

CLOSING SESSION

The Future of HOV Facilities

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I would like to take this opportunity to share with you some of my thoughts on the future of HOV facilities. I consider it an honor to be asked to make a few concluding comments to the HOV conference on a subject that I find of intense interest.

To start my comments I think it is appropriate to step back in time and take a look at where we have been, why we are where we are, and how we got here in the development of HOV facilities. As many of you are aware, the development of HOV facilities in this country dates back many years. However, most of this development has occurred in the last 20 years. I think by examining what has happened in the last 20

years we can get a better perspective on what is likely to happen over the next 5, 10, and even 20 years.

In the late 1960's and early 1970's, many people questioned whether HOV facilities would really work. Given these concerns, there was a great deal of uncertainty and anxiety over the development of HOV projects. However, it was clear at the time that we could not continue to operate our highway facilities in the same way that we had in the past, as most metropolitan areas were having a difficult time responding to the continuing dramatic increase in traffic and vehicle miles of travel. At the same time, the financial capabilities of many areas and the federal highway programs that had been used in the past to fund major capital improvements, were changing.

As a result, most metropolitan areas began to realize that building more highways to solve mobility and traffic congestion problems was not feasible. This resulted in the re-examination of alternative approaches to addressing traffic growth. HOV facilities emerged as one realistic approach to accommodating this growth. The emphasis turned to moving people rather than vehicles. Many of the early HOV projects were implemented as part of Transportation Systems Management (TSM) programs, and TSM became a major focus of transportation programs in many areas during the 1970's. High-occupancy vehicle facilities were an important component of many of these TSM programs. This was a major step in taking a different approach to addressing the traffic problems we were facing.

The projects initiated during the early 1970's have been referred to at other sessions throughout the conference this week. These included the Shirley Highway

HOV lanes in northern Virginia, the contraflow lane on the approach to the Lincoln Tunnel in New York City, and many other highly successful projects. The Lincoln Tunnel contraflow lane currently carries approximately 35,000 people or person trips during the morning peak hour. It has been estimated that maintaining the same level of service as this single contraflow lane provides would require some 20 new tunnels under the Hudson River. Thus, it is obvious that the contraflow lane does have a very significant impact on traffic flows in that corridor.

While the Lincoln Tunnel contraflow lane probably represents that high end of the person-carrying capacity of HOV facilities, there are many other examples of successful projects. The Shirley Highway HOV lanes, which many of us had the opportunity to tour this week, have added greatly to the person-carrying capacity of a very important freeway corridor. The Shirley Highway HOV facility carries as many people as some rail systems in our major metropolitan areas.

Another of the successful early projects was the El Monte or San Bernardino Freeway Busway in Los Angeles. Like the Shirley Highway HOV lanes, the El Monte Busway started as a bus-only facility. In 1976, two years after it first opened to buses, carpools were allowed on the facility, partly as a result of a strike by bus drivers. Initially, carpools with 3 or more occupants were required to obtain a permit to use the facility. The permit - only requirement was later dropped, and today the facility is open to buses, vanpools, and carpools with three or more occupants. The San Bernardino Freeway Busway is a good example of a very cost-effective method of moving people in a congested corridor.

There are many other examples of HOV facilities implemented during the 1970's, and the decade ended with a good deal of interest in HOV lanes in many parts of the country. However, there were still relatively few projects in operation at that time. The interest was there, but the number of operational projects was limited. One of the interesting aspects of the development of many of these early HOV projects was that transit agencies and highway agencies started to work together in partnership, sharing common goals. Transit and highway agencies began to realize that they shared the common objective of moving people not just vehicles. I consider this one of the greatest results of the HOV efforts during the 1970's.

The 1980's saw a slightly different focus. The attention of transportation professionals had changed from one of questioning the feasibility of HOV facilities to examining the types of facilities that should be built and how they could best be planned, designed, and implemented. Most metropolitan areas continued to experience significant increases in traffic congestion during the 1980's. Better management of existing facilities and moving people, rather than vehicles, became the focus in most areas.

During the 1980's, a variety of different HOV projects were implemented across North America. In Ottawa and Pittsburgh, exclusive bus-only facilities were developed on exclusive rights-of-way. These represented slightly different approaches than the HOV projects that had been implemented earlier. In Seattle and Houston, major HOV projects were developed on a number of freeways, HOV facilities were opened in Orange County, California and many other projects around the country were also implemented during

this period. There was a growing commitment to HOV facilities.

There are now some 40 major HOV facilities in 20 metropolitan areas. This is quite a growth from the first projects back in the early 1970's. With this background, I would now like to address the future of HOV facilities; where are we going? There are six general areas I would like to cover.

First, I think the time has come for HOV facilities in this country. HOV projects are becoming a very important element in our total transportation system. In many corridors HOV lanes represent a very cost-effective method of moving people in fewer vehicles. This has been demonstrated in many of the examples presented throughout this conference. The numerous projects in planning, design, and construction around the country provide a good measure that many agencies are now realizing the benefits that HOV facilities can provide.

Second, I think there will be more emphasis on the development of HOV systems. While there is some disagreement over how the term "system" is defined, I would suggest that it means providing HOV users with a way to travel throughout the region at speeds that provide travel time savings over single-occupant vehicles. This system approach provides greater acceptance for HOV facilities on the part of the general public and also greatly increases mobility in our urban areas.

Third, I think HOV facilities will lose the "step-child" image they have in many areas. HOV projects are being recognized as an important factor in alleviating congestion problems in our major urban corridors.

Fourth, with the increased emphasis on regaining the United State's lead in transportation technology, there will be a significant investment of funds for the development of what is called Intelligent Vehicle Highway Systems or IVHS. HOV facilities appear to be appropriate for the testing and development of many of these projects and for the initial application of many of the advanced technologies. This is an area that must be pursued actively.

Fifth, I think we will see an increased involvement of the private sector in the development of HOV facilities. In many areas, air quality regulations are placing specific requirements on developers and employers to reduce trip generation levels. Thus, the private sector has become more active in working with public agencies on different approaches to reducing traffic congestion levels and air quality concerns. HOV facilities are being considered in many areas to achieve these objectives.

Sixth, due to the acceptance and success of HOV facilities, I think we will continue to see greater cooperation between highway and transit agencies on a variety of projects. Many transit agencies are broadening their view, and their definition of transit now includes carpools and vanpools. Instead of looking at carpools and vanpools as competition to regular transit service, most agencies now view these as part of the family of transit services. The American Public Transit Associations' "Transit 2000 Plan" is evidence of this support for the development of HOV facilities.

In summary, I feel that the future of HOV facilities is very bright. The only limitation we have is the creativity and imagination that each of us uses to address specific problems in our metropolitan areas.

We have a great product. We have a product that continues to be improved as we gain new experiences from existing projects. Sharing our experiences through conferences like this, is needed to ensure that we continue to improve and move forward with the development of facilities that will enhance urban mobility. HOV facilities are one approach that will help achieve these objectives. Our biggest challenge now is to deliver the HOV projects that are being planned and designed.