



Metro News Pressroom

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Texas Transportation Institute Study Says Metro's Efforts Making Dent in L.A. County Congestion

Traffic congestion in L.A. and Orange Counties tries the patience of the most patient driver. But there's some encouraging news. The Texas Transportation Institute's "The 2005 Urban Mobility Report" concludes that the multi-pronged approach of transportation agencies including Metro reduced the number of hours drivers in L.A. and Orange County wasted in traffic from 98 hours per year in 2002 to 93 hours in 2003.

"The Texas Transportation Institute's conclusion supports Metro's longstanding belief that a 'one size fits all' approach is not the best way to chip away at traffic congestion," said Roger Snoble, Metro's chief executive officer. "It takes a variety of tools, everything from carpool lanes to public transit to information technology, to better manage the traffic on our streets and highways."

While this year's report notes that a slowdown in California's economy in 2002 and 2003 may have resulted in a decline in cars and trucks on streets and highways, it also credits operational improvements, including an increase in freeway ramp metering and freeway surveillance cameras, and better incident management with lessening the annual hours of delay in Los Angeles and Orange County.

"We're starting to whittle away at this," said the Texas Transportation Institute's David Schrank, co-author of this year's Urban Mobility Report. "Knocking off three or four hours of delay per year is something you may not notice, but it's a start. As a major urban area makes more of these operational improvements, diversifies its land use and expands public transportation, those three or four hours will turn into six or eight."

While the annual Urban Mobility Report does not study the impact of individual transportation improvements, Schrank says each improvement may eliminate one to three percent of the traffic congestion that plagues large urban areas, including the Los Angeles region.

"What we're seeing is that each of these treatments eliminates some delay," said Schrank. "Because of that, the more you can put out there the more delay you can eliminate."

In fact, in recent years there has been a marked increase in the number of discretionary riders who use the Metro System's buses and trains. The number of Metro riders with a car or truck available increased from 22 percent in Fall 2002 to 30 percent in Fall 2004. The 2005 Urban Mobility Report acknowledges the benefits of public transportation, saying "if public transportation service was discontinued and the riders traveled in private vehicles, the 85 urban areas would have suffered an additional 1.1 billion hours of delay in 2003."

Schrank is encouraged by the performance of the Metro Rapid bus program, which in late June will reach the half way mark of a planned expansion to 28 lines, and says he's interested to see the impact of the Metro Orange Line, Metro's 14-mile exclusive transitway, when it opens later this year.

"The early information shows that bus rapid transit has fairly good ridership and is fairly successful," he said.

The report says expanding the capacity of streets and highways will be necessary to keep pace with development. One such project in L.A. County is the 101/405 freeway project, which will remove the chronic bottleneck from this overburdened interchange.

Schrank and co-author Tim Lomax say that the efficiency of roads can be increased through the use of information technology, including educating travelers about their options. In September 2004, Metro entered into an agreement with TrafficGauge, Inc. on a demonstration basis to provide real-time freeway traffic congestion information to the company for distribution to owners of TrafficGauge's hand-held electronic traffic monitoring device.

Schrank and Lomax suggest that changes must be made in the way that commercial, office and residential developments occur to sustain the "urban quality of life" and gain economic development "without the typical increment of mobility decline." Clearly public transit is at the forefront of such change in Los Angeles County and it is reshaping L.A.'s urban landscape. An informal survey conducted by Metro in 2004 showed that developers and their partners are investing more than \$4 billion in at least 30 new development projects around Metro stations throughout Los Angeles County.

Schrank and Lomax say it's a given that large urban areas will be congested and "realistic expectations are also part of the solution." But they are quick to point out that with a balanced and multi-pronged approach congestion "does not have to be an all-day event."

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