

Preliminary Study Shows Two-Person Carpools Slow Traffic on El Monte Busway During Rush Hours

(March 15) A preliminary analysis of El Monte Busway traffic indicates that since a two-person carpool experiment began Jan. 1, peak period speeds have slowed considerably and express bus trips are being delayed by as much as 4.9 minutes in the afternoon.

But, the study also shows that relieving congestion on the mixed-flow lanes has resulted in a slight net gain, per-hour, in the numbers of commuters who travel through that portion of the freeway during peak hours.

Buses averaged 43.5 mph

Before the state law requiring the 18-month two-person carpool experiment went into effect, three-person carpools and vanpools were averaging 60 mph on the 12-mile El Monte Busway. Buses, which serve two stations along the line, were averaging 43.5 mph and completing the run in 12 to 17 minutes.

Once the experiment took hold among commuters, time checks conducted Jan. 28 and Feb. 24 indicated that morning westbound traffic on the Busway increased an average of 1.8 minutes for a 16-minute trip (11 percent) and by an average of 4.9 minutes for a 17-minute afternoon eastbound trip (28 percent).

Observations by Caltrans and transit operators also indicated that enough vehicles had shifted from the mixed-flow lanes to the Busway "to roughly equalize the travel speeds on both," according to a report presented to the Board's Operations Committee. Average bus speeds slowed from 43.5 mph to 34 mph.

Trade-off in time savings

"All the benefit to auto drivers is at the expense of bus riders and three-person carpools," says Dana Woodbury, deputy executive officer, RTP&D. "These people no longer enjoy as much as a 30-minute travel time savings over mixed-flow auto users."

The California Highway Patrol and Foothill Transit operators reported a significant increase in the number of unsafe driving incidents at points where vehicles using the Busway attempted to merge back into the mixed-flow lanes. Foothill also reported more than 800 complaints from passengers during the first month of the two-person carpool experiment.

The Board's Operations Committee has requested a comparison of El Monte Busway performance with the Harbor Transitway and information about the impact of the experiment on ridership on Metrolink's San Bernardino line.

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