

## Enforcement Activities in Northern Virginia

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I would like to briefly review the types of HOV facilities we have in northern Virginia and talk a little about enforcement activities on each. The first facility is the I-95 HOV lane. The inside lane operates as an HOV lane in the peak-direction during the peak-period. A 3+ occupancy requirement is used on the lane. At the time the HOV lane was implemented, the outside shoulder was also reinforced and it is used as an active conventional lane during peak-period. This provides a total of 3 general purpose lanes and one HOV lane during the peak-period in the peak-direction. The shoulder lanes are closed to general traffic during the non-restrictive periods and function as emergency shoulders. However, it has been difficult to communicate this to drivers and there is some abuse of the restrictions.

I-395, or the Shirley Highway, includes two barrier separated reversible HOV lanes located in the median of the freeway. A 3+ occupancy requirement is also used on this facility. The I-395 HOV lanes have shoulders on both sides, making enforcement easier.

I-66 is the last HOV facility in the area. A 10-mile segment of I-66 is reserved for HOVs during the peak-hour in the peak-direction. This provides a two-lane exclusive HOV facility. A 3+ occupancy requirement is used. There is an exemption from this restriction for traffic going to and from Dulles Airport. This exception does cause some problems from an enforcement perspective.

I-95 was opened in the northbound direction in 1985 and in the southbound direction in 1986. At first, a 4+ vehicle occupancy requirement was used, but in 1989 this was lowered to 3+. The diamond lanes will continue to operate until 1994 or 1995 when the extension of reversible lanes to Woodbridge is complete. The HOV restricted periods are from 6:00 a.m. to 9:00 a.m. in the morning, northbound, direction, and 3:30 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. in the afternoon, southbound, direction. During the morning peak-hour, from 6:30 a.m. to 7:30 a.m., the violation rate in the diamond lane is about 24%. During the peak-period the violation rate is 46%. Both of these levels are unacceptable. The problem along most of the diamond lane length is that there is no room for enforcement activities. There are only a few spots with adequate room to pull violators over.

I-395 was initially opened to buses in 1969. Carpools and vanpools, with 4+ occupants, were allowed in 1973. The traffic management system was added in 1985. In 1989, the vehicle occupancy level

was lowered from 4+ to 3+. The HOV restricted period is from 6:00 a.m. to 9:00 a.m. northbound, and 3:30 p.m. to 6:00 p.m., southbound. The violation rate during the peak-hour, from 6:45 a.m. to 7:45 a.m., is approximately 6 percent. During the peak-period the violation rate is around 17 percent. The difference in violation rates between the diamond lanes and the barrier separated lanes is very noticeable. This is due to both the barrier separation and the shoulders which provide space for enforcement activities. The shoulders also provide space for disabled vehicles and incident management activities.

I-66 was initially open to HOV traffic in 1982. The Dulles connector road was open in 1983. The traffic management system was implemented in 1985. The vehicle occupancy requirements were lowered from 4+ to 3+ in 1986. The HOV operating hours are 6:30 a.m. to 9:00 a.m. eastbound, and 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. westbound. During the peak-hour, from 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 a.m., the violation rates average about 38 percent. In the peak-period this increases to 52 percent. However, some of these vehicle may be exceptions going to Dulles Airport. The problem is that there is no easy way to measure what percent of the violators these may be. Dulles must be the busiest airport in the world, because it seems that all the single occupant vehicles are going to or from there. There are good enforcement areas on I-66, so this is not a problem.

Northern Virginia implemented a HERO program in 1989, modeled after the program in Seattle. Signs are located along the facilities encouraging motorists to call a toll free number to report violators of the HOV requirements. We were overwhelmed at the beginning with the response we received. During the first seven months, the

response was very high. When a call is received, an initial informational letter and brochure is sent to the owner of the vehicle reported to be in violation of the HOV occupancy requirements. The attempt here is to inform the individual about the purpose and requirements of the lanes, and the types of transit and rideshare services available in the area. Since we do have a large number of visitors and new arrivals in the area, we feel this first educational step is very important. If the violator is reported a second time, a second letter is sent from the department. The wording of this letter, while still informational in nature, is a little stronger. The letter indicates that if the violations continue, the individuals name will be turned over to the state police for enforcement. The third letter comes from the state police indicating the vehicle has been placed on the enforcement list.

The results of the program indicate that it has been successful at lowering violation rates. During the first seven months of operation some 54,000 calls were received. Of this, 70 percent were on the I-95 diamond lanes, 3 percent were on the I-394 lanes, and 27 percent were on I-66. Seventy-six percent of the calls were on first time violators, with 21 percent second time violators, and only 3 percent were reported a third time. Thus, it seems that the program has reduced the number of repeat offenders. Of course, the HERO program is not the total answer to reducing violation on the HOV facilities. However, used in combination with other enforcement approaches it can have a positive influence on reducing HOV violation rates. We will continue to use the HERO program, with some modifications. Due to the Dulles airport exemption on I-66, the HERO signs have been removed from that facility. We found we were receiving a large number of calls on vehicles who owners claimed they

were going to or from the airport. The signs were relocated to the ramps where we have enforcement and beyond the Dulles connector road.

The other recent enforcement program implemented in northern Virginia is the ticket by mail program. This program has enabled the state police to ticket in areas that we were unable to before. Last year, legislation was passed allowing a change in the ticketing process. This change allows a police officer to ticket by mail for an HOV violation. It made the violation a traffic infraction, and thus no points toward revocation of the drivers license are assessed. There is a \$70 fine; a \$50 fine and \$20 court cost, associated with the violation that the registered owner of the vehicle is responsible for. However, the ticket is rebuttable if the registered owner wishes to appear in court and testify under oath that they were not operating the vehicle.

The ticket by mail program has increased by 4 or 5 times the number of tickets one officer can issue. The program has not been without problems, however. We feel most of these can be addressed and we feel the program has resulted in a number of benefits. The violation rates have been reduced, traffic flow is not interrupted as much as it is with normal enforcement methods, and the safety of the police officer and the motorist are enhanced. These are all important points. In addition, few violators are actually going to court to fight the tickets. Initially, all violators were required to appear in court. This was changed so that now only individuals wishing to fight the ticket have to appear in court. Approximately 80 percent of all observed violators are mailed tickets. Some vehicles, such as rental cars, some out-of-state vehicles, and company owned vehicles

are not sent tickets. Officers are also now momentarily stopping the vehicles to obtain the drivers license or social security number to ensure that the proper individual receives the ticket. The ticket is then sent by mail to this individual. Even stopping the vehicle to obtain this information is much shorter than the 15 minutes or so it normally takes to issue a citation. However, there are limited areas to pull vehicles over on some of the facilities, restricting this method.

We continue to look at additional ways to improve all of these programs. A recent evaluation within the agency recommended continuing the ticket by mail program and expanding its capabilities through automation. I do not think we were prepared for the large volume of summons the program has generated. To make it more effective, a consistent ongoing program is needed. Automation of the whole system would greatly improve its efficiency, especially in terms of writing the tickets and mailing the letters.

In conclusion, I would like to stress the importance of enforcement activities to making HOV facilities work successfully. Enforcement needs to be considered in the planning and design of HOV lanes, and in the operation of the completed facilities. The recent experience in northern Virginia with the HERO and ticket by mail programs seems to indicate that these types of approaches can reduce violation rates and generate public awareness and support for the HOV facilities.