

- Connected with established statewide organizations such as the Rural County Representatives of California, the California State Association of Counties, the League of California Cities, the Rural Community Assistance Corporation, the California Cattlemen's Association, and the California Farm Bureau Federation.
- Presented to County Boards of Supervisors and County Transportation Commissions in person.
- Traveling to these communities built significant goodwill, despite skepticism from community members and hard questions about the road charge concept.

## TRIBAL

- Formal Notification – Emails, follow-up phone calls to 110 federally recognized tribes, as well as non-recognized tribes and 214 contacts on the Native American Heritage Commission list.
- Gained Native American Advisory Committee guidance on meeting with the three tribal Chairmen's Associations and partnering with the National Indian Justice Center to spread word about the Project.
- Attended events, recommended by the National Indian Justice Center, the National Congress of American Indians.
- Articles and paid ads in culturally focused publications.
- Launched a "Bring-a-Friend" program
- Overall, the most effective recruitment approach was receiving approval from tribal leadership. Without this support, it was difficult to recruit members of tribes to participate in the pilot.

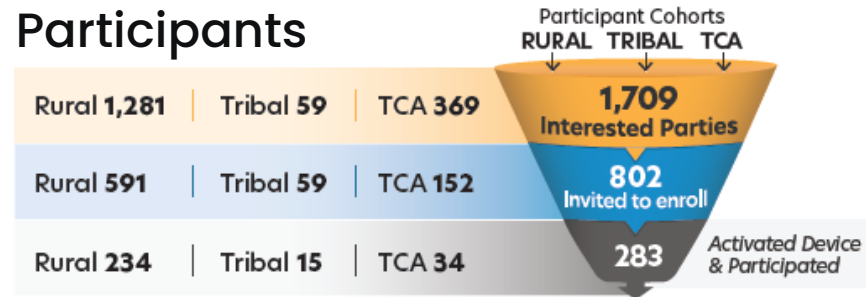
## TCA

- Caltrans worked in coordination with California's Transportation Corridor Agencies (TCA).
- Recruiting emails were sent to existing TCA customers, and TCA employees oversaw recruiting and operations.
- This included eligibility requirements, desired participant stratification goals, and recruitment were executed through TCA's existing channels with its customers.

# Pilot Statistics

The pilot started April 2023  
and concluded in  
September 2023

## Participants



## Pilot Vehicles by Fuel Type

Rural

Gas = 212

**EV = 13**

**Diesel = 8**

Alternative = 1 (E85 flex fuel)

## Tribal

Gas = 14

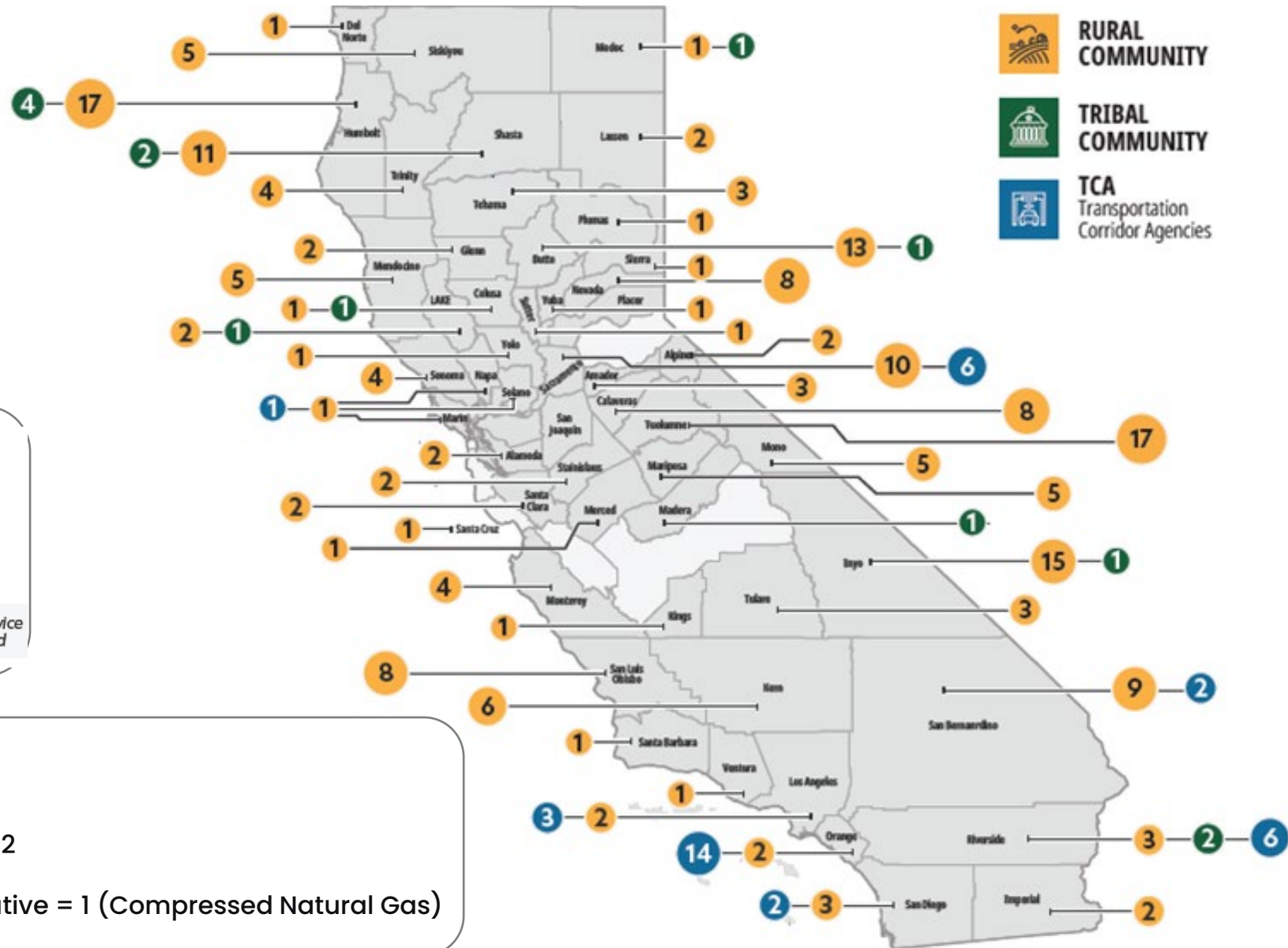
**Diesel = 1**

TCA

Gas= 32

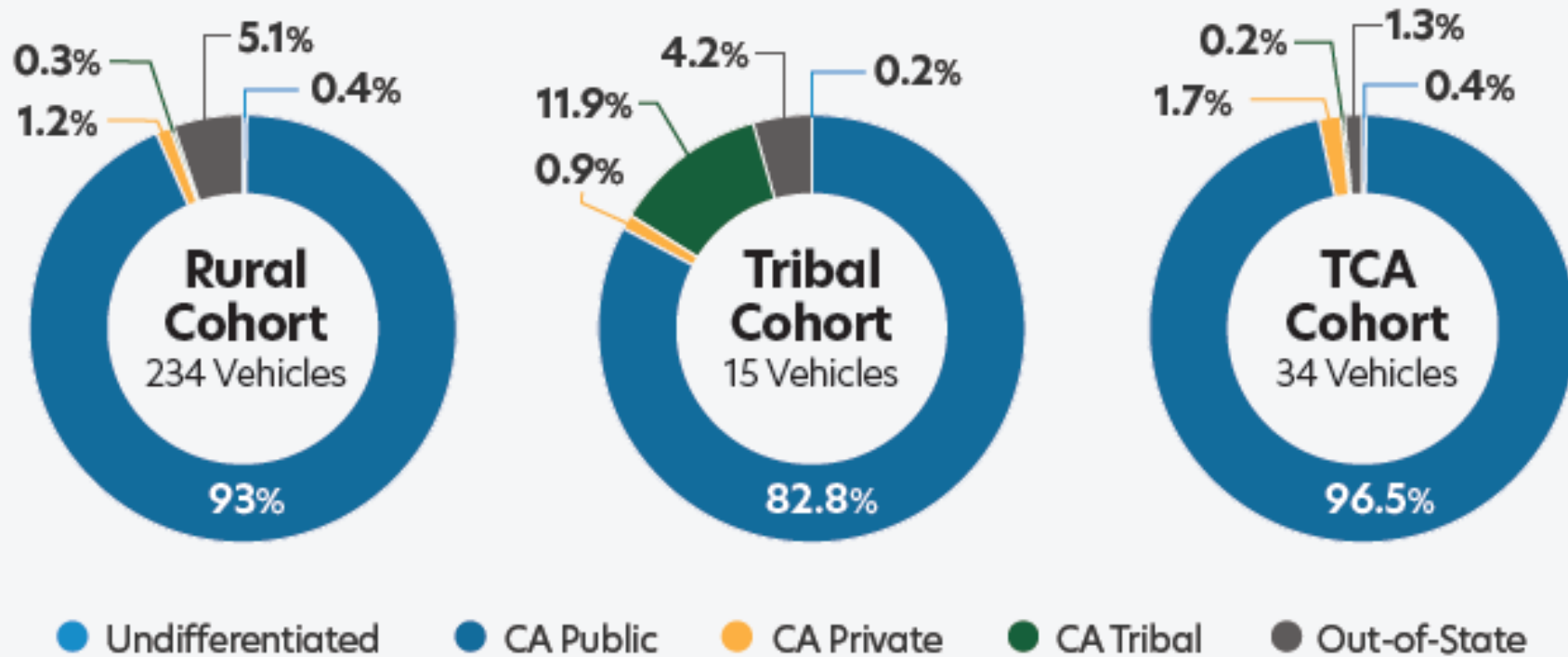
$$EV = 1$$

Alternative = 1 (Compressed Natural Gas)





# Mileage Differentiation Results



Roughly 19 out of every 20 miles were driven in-state by the Rural and Tribal Cohorts, while only one out of every 100 miles driven by the TCA Cohort was done so out-of-state.





# Communications Research

## COMMUNICATIONS RESEARCH

- General Statewide Survey
- Rural Communities Survey
- Tribal Communities Survey
- Focus Groups with Rural Communities
- One-on-One Interviews with Members of Tribal Communities

## OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT EFFORTS

- Targeted Organization Meetings and Presentations
- Tribal Engagement Efforts
- Local Government Presentations



# RURAL COMMUNITY PREFERENCES

## RURAL COMMUNITY PREFERENCES

Examining the perspectives of rural communities in the state revealed that satisfaction with the condition of local roads is extremely low among rural California residents. While many rural residents acknowledge the need for some additional funding for road repairs, project research showed a generalized mistrust of government that leads many rural residents to believe that the problem is not necessarily a lack of revenue, but government misspending. That said, rural residents agree that it is important to replace the gas tax with a sustainable revenue stream, and that EVs and hybrids should pay their fair share into road repairs and maintenance. Rural leaders understand there is a problem and want to be at the table helping the state find solutions.

## Privacy or Lower Taxes? ■

Knowing that the rural areas of the state tend to set high value on both paying lower amounts in taxes and privacy, this pilot tested which would be their priority if they had to choose between the two. The general answer appears to be privacy. Rural residents conveyed their sense that they would not personally benefit from not having to pay for the miles they drive on private roads and that they would end up worse off by sharing their location data.

It is important to restate that the sharing of location information is not necessary for the implementation of a statewide road charge program and would never be required. The preference for privacy over location sharing in rural communities is a key understanding discovered in this pilot. However, variation in preferences does exist in rural communities as well, reinforcing the importance of providing multiple options for reporting miles in a potential future program so that individual taxpayers can make the choice that works best for them.

## EV Only Preference ■

In general, rural communities expressed a strong preference for a split system whereby hybrid and electric vehicles pay a road charge, and others continue paying a gas tax, even though it would cost them more to continue paying a gas tax.

## Experience Still Translates to Support ■

Despite these perceptions and reactions among the rural community at large, those who actually participated in the Project and had first-hand experience with the road charge and the mileage-reporting device reported a significantly more positive overall experience. Further, 75 percent found road charge as a fair funding option for California that the state should continue to explore. Given the state's experience seeing this phenomenon happen across multiple pilots in multiple states, it seems practicable that should a road charge system be implemented in the state, many Californians would adapt to and accept it, even in rural areas.



# TRIBAL COMMUNITY PREFERENCES

## TRIBAL COMMUNITY PREFERENCES

When analyzing the preferences of tribal communities in the state, it should be noted that the Project team had more limited ability to draw conclusions from the tribal communities research conducted as part of this Project. Despite multiple outreach methods having been utilized during a relatively lengthy period of time, a relatively small number of community members participated in the research, meaning statistically significant conclusions cannot be drawn.

With that caveat, the research suggested that tribal residents were very dissatisfied with the condition of roads in their areas. Awareness around the gas tax tended to be high among this audience, and research hinted at a belief that the government collects enough revenue for road repairs, but the funds are distributed in an unfair way that disadvantaged their communities. Consequently, many perceived replacing the gas tax with a road charge as unnecessary, and while many agreed that electric vehicles should contribute to road maintenance, they believed road charge would be unfair to their own communities.

## Leadership Opposed ■

The Northern and Southern Chairmen's Associations are both strongly opposed to the imposition of a road charge on their members. They view it as a potential threat to tribal sovereignty, and expressed willingness to pursue court action if necessary. They challenge the government of California to engage with them early on this topic and in good faith.

## Concerns Over Impact to Gas Stations ■

The impact on tribal gas station revenue was also a key point of concern. Not all tribes own gas stations, but Caltrans estimates there are around 40 tribally owned gas stations within California. As sovereign nations, they do not collect state fuel taxes. Consequently, the tribal gas stations currently have a competitive advantage over other non-tribally owned gas stations in the area, which drives business to their locations. The revenue from these stations does not just fund tribal transportation needs, but many critical government services for these tribes. Thus, the potential repeal of the state gas tax, which would take place upon the implementation of a full road charge program, causes significant concern. For this reason, tribes would generally prefer an EV-only road charge program, which would keep the gas tax in place for gas-powered vehicles.

## Important Issue for the Federal Pilot ■

Securing reliable revenue to support their communities' needs is an important consideration for tribal leadership. Not all tribes have casinos or gas stations or other independent sources of revenue, making them reliant on often insufficient revenues received from the federal government. As the U.S. Department of Transportation embarks on a federal road charge pilot authorized by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, California encourages the consideration of tribal sovereignty and revenue matters to be a priority as this policy is explored at the federal level.



# Technology Findings

## GPS Technology Works...

- The six-month live pilot demonstrated that GPS technology most definitely can be used to successfully facilitate the accurate differentiation of public versus non-public roads.
- Subject to the granularity and accuracy of the map-sets and shapefiles being used.
- To safeguard the ongoing accuracy of the differentiation process, it is imperative that a reliable source of up-to-date map-sets and GIS shapefiles is identified relative to road networks and land ownership, and that a process is adopted for periodically updating such map-sets and shapefiles over time.

## ..... But Is It Worth It?

- A detailed breakdown of all device-related pilot costs revealed that a significant share of these costs was attributable directly to the collection, storage, and processing of GPS waypoints in support of the differentiation process.
- Given low levels of interest and number of private miles driven, is such a mileage reporting option worth the cost at this time?

However, it should be noted that the issue of private, tribal, and out-of-state miles likely affects states differently, particularly between the East Coast and West Coast. As states look forward to future interoperability, these issues need to be considered carefully.



# TOLLING AGENCY FINDINGS

California's Transportation Corridor  
Agencies (TCA, The Toll Roads)

- ▶ The sub pilot demonstrated that there is indeed a great deal of promise in the notion of California's existing tolling agency serving as a Commercial Account Manager for its Road Charge program.
- ▶ One impact would be the need to add additional customer support resources to address the inquiry workload introduced by the addition of road charge transactions to the account holder statements.
- ▶ TCA account holders expressed extremely high levels of satisfaction with their experience.
- ▶ In summarizing their experience with the sub pilot, TCA officials offered their viewpoint that *"partnering with a tolling organization is a great approach for mitigating costs in the deployment of a Road Charge program, while also leveraging experience on the public sector side ... it represents a true win-win."*







# Questions?

**Read the full report at**

**<https://www.caroadcharge.com/projects/public-private-roads-project/>**

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