



Los Angeles County Congestion Reduction Demonstration Project

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS
UPDATE #1/AUGUST 2008

Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Metro), California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), and other mobility partners have come together to find ways to rescue Los Angeles County residents from traffic congestion and gridlock. These agencies are working together to develop a package of solutions that will increase traffic flow and provide better travel options, especially during weekday peak hours. By combining their collective expertise and resources, the partners aim to discover ways to improve the performance of our transit systems and freeways, allowing area residents to benefit from reduced congestion and greenhouse gas emissions, increased travel time savings, and better trip reliability. Los Angeles County has also been provided an important opportunity to test congestion management strategies in a Demonstration Project that will be located within the I-110 and I-10 corridors, and if funding is available, the I-210 corridor. This Demonstration Project will allow Los Angeles County to test innovative ways to move people during busy peak-hour periods, now and in the future.

Below is an update of our most Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ). The FAQ will continue to be updated as new information becomes available.

A DEMONSTRATION PROJECT

Demonstration projects are by definition pilot or test programs. This demonstration project is through a US Department of Transportation grant which means that the implementation is almost entirely financed by the federal government. It is designed to test innovations to improve existing transportation systems. This specific, one-year-long demonstration project, which we call FastLanes, will:

- > Test innovative pricing strategies to alleviate congestion, maximize freeway capacity usage, and fund additional transit alternatives on High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) lanes on I-110 between 182nd Street/Artesia Transit Center and Adams Boulevard and on I-10 between Alameda Street/Union Station and I-605
- > Provide LA County \$210 million of federal funds to pay for desperately needed new infrastructure. The grant will help expand and upgrade transit improvements along the I-110 and I-10 corridors. For example, it is anticipated that the following projects may be funded by the federal grant:
 - New buses and rail cars
 - Expanded vanpools
 - Enhanced park and ride lots
 - Increased local bus access
 - Traffic management and support systems



- 
- An illustration of a multi-lane highway with several lanes of traffic. A white transit vehicle is in the rightmost lane, moving towards the right. Other cars in various colors (blue, red, grey) are in the other lanes. The highway is bordered by a green area on the left and a blue area on the right.
- > Be a flexible experiment that will be adjusted to achieve optimum transportation enhancing results that are not based on traditional preconceived notions as to what will work. If the concepts do not work, the demonstration program will be discontinued, but the region will still benefit from the investments in Park & Ride facilities, traffic control systems, transit/rail/vanpool services, new buses and associated amenities designed to improve the flow of I-110 and I-10.

BENEFITS

WHAT CHOICES AND BENEFITS WILL THIS PROGRAM PROVIDE MOTORISTS?

The program will provide carpoolers and vanpoolers with:

- > Guaranteed speed performance and reliability in the FastLanes part of the project
- > Improved free access to guaranteed-performance FastLanes for 2-plus carpools on I-110 and 3-plus carpools on I-10
- > Improved and expanded carpool and vanpool services
- > More convenient express transit options that serve their corridor routes
- > Enhanced park and ride lots

The program will provide single occupant drivers with:

- > Access, for a fee, to the faster, more reliable FastLanes they currently cannot use under the HOV program
- > Increased opportunity to choose better transportation alternatives, including an improved rideshare system, with more reliable travel speeds and time
- > A choice to shift to more convenient express transit options and vanpools that serve their corridor route
- > Continued free access to better-managed general purpose lanes

The program will provide transit users with:

- > Improved speed and reliability of express transit
- > Increased transit service choices with improved rail service, bus headways, connections, more express services, and, in some cases, new routes
- > More comfortable reliable rides with the addition of new vehicles and support equipment
- > Improved security and lighting at transit centers/stations
- > Enhanced park and ride lots

HOW WILL LOCAL COMMUNITIES BENEFIT?

In a County with freeway gridlock, skyrocketing gasoline prices and continuing air quality problems, increased transportation choices and improved travel efficiencies will benefit the overall well-being of corridor communities.

This will be accomplished by:

- > Providing alternatives for improved and faster access to businesses and residential communities along the corridor
- > Increasing the people-moving capacity of local freeways via new transit services, enhanced rail services, expanded vanpools, and FastLanes, thereby reducing congestion not only on the freeways, but also on local streets
- > Producing a better traffic flow on the corridor and utilizing advanced technology in new transit vehicles to help reduce vehicle emissions and greenhouse gas emissions and improve air quality
- > Increasing linkage of major employers with housing via expanded carpool and vanpool programs
- > Enhancing community revitalization or redevelopment initiatives through improved transit connectivity and expansion of vanpools

- 
- > Improving lighting and security at the Park and Ride facilities
 - > Retaining investments in transit, transportation infrastructure, and technological enhancements in the corridors

WHAT ARE THE LONG-TERM BENEFITS OF THIS PROGRAM?

LESSONS TO BE LEARNED

This program is part of the greater holistic approach to maximize the efficiency of the region's transportation system by managing the corridors through coordinated demand management strategies. The lessons to be learned will provide the data necessary for our transportation planners, community leaders and elected officials to make well-informed decisions in mobility planning for all of us. The FastLanes demonstration project will help us learn how we can better manage our transportation infrastructure to provide better travel choices, time savings and travel reliability for all area travelers. It will also illustrate the level of effectiveness of a travel demand pricing strategy that has proven to be quite successful both nationally and internationally.

IMPROVED TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE

The new equipment and infrastructure improvements provided (buses, rail cars, Park & Ride lots and traffic management) will continue to benefit travelers for years to come, even if the FastLanes demonstration project is discontinued after its one-year demonstration period. The funding of this project provides an infusion of much needed transportation funds to help address our already at-capacity freeway system – without the environmental and economic burden of building additional freeways.

CRITERIA FOR HOT LANE SELECTION

HOW WERE THE 10, 110, AND THE 210 CHOSEN FOR HOT LANES IMPLEMENTATION?

The primary criteria for selecting conversion of HOV lanes to FastLanes along the I-10, I-110, and I-210 corridors include evidence of the following:

- > High travel demand and traffic congestion levels
- > Availability of alternative travel modes, such as bus and rail service, along the HOV corridors and/or on the arterials and streets located in their vicinity
- > Existing HOV lanes (with sufficient length) that could provide significant travel time benefits

WHY IS THE I-405 NOT ON THE LIST OF PROJECTS?

First, there are gaps in the HOV lanes along the I-405 corridor, with one significant segment missing where construction will start soon. Second, this highway was not selected at this time because of the limited parallel and reliable modal alternatives along the corridor. This will be evaluated under Metro's Congestion Pricing Operating Plan which is a countywide plan that will review a broader range of options for future implementation.



FUNDING

WHAT IS THE SEQUENCE IN ACCESSING THE \$210.6 MILLION IN FEDERAL MONIES FOR TRANSIT ENHANCEMENTS?

The sequence for accessing federal monies is as follows:

- > Projects must be included in the Los Angeles Transportation Improvement Program, Metro's Long Range Transportation Plan and SCAG's Regional Transportation Plan.
- > Availability of funds to implement the HOT lanes must be certified by September 30, 2008.
- > State legislative authority to implement and operate the FastLanes must be obtained by October 15, 2008.

WILL THE STATE (CALTRANS) PAY FOR ANY PORTION OF THE PROJECT?

Caltrans has committed \$800,000 for developing the operating plan and will prepare the environmental documentation that is needed.

USE OF TOLL REVENUES

TO THE EXTENT THAT TOLL REVENUES EXCEED OPERATING COSTS, WHAT IS THE STRUCTURE CONTROLLING EXPENDITURE OF THE REVENUES?

The State law authorizing the project would specify the eligible use of the net revenues. State legislation for similar projects in California requires that net revenues be used for transit projects and other related improvements in/along the HOT lanes. Federal legislation allows for the use of net revenues for any project that improves the success of the operations of the HOT lanes. Metro's application to the USDOT stated net toll revenues will be used within the corridors for improvements such as additional transit facilities and service, subsidies for vanpools and funding for advanced traffic signal timing and arterial capacity improvements.

CAN PRICE ADJUSTMENTS BE MADE AFTER THE POLICY HAS BEEN APPROVED, OR ARE THE FEES GOING TO BE FIXED?

Fees will be adjusted according to the level of travel demand to guarantee reliable travel speeds of at least 45-50 mph and to avoid congestion. This is to be done electronically and without the need for the vehicles to stop to make payments, similar to the process in San Diego's I-15. Fees will be set higher during peak-periods of travel.

PLAN ELEMENTS

DID METRO CONSIDER A PLAN THAT INCLUDED ROBUST PARKING REFORMS IN THE GREATER DOWNTOWN LOS ANGELES AREA – SIMILAR TO CHICAGO'S CONGESTION REDUCTION PLAN?

Yes. The proposal that was submitted to the USDOT included an Intelligent Parking Management Program in downtown Los Angeles comprised of significant parking reforms that included variable pricing.

DOES THE AGREEMENT WITH THE DOT STIPULATE THE DURATION OF THE FASTLANES DEMONSTRATION PROGRAM?

The MOU with USDOT does not stipulate the duration of the FastLanes demonstration program. However, the application submitted to the USDOT indicated that the duration of the FastLanes demonstration will be one year.



WHAT IS THE LENGTH OF THE FASTLANES PROJECT?

- > The length of the I-10 HOT lane is 14 miles (28 lane miles).
- > The length of the I-110 HOT lane is 16.5 miles (33 lane miles).

IS THERE GOING TO BE AN ENVIRONMENTAL STUDY DONE ON THE PROJECT? WILL THERE BE MITIGATION?

Yes. Caltrans will prepare an environmental document and all impacts will be addressed. The environmental process will be an open and public process.

DOWNTOWN BOTTLENECK

WHAT IS YOUR PLAN TO ASSURE THAT THE DOWNTOWN BOTTLENECKS ON THE I-110 AND I-10 DO NOT WORSEN FOR AUTOS?

It is recognized that there will need to be operational improvements implemented at the northern terminus of I-110, to accommodate a smooth transition for users, from the FastLanes, onto the general purpose lanes of I-110, and/or local city streets. Metro and Caltrans are working closely with the City of Los Angeles Department of Transportation (LADOT) to develop interim measures to mitigate impacts to traffic flow where the facility terminates today. It is anticipated that the interim measures will be in place by opening day.

Currently, one of the more feasible long-term solutions is the construction of a “flyover” structure which would bridge over Adams Avenue and connect the FastLanes traffic from the I-110 Transitway directly onto Figueroa Street. This is a long-term solution and not part of the FastLanes Demonstration Project. However, a Project Study Report is included for funding by the FastLanes Demonstration Project and will develop the scope and cost of the “flyover” structure. Recurring revenue generated from HOT lanes on I-110 could be used to fund the “flyover.”

For I-10, the FastLanes terminate near Union Station. The current infrastructure accommodates a smooth transition for auto traffic destined for SR-101. However, for traffic destined for the Central Business District, Metro and Caltrans are also working closely with LADOT to develop interim measures to mitigate impacts to the traffic flow destined for downtown.

EQUITY

WILL THERE BE DISCOUNTS AFFORDED TO THE ELDERLY, POOR, AND STUDENTS IN ORDER TO MINIMIZE POTENTIAL IMPACTS?

The potential impact of tolling on low income commuters is one of the most-voiced concerns raised to date by numerous elected officials and community activists. Metro is sensitive to this concern, and recognizes the extent to which FastLanes may be perceived as being out of reach for those with limited financial means.

Metro intends to develop a program specifically designed to assist low income commuters. One proposal may be to provide FastLane credits for regular transit users which would enable them to redeem credits for free access to FastLanes on those occasions when driving a car is necessary. There are other promising and creative options currently being explored. Metro is committed to developing a system of comprehensive mobility improvements that are accessible for individuals of all income levels.



WOULD CARPOOLERS AND SOLO DRIVERS OF HYBRID VEHICLES HAVE TO PAY A TOLL TO USE THE HOT LANES?

- > I-110 has a 2-person minimum occupancy requirement at all times of the day. 2-person carpools on I-110 would not be charged a toll.
- > I-10 has different minimum occupancy requirements based upon the time of day. During the peak period, only 3-person carpools are allowed; while 2-person carpools are allowed during the off peak period. 3-person carpools would not be charged a toll. Analysis is underway to determine whether additional capacity exists to allow 2-person carpools to buy into the peak period by paying a toll. In addition, analysis is underway to determine whether charging a toll to 2-person carpools during the off-peak period will alleviate congestion and maximize the capacity of I-10 without shifting vehicles to local streets.
- > Hybrid vehicles with current access rights to the HOV lanes will not be tolled.

CHICAGO IS THE OTHER CITY TO RECEIVE A CONGESTION REDUCTION GRANT FROM USDOT, TO FUND A SIMPLE AND RELATIVELY NON-CONTROVERSIAL VARIABLE PARKING PROGRAM, WHEREAS THE SCOPE OF METRO'S PROJECT IS MORE COMPLEX. WHAT ARE THE PRIMARY DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THESE TWO PROJECTS?

Like Metro, the City of Chicago has also been selected by USDOT for a pilot program under the Congestion Reduction Demonstration Program. However, Chicago's overall program is vastly different, and generally not comparable to that of Los Angeles County.

The Chicago pilot, a variable parking plan proposal in downtown Chicago, is just one of several projects undertaken by the city over the past roughly two years aimed at both private equity investment in transportation infrastructure and congestion management. The first, a controversial 99-year lease concession agreement whereby the city transferred effective ownership and operation of the Chicago Skyway toll road to a consortium of Australian investment banks in return for \$1.8 billion in upfront cash, has resulted in immediate increases in tolls, with further increases planned over the next several years. Other projects have included the sale/lease of the Grant Park parking garages and plans to complete a concession-lease agreement for Midway Airport, similar to the Skyway transaction. The Chicago pilot proposed under USDOT's program is but one element in an overall plan that continues to be developed by city officials. Other proposals are likely to follow in the near term.

WILL AN ASSESSMENT OF THE IMPACT OF CONGESTION PRICING ON THE ECONOMIES OF AFFECTED COMMUNITIES BE PERFORMED?

Yes. The approved Scope of Work for the Los Angeles County Operating Plan includes an assessment of the impact of congestion pricing on the economies of the affected communities. The environmental process for the Project also provides an open and public process as another vehicle to assess and address these impacts.

PROGRAM EVALUATION

WHAT FACTORS WILL BE USED TO EVALUATE THE SUCCESS AND FAILURE OF THE PROGRAM?

The program will be evaluated according to the following criteria:

- > Minimum travel speed performance of at least 45 mph along the FastLanes
- > Impact of the FastLanes on the performance of the general purpose lanes
- > Increase in transit ridership along the corridor where the program is instituted
- > Increase in vehicle and passenger throughput
- > Travel speed reliability



WILL METRO RESERVE THE RIGHT TO RE-IMPLEMENT THE HOV LANES IF THE POLICY FAILS TO INCREASE MOBILITY AND DECREASE CONGESTION?

Performance of the program will be monitored and adjustments made accordingly. HOT lanes could return to HOV status if the FastLanes demonstration program is deemed unsuccessful.

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

WHAT IS THE MECHANISM FOR COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN THIS PROGRAM?

The Metro Board has awarded a 12-month consultant contract for developing a congestion pricing operating plan that includes a community outreach and education program. The baseline message to all community groups is that this travel demand strategy must work to provide benefits for everyone. Extensive outreach will include surveys, educational campaigns, presentations and opportunities to hear from a wide variety of constituents. Metro has commenced with the formation of corridor advisory groups to engage representatives of local cities, local governments, legislative staff, private and public agencies, as well as the community.

Initially, surveys will be conducted and the data analyzed to assess the public perception on key issues related to congestion-reduction, including pricing. These surveys will provide further guidance for conducting public outreach in Los Angeles County via community meetings, focus groups, workshops, and media. Outreach efforts will be tailored to educate stakeholders about potential impacts, proposed mitigations, and the range of viable travel choices available in the region. Included in the outreach plan is a diversified media program, rich in graphics, with the opportunity for broad distribution through DVDs, electronic media and through multi-ethnic media venues.

The consultant team commenced outreach efforts in June and has developed an accelerated program for community workshops and individual stakeholder briefings. To date, presentations have been made to regional councils, city councils, economic partnerships, community-based organizations and legislative staff in both the I-10 and I-110 corridors. The community meeting schedules will be posted on the Metro website at www.metro.net/FastLanes.

CORRIDOR SPECIFIC QUESTIONS

HOW MUCH CAPACITY IS AVAILABLE ON THE 110? HOW MANY MORE VEHICLES CAN BE ACCOMMODATED DURING RUSH HOUR AND NON-RUSH HOUR? WHAT PRELIMINARY MODELING OR STUDIES WERE COMPLETED TO SUPPORT THIS CONCLUSION?

Initial analysis of the traffic volume data shows that the highest volumes during the peak commute period occur on the northbound I-110 Transitway during the morning period. The highest volumes that are observed are for a short period (< 1 hour) during the morning commute period (defined as 6:00 am to 10:00 am). The existing I-110 Transitway is currently accommodating the traffic demand for that facility and still provides a minimum speed of 45 mph. The maximum design capacity of this facility is approximately 1800 vehicles per hour. The range of anticipated capacity on the northbound lanes is estimated between 200 to 500 vehicles during the morning commute period. As part of this demonstration program, additional analysis and modeling efforts will better define the available capacity in this corridor over the entire commute period, both morning and afternoon.



WILL THE DEMONSTRATION PROJECT INCLUDE AN ANALYSIS OF HOW MUCH ADDITIONAL TRAFFIC IS EXPECTED ON THE I-110 FASTLANES AND AN ASSESSMENT OF HOW LONG THE HOV-2 REQUIREMENT CAN REMAIN IN PLACE BEFORE DETERIORATION SETS IN?

Yes. Travel demand forecasting through modeling efforts and additional traffic analysis are currently underway. I-110 is a very mature and built-out corridor in terms of new employment and housing. There are still opportunities for expanded job generation as well as housing construction (in-fill housing) but they would not dramatically increase the demand in this corridor. It is difficult to predict how much additional traffic is expected and when the HOV-3 requirements are to be put in place without the forecasting, modeling, and traffic analysis.

IF FUTURE FUNDING BECOMES AVAILABLE, HOW WILL FASTLANES ON THE I-210 BE IMPLEMENTED PARTICULARLY GIVEN THAT THERE IS ALREADY SIGNIFICANT CONGESTION?

The I-210 corridor experiences a high demand for both the HOV and general purpose lanes, all of which evidence high levels of congestion. This corridor presents challenges that will require use of a broader and integrated program of travel demand strategies (including congestion pricing) and additional investments in buses and infrastructure.

USDOT has already required California to address the degradation that we are experiencing in these highly successful HOV lanes. One of the proposed strategies to address the degradation would be to raise the vehicle occupancy requirements in the I-210 HOV lanes to HOV-3 and implement congestion pricing to moderate the demand in the HOV/HOT lane to provide greater trip reliability and guarantee a minimum operating speed of 45 mph. Los Angeles County will need to address the degradation of the I-210 HOV lanes, whether this demonstration project moves forward or not.

An integrated solution will include efforts to enhance transit and rail services, as well as other complementary services, which will provide greater, more reliable travel choices and facilitate shifts to the other modes. Additionally, there are other travel demand strategies (connector and ramp metering) that are being implemented in this corridor to aid in congestion relief and provide greater trip reliability.