The Urban Mass Transportation Administration Perspective on HOV Facilities

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I appreciate the opportunity to participate in the program today for the 5th National Conference on High-Occupancy Vehicles (HOV). I join Dean in congratulating the convenors of the conference for the excellent job they have done. UMTA is proud to be a co-sponsor of the conference. Administrator Brian Clymer sends his best wishes for a successful conference and regrets that he could not be here. The intensity of the reauthorization process, which I will discuss, prevented him from leaving Washington, D.C.

The continued growing interest in HOV facilities is impressive. The fact that this is the fifth national conference confirms the continued interest in this topic. Also, from the perspective of intermodality, the development of HOV operations is a remarkable example of cooperation between two administrations, the Urban Mass Transportation Administration (UMTA) and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA).

It is appropriate that the conference is being held in Seattle, which was an early leader in the development of HOV projects. One of UMTA's earliest HOV efforts, in what was then known as the Bus Priority Demonstration Program, was initiated here. I'm sure some of you recall the Blue Streak Project which was conceived in the late 1960's by Don Smith of Seattle Transit. Seattle Transit was the independent agency under the city of Seattle responsible for public transportation. It later was a department of the city and then of course became part of Seattle Metro.

Don Smith was one of the early pioneers in the development of HOV facilities. He was the architect of an express bus on freeway plan for the city of St. Louis in the 1950s before moving to Seattle. Unfortunately, the St. Louis plan never materialized. It wasn't until 1970, with assistance from UMTA, that one of Don's creative ideas for improved bus service was implemented. He retired soon after the project became operational. Jim Patrick succeeded him and is still on the staff of Metro, and I believe he is here with us today.

The Blue Streak Demonstration Project included a 500 car park-and-ride lot near the Northgate Shopping Center about 8 miles north on I-5, express buses on the reversible lanes of I-5, and an exclusive bus off-ramp connection to the CBD streets. It was a relatively simple improvement, but it provided proof that commuters could be attracted to high quality bus service. This theme has been expanded over the years in the Seattle area. The agencies responsible

for the Seattle system are to be commended for becoming one of the leaders in the operation of HOV facilities.

The 1970s generated other important HOV demonstration projects. These included the Shirley Express Bus Lanes and the El Monte or San Bernardino Freeway Busway. These projects eventually lead to the development of the term high-occupancy vehicle facilities that has come to represent a wide range of activities being pursued in many urban areas.

While we have seen a number of HOV projects implemented, this is only the 5th national conference. This provides an indication of the time and commitment it takes to develop new ideas. This is especially important to note as we are at an exciting point in the history of HOV development.

The potential for improving the operation of HOV facilities using Intelligent Vehicle Highway System (IVHS) technologies is enormous. This applies to both freeway and city street HOV facilities. Some of you are aware that the Advanced Public Transportation Systems Program (APTS) was announced by UMTA Administrator Clymer at the IVHS America meeting in March. Information packets on this program are available at the registration area of the conference. A new technical committee of IVHS America, the Advanced Public Transportation Systems Committee has also been formed. This group is organizing following the elements of the APTS program with one important exception that will interest you.

One of the four program elements has been broadened to include the general area of HOV facility operation. This provides a wide range of opportunities to consider the application of IVHS technology for assisting HOV facility operations. A similar change has been made to the APTS program to fully support this broader interest. I might add that we are still accepting membership on the IVHS America committee. Anyone interested in participating should contact Ron Fisher or me either during the conference or in Washington, D.C.

A few areas that will be examined under this element include improvements such as traffic signal preemption for buses on major arterials. There appears to be a need for an improved data base on the range of potential HOV and related improvements on city streets. Also, UMTA is especially interested in supporting operational tests of innovative enforcement methods for HOV lanes. We are currently participating in an evaluation of IVHS technology applications to HOV operations being conducted by the University of California, Berkeley. I understand information on this research project will be discussed tomorrow. A joint federal, state, and local effort to operationally test the more promising of these technologies should be moving forward soon.

Let me also note the very close relationship I see between successful HOV facility development and the other three elements of our Advanced Public Transit System program. The first element, market development, is aimed at applying the improved information coming from IVHS activities to building awareness of public transportation options. If we are successful in attracting more solo drivers to transit and ridesharing, the demand for HOV facilities will increase. Thus, market development and customer interface elements, the second supporting component, will help commuters become users of public transportation. For example, better signing that allows real-time updates on service using changeable message technologies can be a big help to transit

users. The third element, vehicle operations and communications, focuses on such things as automatic vehicle location technologies necessary to provide this real-time information. I hope you can begin to see the synergism between the different elements of the Advanced Public Transit System Program and HOV operations.

I think the 1990s will be a very exciting decade. I think we will continue to see a vast growth in HOV operations in different parts of the country. A variety of significant opportunities exist, along with the potential for major progress in a number of areas.

I think these opportunities are important for a number of reasons. Last week I attended a meeting at which UMTA and FHWA administrators Brian Clymer and Tom Larson shared the podium. The subject concerned the issue of urban mobility and demand management. Both administrators were in agreement that we are not going to build our way out of the stifling congestion which plagues most of our urban centers today -- either through new highways or through new transit systems. Both identified better management of the billions of dollars in investments which have been made in the transportation systems as the key to dealing with these issues.

HOV lanes and the sophisticated systems necessary to make them work effectively are going to be even more necessary in the future. Also, policy changes needed to even the playing field between transit and auto usage will be needed. One key issue is the impact of parking and pricing policies, including the inequitable tax treatment of employee provided parking and transit subsidies. Dean Carlson has already mentioned some of the efforts along these lines.

In addition to the recognized need to alleviate urban congestion, other federal and state laws are providing additional emphasis related to clean air and environmental concerns. Of course, all of these programs take money. I would like to share my perspective on how the department's new legislation will assist communities in the HOV arena.

Under the reauthorization, the federal transit assistance and federal highway programs are being unified. This represents a major change from the current approach. The reauthorization will increase the intermodal flexibility of DOT program funds. It will be possible to supplement discretionary dollars from the mass transportation assistance program with flexible formula dollars from the highway program. Funding flexibility will occur in both directions, as UMTA formula funds may also be used for highway projects, if the area has a "balanced local approach" for funding transportation improvements. The concept is to allow local governments to make the best decision on what is needed without being constrained by the size of highway or transit funds or by which program requires the smaller local share. HOV facilities satisfy both programs. Thus, it would appear the opportunities for funding HOV improvements are well provided for in the reauthorization.

As I noted, other federal and state programs will also influence transit and highway projects. For example, the 1990 Clean Air Act Amendments have planning requirements that will impact transit. For areas in the extreme or serious ozone violation categories, specific enforceable transportation control measures must be adopted to offset any growth in emissions resulting from an increase in vehicle miles of travel. As Dean already mentioned, major employers -- those with more than

100 employees -- are required to increase their employee commuting vehicle occupancy levels by 25% above current standards. The increased use of transit and techniques such as HOV facilities will surely be a major cornerstone of many transportation control measure plans and employer vehicle occupancy plans.

Air quality control plans are becoming a regular part of life in many urban areas. I understand the Southern California Air Quality Control District now requires employers in central Los Angeles to raise occupancy rates for commuters to 1.7 and to 1.5 in the surrounding area. These types of requirements are being debated and considered by many state legislatures, including here in Washington. Fortunately, the quality of the air here is still relatively good. In addition, the commitment to keep it that way is high. Thus, HOV facilities continue to be considered as an important element in the approach taken in the Seattle area to many of these problems.

Another significant feature in the reauthorization is a new planning and research program. This new program would incorporate all current planning, research, demonstration, and technical assistance activities. It would be funded through a 2.8 percent take-down of our total appropriation. Of these funds, we are proposing that one-third would be used for a national program to be managed by UMTA. This program will be targeted to areas of national concern and to the reintroduction of technology development. These funds will support the UMTA component of the departmental IVHS initiative.

The remaining two-thirds will be used for a state and local program. These funds certainly could be used to support HOV efforts, based on state and local needs. A portion of the state and local funds will be set aside for the establishment of a Transit Cooperative Research Program. This program, modeled after the National Cooperative Highway Research Program, will fund research and technical activities in support of the transit industry. The Transportation Research Board and an industry governing board established under the Transit Development Corporation will administer and manage the program.

We believe this new program will provide the necessary resources for UMTA to assist the transit industry in the improvement and development of products to serve new and existing markets. We believe this will once again make the United States competitive in the international market place. This is the vision that Secretary Skinner has laid out in the National Transportation Policy. In the past, research has been directed at revolutionary changes and new technologies focused on major systems. Today's program will emphasize manageable changes to the existing transit system, such as advances in component technologies and innovative operational techniques. The program will seek partnerships with manufacturers, suppliers, and transit operators interested in innovation and willing to commit personnel and financial resources in seeking solutions to industry problems.

The programs are designed to help you test new ideas, such as HOV facilities or IVHS improvements. I wish I could say these ideas were all ours, but they are not. The basic framework for this program was laid out in Transportation Research Board Special Report 213, which outlined the need for transit research following the components of a national mission, technology development, and local problem solving. Also, any of you who are familiar with the long standing and successful

FHWA programs can see the similarities with those programs.

We have patterned our proposal for the transit planning and research program after the FHWA program. The FHWA Program and the UMTA State and Local Planning and Research Program will use the same formulas, matching ratios (75/25), and primary grantee (the state), with a mandatory pass-through to Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs). In addition, the UMTA and FHWA planning requirements will be the same.

In closing I want to emphasize our long-term commitment to HOV facility development. This commitment goes back to one of the earliest examples, the Blue Streak project developed in 1970 here on I-5 in Seattle. There are many professionals at the federal, state, and local levels who have played and will continue to play key roles in the intermodal coordination needed to advance HOV projects. With the continued dedication of people like yourselves we will continue this progress into the next century.

Let me assure you that UMTA continues to be supportive of these activities. Assuming our reauthorization is passed by Congress, we will be joining with many of you in developing new advances for HOV operations throughout the 1990s. It will be exciting to see what we will be discussing after another five of these conferences have taken place.