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Transport Futures driving mobility pricing conversation

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In the five years since Transport Futures began, founder Martin Collier has seen the conversation shift from refusing to talk about road pricing to an acceptance of the method as a way to reduce congestion.

“In 2008, when I started asking people to support (toll road) Highway 407, everybody else ran in the other direction and now a lot of the same people are now holding their own conversations,” said Collier.

High occupancy toll (HOT) lanes were among the list of revenue tools to fund The Big Move released by Metrolinx this past summer, a move which Collier said is a sign of changing mindsets.

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The initial Transport Futures solely looked at road pricing as Metrolinx was looking at different ways to pay for transit at the time. The conference has since evolved to examine gas taxes, parking fees and other financial measures. It discusses the issues from various standpoints, such as public acceptance, leadership, smart growth and land use planning.

“We’ve been able to bring that conversation forward and now how can we implement these tools?” said Collier.

“Many other places are implementing these measures with amazing, incredible results in terms of congestion revenue, in terms of reducing health care costs because of less crashes, better good movement, and better transit service.”

Today (Nov. 18) will be the 10th installment of the conference, though there have also been several roundtable discussions and seminars in addition to the larger conferences. The events facilitate an easier discussion between attendees from government, academia, the business community, NGOs and the general public.

The fifth anniversary summit will include some of the best speakers throughout the years and some new ones that Collier says delegates can learn a lot from.

Gunnar Söderholm from the city of Stockholm, Charles Howard of the Puget Sound Regional Council and David King of Columbia University will sit on a panel examining the ways various cities have introduced mobility prices and the road to public acceptance.

“In Stockholm they showed people how it worked and the difference a congestion charge or a pricing system would make to how people make their decisions around getting around,” explained Collier.

“People saw how much better it made their commute times and the reliability of the transportation system. In the end they voted in a referendum to go with a congestion charge.”

Discussions will also look at public acceptance, transit pricing, car costs and parking.

While Collier has seen a shift in the mindset of the local population around congestion pricing, there needs to be the leadership to implement it.

“As a first step, I’d like to find a willing municipality who is ready...to try some pilot projects to see what will happen.”

Through pilots, said Collier, it becomes known about how congestion affects quality of life.

“There could be a better quality of life because right now I don’t think we’re paying the right price and it’s showing in terms of congestion and people being burnt out.”

He said there has to be more research done on the impacts of mobility pricing in Canada and what are the opportunities to create more jobs, whether it’s in construction or the Internet technology area.

The Transports Futures Fifth Anniversary Mobility Pricing Summit takes place at the Metropolitan Hotel in Toronto on Nov. 18.