

TOWN MEETING ON
HOV FACILITIES

Tom Stenger

Executive Director
Washington Transportation
Policy Institute

I would like to focus my comments this morning on a few broad policy areas that I think are critical to the future of transportation in our metropolitan areas. First, it is important to remember that HOV lanes represent just one element of a multi-modal system. HOV lanes are appropriate in many instances and represent one very good tool for dealing with mobility and traffic congestion in major travel corridors. However, they are not the total solution and they are not appropriate in all situations.

My second point relates to considering HOV lanes as a part of the permanent transportation system. HOV lanes need to be considered in a system context and coordinated with other elements of the multi-modal transportation system. HOV lanes can be lost through political action that may be the result of a perception that the lanes are not adequately utilized. Legislative action or political pressure in some areas has led to the redesignation of HOV lanes into general-purpose traffic lanes. This potential of legislatively mandated changes is somewhat unique to HOV facilities. Thus, we need to be aware of this possibility and ensure that accurate information on their use and benefits is provided to representatives at all levels of government. For example, the Washington State legislature has considered setting the occupancy requirements for all HOV facilities in the state.

Third, the success of HOV facilities depends largely on the close cooperation of

all agencies involved in planning, design, operation, and enforcement activities. A close working relationship between the state department of transportation or highway department, the transit agency, and the enforcement agency is especially important. All parties need to be actively involved and committed to maximizing the use of the facility.

Fourth, HOV lanes often do result in increased operating costs for transit agencies if new services are implemented in association with the opening of the facility. The cost of new services can be significant and this needs to be considered in the planning stage. Also, enforcement is critical to the success of the HOV lanes. Thus, additional resources may need to be allocated to ensure that the lanes are adequately enforced.

Fifth, it is also important to consider the costs associated with other support elements. These include the capital costs associated with park-and-ride facilities and costs for the rideshare matching and public information programs. These elements are needed to support the HOV lanes.

Sixth, I would like to suggest that we take a closer look at the aesthetics associated with the HOV lanes and support elements. We may be able to do a better job of designing these facilities to be more aesthetically pleasing; making driving or riding more enjoyable.

My last point relates to how we address our longer term transportation problems. We need to develop long term strategies to address the increasing demands being placed on our transportation system. I would suggest that a number of different approaches including additional freeways,

HOV lanes, and other techniques will be needed to meet future travel demands.

Renee Montgelas

*Assistant for Transportation
Washington Governor's Office*

I would like to outline a number of issues that are often raised at the state level concerning HOV lanes. These are based on the different opinions I often hear expressed about HOV facilities working in the Governor's office. Obviously, these include comments from individuals in favor of HOV lanes and those who feel they should be open to general traffic. I would also like to briefly discuss the environment at the state level within which many of the policies affecting HOV facilities and transportation in general are made.

The types of issues I hear raised most frequently relate to the operational aspects of both current facilities and those planned for the future. As Tom noted, the occupancy requirements continue to be a major topic of interest at the legislature. As you are aware, some HOV lanes in Seattle utilize a 2+ occupancy requirement, while others require 3 or more people. Legislation has been introduced that would allow the 3+ requirement to be dropped to 2+. Much of the impetus behind this move relates to the empty lane syndrome or the perception by a number of people that the lanes are not adequately utilized.

Another issue that is often raised relates to the operating hours for HOV facilities. While Seattle HOV lanes currently operate on a 24-hour basis, arguments continue to be made for limiting the operating hours to the peak-periods only. This is another area that the legislature has considered

developing guidelines on how the system should be used.

A third issue that has come up again recently is the potential for converting an existing general-purpose traffic lane into an HOV lane versus building additional capacity. While there appears to be some public acceptance to converting a lane in one area of Seattle, there is also a concern that such an action could result in significant public and political back lash if it resulted in increased levels of congestion in the mixed-traffic lanes.

A fourth issue relates to establishing priorities for the future development of the HOV system in Seattle. Ideally, projects should be ranked on the basis of an agreed upon set of measures. However, lower priority projects may be moved ahead of higher priority facilities in response to public or political pressure. We have seen examples of this occurring in the Seattle area and I am sure it has happened in other areas also.

Funding represents a fifth issue. In Washington we have a split between the eastern and western parts of the state, much like the urban and rural splits in many states. This split often makes it hard to secure the needed votes on funding measures, such as HOV facilities, that benefit only the eastern portion of the state. Authorizing local option taxing authority has been one response to this.

I would like to close by noting the tie between HOV facilities and travel demand management (TDM) strategies. In the last session, the Washington legislature passed a fairly innovative travel demand management program. This program, which is mandatory for employers with 100 or more employees, requires employers to develop

commute trip reduction plans. These plans must address how employers will reduce the number of their employees who commute in single occupant vehicles. The legislation, which is targeted primarily to non-attainment areas, sets specific goals and schedules. However, although the development of commute trip reduction plans are required, the law does not set penalties for non-attainment. The only penalties relate to the lack of a good faith effort on the part of employers. In order to make these programs successful, HOV and transit facilities and services must be available.

Paul A. Toliver



*Director of Transit
Seattle Metro*

I would like to share with you Seattle Metro's perspective on HOV facilities in the Seattle area. First, we have seen an increase in ridership on routes using HOV lanes. This is due primarily to the decrease in travel times and the increase in travel time reliability provided by the HOV facilities. The HOV lanes also provide similar incentives to carpoolers and vanpoolers. All of these modes are important for helping solve the

transportation problems in the Puget Sound area.

We tend to define HOV facilities very broadly to include the variety of support services, facilities, and programs that are needed to ensure their success. Seattle Metro focuses on providing a wide range of products to meet the needs of specific markets. The HOV system offers incentives and improvements for many of our transit products. We also see marketing and public information as very important elements of the overall system.

The approaches utilized in Seattle include express routes, park-and-ride services, ridesharing, TDM efforts, guaranteed ride home programs, and other innovative approaches. Parking management, land use, and zoning also need to be part of the comprehensive approach.

Ensuring that the different HOV lanes and supporting facilities are linked together into a system is important. This can help provide incentives to HOVs on all portions of the trip. In addition, it is important to remember that the HOV system is just one part of the overall transportation system. A variety of other facilities, services, and techniques will still be needed to help manage our future transportation needs.

Mikal Wasch

*Employee Programs Manager
Boeing Corporation*

One of the challenges we are facing at Boeing is how to encourage our employees to use buses, vanpools, and carpools. This really amounts to changing the culture and the way people commute. Boeing has had a great deal of help from the local transit agencies in addressing questions of cost and

convenience with the different transit alternatives. This has included designing routes specifically for our employees, developing subsidy programs to reduce the cost of transit options, and providing other support services.

These efforts have resulted in some very impressive increases in transit use on the part of Boeing employees. For example, at our Everett plant bus use has increased from 1,000 to 2,000 employees. A 600 to 1,200 increase occurred at our Renton plant. Our overall goal is to increase vehicle occupancy levels from our current level of 1.2 to 1.5. Although Boeing represents only 9% of the regional work force, we account for about half of the vanpools organized by Metro and Community Transit.

We are also involved in assisting other companies set up transit subsidy and commuter programs. Through the Boeing loaned executive program, we have helped eight local firms establish their own employee commuter assistance programs. We also share information on our programs with businesses and other groups all over the country.

Thus, Boeing has taken a very pro-active role in promoting all types of transit options with our employees. I think this puts us in a good position to respond to the recent air quality legislation which places specific requirements on firms with 100 or more employees.

We have seen a number of changes in our program since it started in 1980. At one time we had a company sponsored vanpool fleet of almost 100 vans. However, due to high maintenance costs, Boeing transferred ownership of the vehicles to Metro. When we started the program in 1980 we also initiated a steering committee to help develop and coordinate the different

program elements. This has provided the unique opportunity to bring representatives from the different public agencies together with Boeing personnel to work on the different program elements. I think the work of the steering committee has had a very positive influence on the program. We look forward to continuing our involvement in these different efforts and are committed to promoting the use of buses, vanpools, and carpools with our employees.

Terry W. Ketcham



*Sergeant
Washington State Patrol*

It would seem that with a name like Ketcham, I was born to be a policeman. In actuality, however, I started my professional career as a teacher. In some ways teaching is still involved in my job today. Instead of teaching music, I teach math; how to count to three to use the HOV lane.

Let me share with you some of my ideas relating to HOV facilities. We know that the HOV lanes are designed to transport the maximum number of people by encouraging carpooling. HOV lanes are ineffective, however, unless the occupancy requirements are enforced. There are four major ways

we can improve upon our current efforts in this area.

First, I would encourage enhanced enforcement of HOV lanes. HOV facilities are used most heavily during the morning and afternoon commute periods. These are the times when the general purpose lanes are the most congested. It is during these periods that people have the greatest tendency to violate the HOV lane requirements to save a few minutes in travel time. It is very expensive to hire, train, and equip a police officer. Thus, special police enforcement for just the peak-periods is expensive. A more cost-effective approach may be to pay regular officers overtime to handle these periods. This approach has been used successfully in Ottawa and California.

What we really want from the motoring public is voluntary compliance. To get voluntary compliance, however, people have to feel that there is a good chance they will be caught if they do try to use the lane improperly.

We also need higher fines to discourage people from violating the lane requirements. In Washington State the fine for violating the HOV occupancy requirement is \$47, regardless of how many times you are caught. I have stopped people who have indicated that they will take a chance of being caught and paying the fine because it is not that expensive; for them it represents the cost of doing business. Other areas, primarily California, have higher fines, especially for repeat violators. Their lack of repeat offenders indicates that higher fines work.

Third, we need a court system which supports the citations that are issued. There are too many examples, including cases in the Seattle area, where tickets for HOV

occupancy violations are routinely dismissed by the courts. For the system to work we need judges who understand the requirements and are willing to uphold them in court. The public has to know not only that there is a certainty of being caught, but also that there is a certainty of punishment.

Finally, we need to do the best job we can of educating the public. The HERO program has been successful as both an informational and an enforcement program. Further, the traffic spotters identify the congested areas and remind motorists of the HOV lane requirements. The signing for the HOV lanes in Seattle is very good, and is improved whenever a problem is identified. Thus, the public cannot claim they are unsure of the lane requirements. It takes a combination of enforcement, fines, the court system, and a public educational program to make people voluntarily comply with the HOV restrictions.

All of these, of course, are based on the premise that the HOV lane was designed safely, with adequate enforcement areas. No one has ever been killed because he or she violated the HOV lane restriction. We cannot ask our police officers to place their life on the line for a non-life threatening violation. It is essential that representatives from the enforcement agencies be involved early in the design process to ensure that adequate enforcement areas are provided.

We all share a common goal of providing for the safe and expeditious movement of traffic. HOV lanes are one of the ways we can accomplish this. By increasing the police presence, encouraging voluntary compliance, and by designing safe roadways we can accomplish this goal together.

Dennis L. Christiansen



***Division Head
Texas Transportation Institute
The Texas A&M University System***

If I was a New England politician, I would schedule a town meeting for the morning after a boat cruise. Even a Texas politician might be able to pass a state income tax this morning.

I think one of the advantages of a conference like this is that it provides the opportunity to reflect on where we have been and what we have accomplished as a profession. As far as HOV facilities are concerned, I think we have accomplished a great deal over the last few years. I think these accomplishments can be seen in many different ways.

First, in the decade of the 1980s, the miles of operating HOV lanes tripled. It appears that they will triple again in the 1990s. Second, approximately \$1.5 billion has been invested in HOV facilities in this country. This represents an important investment in the transportation infrastructure in many metropolitan areas. Two federal agencies, UMTA and FHWA, are working together in many areas to fund HOV projects. The new Clean Air Act

further encourages HOV lane development and federal legislation currently being drafted favors HOV lanes. These represent significant changes in just the last few years. The people in this room deserve a great deal of credit for many of these activities.

Looking ahead, I think there are a number of areas we still need to improve upon. First, I think we need to do a better job of translating what we have learned into improvements in the field. We know a good deal more about the best ways to plan, design, operate, market, and enforce HOV lanes. We need to make sure that this experience and knowledge is shared with others just starting projects for the first time. Second, I think we need to establish a set of uniform procedures for developing HOV lanes. Successful HOV projects require a great deal of interagency cooperation and hard work. Developing uniform procedures will help identify the steps and groups that need to be involved in the process.

Funding continues to be an important issue. The proposed federal legislation would provide priority funding for HOV lanes. Currently, however, the federal funding ratios for developing an HOV lane with FHWA funds are higher than if UMTA funds are used. Even we in Texas can figure out that which program should be pursued. These issues are being looked at by the HOV Coalition, and a more equitable approach between FHWA and UMTA is needed.

The last issue I would like to touch on relates to freeway design standards. One of the advantages of HOV lanes is that they can be developed relatively cheaply and relatively quickly. However, this is often true only when they are not built to full freeway design standards. If full inside

shoulders and full lane widths are required for freeway mainlane and HOV facilities, the cost goes up considerably. On one hand, no one wants to build a roadway that is either unsafe or inefficient. However, on the other hand, we also do not want to spend three times as much money to build an HOV project if this is not necessary. Unfortunately, I think we still do not know enough about what are safe and unsafe design standards. This is an area where more research is needed.

To conclude, I think the accomplishments over the past decade have done much to enhance the role of HOV facilities in helping to maximize congestion problems and improve mobility in many urbanized areas. However, there are still issues and concerns that must be addressed related to procedures for developing HOV facilities, funding, and minimum design standards. With the creativity and expertise in this room, I am sure we will be able to resolve these issues.