

# **Marketing as part of the HOV Planning Process**

**A White Paper developed for the 5th National Conference on  
High Occupancy Vehicle Systems  
Transportation Research Board Committee on HOV Systems**

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## **Executive Summary**

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Growing competition, heightened public demand for improved effectiveness and economic pressure have encouraged transportation policy and planning leaders to consider marketing as a powerful tool which can enhance the transportation facility planning process.

A marketing orientation can strengthen and smooth the HOV planning process. Many regions throughout the country have demonstrated that when a planned marketing approach is included in the HOV planning process, the six major HOV constituency groups -- **elected officials; public agency staff; planning organizations; community groups/ employers; media; and the general public** -- have increased opportunities to impact the decision making process of the HOV project planning team.

There are six compelling reasons to include marketing as a part of the HOV planning process. They are to:

- 1) **Heighten public awareness of the organizational mission;**
- 2) **Build constituencies, create partnerships and foster support;**
- 3) **Increase public confidence;**
- 4) **Develop accurate expectations;**
- 5) **Facilitate immediate use of the facility; and**
- 6) **Provide information which enhance future project planning activities.**

If marketing activities are not included as part of the planning process, the study team risks constituency dissatisfaction with the project and a lasting mistrust of the organization.

Marketing activities associated with the HOV planning process should assure that HOV recommendations that are technically suitable (they are cost-effective, increase the overall people carrying-capacity of the roadway and are sensitive to safety and environmental requirements) are also alternatives that are acceptable to a variety of publics.

There are four activity phases of the HOV marketing process. These phases are designed to coordinate with and complement technical HOV planning and implementation activities. These activities are:

Phase One:

### **Data Gathering**

Literature Search  
Surveys  
Focus Groups  
Executive Interviews  
Issues/Stakeholders Identification

- Phase Two:                   Public and Private Communication**  
Kick-Off Briefing  
Community/Jurisdiction and Elected Official Briefings  
Media Relations  
Newsletters  
Targeted Mailings  
Speakers Bureau/Public Forums
- Phase Three:               General Awareness**  
Information Development and Distribution  
Advertising  
Media Relations  
Special Events and Ceremonies  
Transit and Rideshare Promotions
- Phase Four:               Evaluation**  
Survey  
Focus Groups  
Executive Interviews  
Final Report

Through implementation of a HOV marketing strategy in concert with the technical planning process, a communication forum is established which stimulates the exchange of ideas and preferences between HOV constituency groups and the technical experts who are charged with translating those preferences into a physical program, resulting in a facility which is supported and used by the public it seeks to serve.

# Marketing as part of the HOV Planning Process

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## Introduction

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This paper suggests a marketing orientation and partnering strategies to strengthen the HOV planning process. A variety of strategies suggested herein have been successfully implemented by HOV planning teams throughout the country, including those in Minneapolis, Houston, Seattle, Santa Clara and Orange counties in California and Connecticut.<sup>(1)</sup> These wise teams knew that if the public becomes involved after it's too late to influence basic decisions about the HOV project, their resulting frustrations are manifested in dissatisfaction with the project and a lasting mistrust of the organization. This mistrust can set back the planning and implementation of future projects, HOV or otherwise.

The following information and examples seek to demonstrate the value of integrating marketing activities into the HOV planning process. When project managers, team leaders and other decision makers understand and appreciate the positive influence these strategies can have on the planning process and outcomes, they can oversee and assure that technical and marketing functions will be united into one cohesive activity.

Paper development began by sending out a questionnaire. Engineers, planners, marketers and administrators who deal in the design, development and marketing of highway transportation facilities and transit and ridesharing services nationwide were included on the mailing list. The purpose of the questionnaire was to find out what they thought about a variety of HOV marketing issues as well as how they dealt/were dealing with those issues.

Responses to the questionnaire revealed a wide chasm between the perceptions of respondents with responsibilities for marketing, public involvement, public affairs, public relations, etc., and the perceptions of respondents who were engineers, planners and non-marketing administrators.

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<sup>1</sup>See "Hampton Roads Area HOV- Rideshare Marketing Program", Richmond VA, Virginia Department of Transportation, May, 1989; "HOV Communications Program", Wethersfield, CT; Connecticut Department of Transportation, 1989; "I-394 Interim HOV Lane: A Case Study Phase I Report", Minneapolis, MN; Minnesota Department of Transportation, October, 1987; "I-394 Interim HOV Lane: A Case Study Phase II Report", Minneapolis, MN; Minnesota Department of Transportation, July, 1990; "Community Involvement Program Summary" Houston, TX; Metropolitan Transit Authority, May, 1985.

The engineers, planners and administrators who answered the questionnaire were almost apologetic in their responses. To them, the issues the questionnaire sought input on -- developing/maintaining a positive image for HOV facilities, furthering statewide support for facilities, combatting the "empty lane syndrome" -- just didn't seem to be a problem in their region.

Marketing personnel responses, however, revealed an entirely different perspective. While they acknowledged that the issues outlined in the questionnaire were important, they expressed significant frustration with their inability to deal with them effectively.

Their frustration lay in the fact that only once a facility was nearing completion, was the assistance of public affairs or marketing personnel requested by "the HOV inner-circle" -- high-level departmental personnel directing the actions of the HOV planning team. Respondents with a marketing background pointed sadly to the lost opportunities to have a variety of publics - elected officials, commuters, local jurisdiction personnel, transit agencies -- participate in the planning activities associated with the HOV facility. Lost, too, were the rich educational opportunities and subsequent interest and support that spring from that participation. Interest and support which marketing personnel were now expected to arouse.

One survey respondent put it this way "There is the potential to head off problems by involving marketing personnel as part of the various design teams in our region. Unfortunately, the (name of city/state withheld) has not embraced the importance of including the marketing perspective as part of product development. All too often, marketing issues are addressed by planners and then they become marketing problems". This respondent did not have a very upbeat vision of the future, as evidenced by his/her closing remarks... "We just keep plugging away in hopes that those who control the quality, status and integrity of these facilities will see the light".

It appears that those who spend time trying to persuade commuters to leave their single occupant vehicles behind for life in the HOV lane, (or sane lane, or diamond lane, or whatever the facility may be) need to consider yet another market -- the engineers, planners and administrators who have ultimate oversight authority of HOV projects. So that they, too, will be invited to join the "inner-circle", HOV marketing professionals need to heighten the awareness and understanding of the value of marketing as part of the HOV planning process.

The rest of this paper discusses the marketing techniques which can enhance technical HOV planning process. It will also discuss how those techniques can ultimately enhance not only the resulting HOV facility, but the sensitivity of the organization to future transportation challenges and opportunities.

## Public Sector Marketing -- A Historical Overview

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To understand why marketers are traditionally not included as part of the planning team of an HOV project, it's helpful to understand the historical role of marketing within the context of public agencies.

*Business Fads, What's In - And Out* (2), offers an overview of the variety of trends that have come and gone over the past four decades. In the 1950's it was computerization, diversification and management by objectives. The 1960's gave rise to the popularity of conglomeration (putting disparate businesses under a single corporate umbrella) and matrix management. In the 1970's, zero-based budgeting (throwing out last year's numbers and starting from scratch when making up the following year's budget) and "management by walking around" were in vogue.

During this decade, too, scrutiny of management practices within the public sector became especially popular. In the marketing arena, however, attention seemed to focus on how to transfer business marketing techniques to the nonbusiness sector. Hence, strategies which worked wonders in the private sector were adopted within the public sectors, some with resounding success, some with dismal failure. As the size and number of government and non-profit organizations multiplied during the decade, so did the interest in developing marketing strategies unique to the public sector.

The 1970's interest in public sector marketing was transformed into a 1980's mandate with the continuing proliferation of public and non-profit organizations. To some public sector managers, however, it was a most unwelcome mandate. Having had the luxury of fulfilling their goals and objectives simply through carrying out their assigned tasks, the thought of "having to sell themselves", (the popular belief of the time regarding marketing's role) was abhorrent. In *Marketing for Public and NonProfit Managers* (3), Christopher Lovelock and Charles Weinberg state,

"Some public and nonprofit administrators resisted the very notion of marketing; they regarded the concept as inappropriate for their type of organization, the terminology unseemly and arcane, and the actual practice of marketing strategies as positively unethical. Popular exposes of manipulative practices, such as Vance Packard's *The Hidden Persuaders* (4) and later works (5), doubtless underlay that view.

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<sup>2</sup>John A. Byrne, *Business Fads - What's In - And Out*; Business Week Magazine, January 20, 1986

<sup>3</sup>Christopher H. Lovelock and Charles B. Weinberg, *Marketing for Public and Non Profit Managers*; John Wiley & Sons, 1984, p.8

<sup>4</sup>Vance Packard, *The Hidden Persuaders*, New York: Pocket Books, 1957.

<sup>5</sup>See, for example, Robert N. Anthony and Regina E. Herzlinger, *Management Control for Nonprofit Organizations*, revised edition, Homewood, Ill: Richard D. Irwin, 1980; Denis Lindon, *Marketing Politique et Social*, Paris: Dalloz, 1976; Michael P. Mokwa and Stephen E. Permut (eds.), *Government Marketing: Theory and Practice*, New York: Praeger, 1981; David L. Rador, *Marketing for NonProfit Organizations*, Boston: Auburn House, 1981; Philip Kotler, *Marketing for Non-Profit Organizations*, second edition, Englewood Cliffs, N.J.:Prentice Hall, 1982.

At the other end of the spectrum were those who embraced marketing with more enthusiasm than understanding; it was almost as if marketing were a magic wand that, if waved by the right professional wizard or fairy godmother, would transform a Cinderella institution into a princess. Miracles rarely happen in marketing, however; these individuals were usually disappointed and frequently disillusioned."

What kind of marketing atmosphere can the public sector anticipate during the 1990's? There appears to be a growing recognition that marketing involves more than just developing advertising and publicity campaigns to build awareness and support. For example in *High-Occupancy Vehicle Facilities: A Planning, Operation, and Design Manual* (6), Charles Fuhs acknowledges that

"Education and marketing are important tools in obtaining and maintaining a broad-based constituency. A public participation program is a necessary ingredient during planning and implementation. Avenues to public/political support include public awareness programs to disseminate information on the consequences and benefits of the HOV project, advertising, rideshare matching, and employer outreach services to promote concepts like discount parking for carpools, vanpools and flexible working hours. Feedback can be obtained through various public meetings and the formation of focus groups to be involved in the decision making process. Sometimes local consent is the most important hurdle in obtaining federal funding, and critical to concept viability".

Clearly, an awareness that marketing is a management function that provides a link between the organization and it's constituents seems to be emerging. Transportation policy and planning leaders are realizing that marketing helps their organizations to fulfill their missions.

Growing competition, heightened public demand for improved effectiveness and economic pressure have encouraged these leaders to consider marketing as a way for their organization to meet their goals. Because this awareness still seems to be in it's infancy, exactly **how** marketing can help an organization move toward a greater customer responsiveness is still a mystery.

The following section discusses a variety of marketing strategies appropriate for inclusion in the HOV planning process, and the advantages of those strategies.

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<sup>6</sup>Charles A. Fuhs, *High-Occupancy Vehicle Facilities: A Planning, Operation, and Design Manual*, New York; Parsons Brinckerhoff, Inc, 1990, p. 2-2-5



# **Advantages of Including Marketing in the HOV Planning Process**

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There are six compelling reasons to include marketing activities in the HOV planning process. They are to:

- 1) **Heighten public awareness of the organizational mission;**
- 2) **Build constituencies, create partnerships and foster support;**
- 3) **Increase public confidence;**
- 4) **Develop accurate expectations;**
- 5) **Facilitate immediate use of the facility; and**
- 6) **Provide information which enhances future project planning activities.**

## **Heighten Public Awareness of Organizational Mission**

The mission of many transportation organizations, such as state departments of transportation and transit agencies, are slowly changing. For departments of transportation, the traditional mission of building as many roads as possible to accommodate an increasing number of vehicles is being replaced with a mission that recognizes that highway dollars are not infinite, and even if unlimited dollars were available, building to increase vehicle capacity poses a detrimental impact on the environment.

Transit agency mission changes are evidenced by the expansion of product lines from traditional bus service to carpool and vanpool services, paratransit and rail services. Many transit agencies have also introduced expanded customer services, such as a transit pass purchase through automatic teller machines and route-specific telephone information services.

Transportation organizations are also adopting an aggressive congestion management approach through activities such as transportation demand management strategies and employer outreach programs. Additionally, legislation to encourage a more pro-active congestion management position is being enacted as many states face increasing traffic congestion problems.

For example, the draft *HOV Policy Issues Report* (7) published by the Washington State Department of Transportation states that "The mission of the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) is to ensure a multi-modal system which meets the social, economic, and environmental needs of the state. Mission objectives include reducing traffic congestion and enhancing mobility."

The report goes on to state that "...the purpose of the system is to move people and not just vehicles and by showing that HOV lanes move more people than any of the adjacent general purpose lanes, attitudes toward the system tend to improve." (8)

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<sup>7</sup>WSDOT HOV Study Committee, *Draft HOV Policy Issues*; Olympia, WA 1990, p.4

<sup>8</sup>As in reference 7

By implementing concurrent, integrated HOV technical and marketing activities, awareness of the dedication an organization has to its mission is enhanced. The use of marketing can help to communicate this change in mission and the transportation organization's expanded role and vision for mobility.

### **Build Constituencies , Create Partnerships and Foster Support**

As the number and impact of HOV systems grow, so too does the desire for a broad variety of special interest groups to be a part of the HOV planning process. An HOV planning approach which integrates technical and marketing activities can capitalize on that interest, resulting in a HOV project which is supported by a broad base of public and private organizations. There are six major constituency groups an HOV marketing component can address during the planning stage. These groups are:

- 1) **Elected Officials;** including local, regional, state and national officials;
- 2) **Public Agency Staff;** such as staff working in traffic & transportation, public affairs, public works, intergovernmental relations and the ecological and air quality arenas;
- 3) **Planning Organizations;** especially those charged with planning for growth and/or transportation;
- 4) **Community Groups/Employers;** these two groups are vital to the HOV planning process, as they are directly affected by the ultimate facility;
- 5) **Media;** the broadcast and print media can be the strongest advocate or biggest adversary to the success of an HOV project. The media picks up it's cues from the positive and negative comments made by the preceding four constituency groups. Recognize the media's importance as a player in the success of a project, and treat them accordingly;
- 6) **General Public;** the general public will often develop their attitudes about an HOV project not only from the information provided to them by the HOV project planning team, but also by the information generated by the preceding five constituency groups, especially the media.

The secret to capturing and maintaining the support of these six constituency groups lies in understanding and addressing their important concerns and issues. These issues could be technical or political. Perhaps they focus on safety or equity. Whatever the issue, it must be adequately and honestly addressed as part of the HOV project planning process, and those findings and anticipated outcomes should be communicated back to constituents.

Through this communication process, partnerships can be developed which can ultimately enhance the HOV facility. A case in point is an unexpected and welcome partnership resulting from the Washington State Department of Transportation I-5 South HOV Study in Seattle. One aspect of this study was to determine the feasibility of converting an existing general purpose lane to an

HOV lane on I-5, the state's busiest corridor. One agency which supported lane conversion was the Washington State Department of Ecology. A letter from the department Director to the state's Secretary of Transportation stated:

"Ecology recommends that an existing lane be converted to a high occupancy vehicle lane. This is the most expeditious and least costly method to shift the public's transportation habits. Results will carry forward and complement WSDOT's long-term initiatives. The change could, and should, be completed immediately." (9)

As part of the integrated technical/marketing process used to conduct this study, a public opinion survey and executive interviews, in addition to traditional technical data analyses techniques, were employed. As a result of these three activities, the study team concluded that lane conversion was not a viable option.

Although the benefits pointed out by the Department of Ecology -- low construction cost and quick implementation -- did exist, the delays caused by the freeway being over-capacity would overwhelmingly counteract the HOV benefits of converting an existing general purpose lane. In fact, the projected back-up of general purpose traffic would be to the extent that an environmental impact statement may be required for air quality assessment.

Findings from the telephone survey along the corridor indicated that the majority of respondents were not in favor of taking a lane away from general purpose traffic in order to construct an HOV lane. Findings from the executive interviews conducted with twenty-two community leaders representing elected officials, public agencies, employers, trade associations and the media indicated no support for the lane conversion concept.

Before recommendations were presented to the study's steering committee, briefings were held with public agencies and local jurisdictions which could be affected by the study recommendations. At the Department of Ecology briefing, Air Quality Programs staff were most interested in the analysis process used in formulating recommendations pertaining to lane conversion. Their satisfaction with the process used is evidenced by a second letter from the Department of Ecology's Director to the Secretary of Transportation. In this letter the Director stated:

"I would like to thank you for the obvious effort the WSDOT has devoted to this important project and for taking the time to keep Ecology apprised of your progress. From listening to the briefing and reviewing the printed materials, we are convinced that WSDOT is doing a thorough and efficient evaluation of alternatives for providing HOV facilities in the I-5 South corridor in the near term. We are particularly impressed with your public involvement process, and respect your conclusion based on this process, as well as technical analysis, that lane conversion is not a viable alternative". (10)

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<sup>9</sup>Christine O. Gregoire, "Letter to Secretary of Transportation Duane Berentson", Washington State Department of Ecology, June 1, 1990.

<sup>10</sup>Christine O. Gregoire "Letter to Secretary of Transportation Duane Berentson", Washington State Department of Ecology, February 13, 1991

The Department of Ecology Director goes on to offer her department's support for implementation of study recommendations, as well as offer her staff's assistance in "making the HOV program a success."

### **Increase Public Confidence**

Secrecy in the protection of national security is good. Secrecy in the planning of HOV projects is not. Although taxpayers may not want to be directly involved in the decision-making process, they still have a desire to remain informed regarding how their tax dollars may be spent.

Attitudes are learned, based on information about the subject and direct experience with it. <sup>(11)</sup> Through the marketing activities associated with the HOV planning process, favorable public attitudes towards the HOV project may be nurtured. Communication activities can also help to educate the public and to modify unfavorable attitudes.

The I-5 South HOV Study in Seattle provides a revealing example of how an open planning process can serve to encourage public confidence and support for an HOV project. Long-range WSDOT plans call for the construction of continuous HOV lanes between Seattle and Tacoma. However, that tentative schedule indicated that construction of HOV lanes between Federal Way and Southcenter, the most congested segment of the corridor, would not be completed, at the earliest, until 1995.

"Not good enough" was the loud and long response of SHOVE -- **Southend High Occupancy Vehicle Enthusiasts**. Armed with reams of petitions, a core group of SHOVE members gathered over 2,000 signatures from people willing to support new HOV lanes, even if that meant converting I-5 general purpose lanes to HOV lanes to get them. SHOVE organizers followed their petition drive with letter writing campaigns to the Washington State Secretary of Transportation and the Chair of the House Transportation Committee. Their message was clear and succinct -- "give us HOV lanes -- **NOW!**"

SHOVE also secured the support of the local media. SHOVE sought the assistance of a Seattle Times writer who's twice-weekly column explores transportation issues. This columnist wrote about SHOVE's desire for HOV lanes in this congested corridor, and encouraged readers to get in touch with SHOVE organizers. His column resulted in hundreds of letters in support of SHOVE's goal.

SHOVE leaders testified before the Transportation Commission, which oversees the Washington State Department of Transportation, when the commissioners were briefed regarding the scope and schedule of the I-5 South HOV Study. When a transportation commissioner asked the Times columnist, who was covering the meeting, what he thought about the prospective study, his response

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<sup>11</sup> Martin Fishbein and Icek Ajzen, *Beliefs, Attitudes, Intention and Behavior: An Introduction to Theory and Research*, Reading Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1975, p.6

of "I think it's a great opportunity for this state to show that it can do something innovative and decisive."<sup>(12)</sup> also appeared in his column the following week.

SHOVE's confidence in the recommendations of the I-5 South HOV Study was a key element of the study's marketing strategy. To ensure their confidence, SHOVE leaders were kept continually apprised of study activities and findings, and asked to assist with study activities whenever appropriate. One SHOVE leader with a background in research, reviewed and commented upon the study's telephone survey before it was fielded. Mailing lists were shared between SHOVE and the study team to ensure broad distribution of information relating to the study's progress and findings. SHOVE leaders were invited to speak during a bus tour of the study corridor held for decision makers and elected officials.

The relationship between SHOVE and the I-5 South HOV Study team been viewed as so unique that SHOVE leaders and I-5 South HOV Study representatives have been asked to participate on a University of Washington Graduate School of Public Affairs panel to discuss how advocacy can work to influence policies, shape programs and promote citizen participation. Although the recommendations of the study -- which include expanding the existing HOV system and implementing a system of ramp meters, variable message signs, closed circuit television cameras and incident management teams -- have yet to be implemented, the study team plans to continue to involve SHOVE throughout the implementation phase of the study. This involvement is key to maintaining SHOVE's confidence and support of future HOV facilities and partnering transportation system management techniques.

### **Develop Accurate Expectations**

If the public has not been adequately included in the HOV project planning process, there is a risk that they will develop inaccurate or unrealistic expectations regarding the project's goals, objectives and expected outcomes.

For example, the Virginia State Legislature rescinded HOV requirements on a section of highway in the state's Hampton Roads area two years ago. When Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) opened the first, and in some officials minds, the weakest link of the HOV system, public reaction was overwhelmingly negative because the public perception was that the system was underused (occupancy rates were at HOV-3). This same section of state highway will connect with an interstate facility with dedicated HOV lanes scheduled to open in 1992. Because federal funding for the interstate system dictates that HOV requirements be in place on that section of state highway when the interstate opens, HOV requirements will be reinstated on the state system at that time. When reopened as an HOV lane in 1992, occupancy rates will be at HOV-2, with requirements for HOV-3 to be reinstated when necessitated by traffic demand.

The legislative experience has resulted in VDOT becoming more sensitive to developing accurate public expectations as they relate to HOV facilities. VDOT

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<sup>12</sup>Peyton Whitely "Commuters Spoke Up and DOT Listened", Seattle, WA: The Seattle Times, June 24, 1990.

has developed a marketing plan to address the problems created by the Hampton Roads experience.<sup>(13)</sup> In 1990, their marketing efforts focused on developing an appreciation for the benefits of ridesharing. In 1991, marketing efforts broadened to improve the public's perceptions of HOV lanes. Goals for the 1992 - 1993 marketing efforts will be to give credibility to HOV effectiveness.

Unrealistic public expectations can be extremely damaging to the credibility and morale of the organization undertaking the HOV project. They can also erode public confidence in the organization's ability to carry out its mission.

On the other hand, when the public (and the public's designated decision makers, such as elected officials, local jurisdictions staff, etc.) has been included in the planning process, expectations are much more likely to accurately reflect the goals, objectives and expected benefits and outcomes of the project.

### **Facilitate Immediate Use of the Facility**

The "empty lane syndrome" -- an HOV facility which to the public looks under-utilized -- can cause considerable general and political dissatisfaction, especially if the construction of the facility caused motorist or neighborhood inconvenience. Integrating marketing activities into the HOV planning process serves to heighten awareness of the facility amongst all markets. Heightened awareness should translate into increased utilization.

Because a variety of organizations and individuals have "ownership" in the facility through their participation in the planning process, they have a stake in assuring the success of the facility. While this concept was discussed previously in this paper under the subsection titled "Build Constituencies, Create Partnerships and Foster Support" constituency ownership should manifest itself in a broad-based willingness to promote the facility prior to and following its opening.

At a minimum, planning teams should look to partnering organizations to help with the design, production and distribution of promotional materials and request organization representatives to make public presentations to corporate and community groups.

### **Provide Information which Enhance Future Project Planning Activities**

In our increasingly complex environment, it is becoming more and more difficult for HOV project teams to stay informed. Planning, development and construction activities are constantly taking place which could affect the design and implementation of the HOV facility being considered. The integration of marketing activities as part of the HOV planning process provides increased opportunities for communication between the HOV planning team and other organizations.

Not only does this communication aid in the planning of the HOV facility, it provides local decision makers not associated with the project with information extremely useful to their independent planning activities. For example, the City of Kent,

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<sup>13</sup>"Hampton Roads Area HOV-Rideshare Marketing Program", Richmond VA, Virginia Department of Transportation, May, 1989.

located about fifteen miles south of Seattle, had been trying, unsuccessfully, to expand an east-west corridor through their city to link Interstate 5 and Highway 167, a major state route about three miles to the east of Interstate 5. Local opposition focused on the theory that because congestion on both I-5 and 167 was already so severe, an expanded east-west link would do nothing to reduce congestion, it would just create one more congested corridor.

At the jurisdictional briefing held as part of the I-5 South HOV study, Kent traffic, planning, public works staff were pleased to hear about the potential HOV improvements being considered for the I-5 corridor. Providing an HOV facility on I-5 gave planners a significant reason to expand the east-west corridor -- as HOV's which were currently using Highway 167 would probably switch to I-5 to take advantage of the travel time savings provided by the I-5 HOV lane.



## **Potential HOV Marketing Activities**

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The preceding sections of this paper argue for an increased role for marketing activities as a part of the HOV planning process. This final section gives specific examples of what those activities can include. This listing is not intended to be all-inclusive, but suggests ideas which should stimulate thoughts and discussion regarding activities which might be appropriate when developing the HOV planning scope.

In all cases, however, marketing activities should assure that HOV recommendations which are technically suitable (cost-effective, increase the overall people carrying-capacity of the roadway and are sensitive to safety and environmental requirements) are also alternatives that are acceptable to the publics they seek to serve.

Obviously, inclusion of and emphasis on each of these suggested activities would be dependent upon the environment in which the planning activities are to take place. For example, if a region has experienced a significant amount of negative media coverage relating to past HOV projects, special care should be taken in developing activities which include the media within the planning process. If elected officials have complained about their lack of past participation in the planning of transportation improvements (HOV or otherwise) a strong component to assure their input should be developed.

On the other hand, if the HOV project is part of a larger ongoing program which is successful, then the marketing approach should capitalize and build on that positive image and established activities.

### **The Four Activity Phases of HOV Marketing**

High-occupancy vehicle marketing activities should coordinate, both in scope and in schedule, with the technical activities traditionally undertaken when planning, developing and implementing an HOV project. Sequence and timing of these marketing activities is critical, as their purpose is to provide information which, combined with technical activities, provides a strong basis of support for the next phase of the project.

The four activity phases of the HOV marketing process are:

Phase One:	Data Gathering
Phase Two:	Public and Private Communication
Phase Three:	General Awareness
Phase Four:	Evaluation

The underlying principal of these HOV marketing activities are to provide a communication forum to stimulate the exchange of ideas and preferences between the six major HOV constituency groups -- elected officials, public agency staff; planning organizations, community groups/employers; media; and



the general public -- and the technical experts who are charged with translating those preferences into a physical program.

## **Phase One**

### **Data Gathering Activities**

The purpose of data gathering activities is to clearly define the social and political atmosphere in which the HOV planning process will take place. Successful data gathering also provides the project team with historical information and insights about projects which had similar goals, objectives or other characteristics.

#### ***Literature Search***

A literature search should be the first marketing activity undertaken. In addition to a review of reports on similar projects, news clippings, speeches, and voting records should be reviewed. Literature search activities provide the project team with information about projects with similar challenges and goals, and the outcomes of those projects.

#### ***Surveys***

A survey to measure the public's attitudes and opinions about the HOV system can provide the HOV team with information vital to the development of project recommendations. Surveys can gather travel information and data and measure public opinions, knowledge, concerns and expectations regarding the HOV project. A survey can also supply insight necessary for the development of communication messages and mechanisms useful during the implementation phase of the project.

The marketing representative on the HOV team should oversee the development, testing and fielding of the survey instrument, as well as the subsequent survey analysis.

#### ***Focus Groups***

Focus groups can be used to further explore survey hypothesis. Focus groups are a market research technique that provide quantitative or exploratory information about individual perceptions toward an idea or product. In a focus group, a small number of people (usually 7 to 10) are brought together to discuss a particular topic under the guidance of a skilled moderator. Focus group participants could be made up of survey respondents, community or elected leader, or some other targeted group.

#### ***Executive Interviews***

Executive interviews are especially useful in gauging targeted market interest and perceptions and expectations of the HOV project. Interview participants should be selected based on their roles in the community, interest in the subject and potential impact they could have on the study's outcomes.

Information gathered through the survey and focus groups and executive interviews should be used to compile the Issues/Stakeholders Identification report.

#### ***Issues/Stakeholders Identification***

Upon completion of survey, interview and literature search activities, an Issues and Stakeholders Report should be compiled. This report should list the major issues, concerns and expectations expressed by the general public and targeted markets, as well as information obtained through interviews, surveys and focus groups.

This report completes the information gathering phase of the project and provides a framework for phase two activities, Public and Private Communication.

## **Phase Two**

### **Public and Private Communication**

Phase Two activities are designed to solicit and encourage thought, reaction, and ultimately, support for the HOV planning process and final recommendations. These activities tend to be targeted in nature, that is, they are designed to meet the specific needs of each of the six major HOV constituency groups.

#### ***Kick-Off Briefing***

Kick-off briefings are extremely important in the development of support and understanding of the HOV project by key departmental and policy making leaders. It also allows lower-level staff who have some association or interest in the project to learn about its goals, objectives, process and timing.

Kick-off briefings are especially important when the HOV project may be controversial or require a fast-track schedule. The briefing agenda should be designed so that it provides a forum in which departmental leaders can talk about the importance of the project in relation to the numerous other activities also being undertaken by the department.

#### ***Community/Jurisdiction/Elected Official Briefings***

Community, jurisdiction and elected official briefings give the project team a conduit for direct interaction with three important and powerful constituency groups. These briefings fulfill multiple purposes -- they build constituencies, create partnerships, foster support, develop accurate expectations and provide information which enhances future project planning activities.

Briefings are most successful when the HOV project team is asking for input and reaction to a set of specific HOV treatments or scenarios. Care must be taken by the project team to ensure that briefings are scheduled so that input can be adequately considered and changes based on that input can be incorporated into the project.

### ***Media Relations***

The project team must consider the media as a very special target market, not only because of their functional role as the disseminator of information, but because of the inherent power the media has in shaping attitudes toward an HOV project. The more knowledgeable the media is regarding the HOV planning process, the more supportive they will be in project outcomes.

Targeted media activities should extend beyond the traditional news releases and press conferences to include editorial board briefings, media tours of the geographic area being studied, and regular phone calls and/or face-to-face discussions between designated reporters and project team staff.

### ***Newsletters***

A project newsletter is a very efficient and effective communication tool. It serves as a forum to address a number of issues and questions raised through the information gathering phase. It can educate the reader to the project process, progress and findings. It can be a mechanism to publicly recognize and compliment project participation by constituency groups. Finally, a project newsletter is especially helpful in assuring that accurate expectations are being maintained about the project scope, activities and outcomes.

Newsletters should be distributed to coincide with project milestones, so a typical HOV project would likely require newsletter publication on a quarterly basis.

Project teams should look to partnering organizations for assistance in newsletter distribution. Transit agencies and local jurisdictions are a good starting point. They can put newsletters aboard their buses, distribute them to their employees, and place them in customer waiting areas. Elected officials may want to insert newsletters in publications they send to their constituents.

### ***Targeted Mailings***

Project newsletters sent with appropriate cover letters can be extremely powerful yet inexpensive targeted mailings. This technique is particularly effective when the newsletter discusses a topic of special importance or interest to the recipient.

Cover letters should call attention to the particular newsletter item or items and be signed by a individual who carries the most credibility or importance with the letter recipient. A computer database program is ideal for developing and maintaining a database which allows for efficient generation of targeted letters.

### ***Speakers Bureau/Public Forums***

Public speaking engagements and participation in public forums are effective and timely methods for increasing awareness of the HOV

project, educating the public and measuring support for alternatives. Presentations can be made at community and civic club meetings; city, county and other elected official council meetings and other public forums as appropriate.

Meetings of special interest associations, such as ITE (Institute of Transportation Engineers) and TRB (Transportation Research Board) are also forums which offer opportunities to talk about the process and progress of the HOV planning activities.

### **Phase Three**

#### **General Awareness Campaign**

General awareness activities associated with the opening of an HOV project are the areas where marketing activities have traditionally focused. Although the promotional messages and techniques used prepare the general public for the opening of a facility are diverse, there is general agreement by HOV project team leaders that marketing activities are an important part of the HOV implementation process.

Excellence in executing the general awareness campaign require a clear theme, and detailed attention to carrying out the chosen activities. Activities are most successful when carried out as an integrated mix rather than as individual components.

The effective design and development of HOV marketing activities associated implementation phase has been well documented (14) and will not be discussed as part of this paper, except to acknowledge the following as activities which generally fall within the scope of implementation marketing.

*Information Development and Distribution*

*Advertising*

*Media Relations*

*Special Events and Ceremonies*

*Transit and Rideshare Promotions*

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<sup>14</sup>See "Hampton Roads Area HOV- Rideshare Marketing Program", Richmond VA, Virginia Department of Transportation, May, 1989; "HOV Communications Program", Wethersfield, CT; Connecticut Department of Transportation, 1989; "I-394 Interim HOV Lane: A Case Study Phase I Report", Minneapolis, MN; Minnesota Department of Transportation, October, 1987; "I-394 Interim HOV Lane: A Case Study Phase II Report", Minneapolis, MN; Minnesota Department of Transportation, July, 1990; "Community Involvement Program Summary" Houston, TX; Metropolitan Transit Authority, May, 1985.

## **Phase Four Evaluation**

Good implementation requires the development of an evaluation system which measures results. Unfortunately, marketers "are weak at constructing simple, reliable and understandable monitoring mechanisms which do not get corrupted by the politics of the situation and mired in incomprehensible complexities."<sup>15</sup>

Evaluations, while a most important final component to the marketing process, do not have to be complex. Evaluation activities which extend beyond measuring volumes, capacity and travel speeds help the project team to determine the public's acceptance of the facility. They also help evaluate the impact of the marketing activities undertaken throughout the planning as well as the implementation phases of the project, and provide the HOV project team with vital information necessary in the development of future projects.

Evaluation activities can include:

### ***Survey***

A survey to measure the public's attitudes and opinions about the completed HOV facility provides "before and after" information valuable in formulating future marketing strategies. If a survey was used in Phase One of the project, the evaluation survey should be developed to correspond accordingly in terms of development, fielding and analysis, so that comparisons are statistically valid.

### ***Focus Groups***

As discussed previously (see page 22 of this report) focus groups are a useful tool when further exploration of survey hypotheses is necessary.

### ***Executive Interviews***

A selected sub-set of individuals who participated in executive interviews undertaken as part of Phase One activities should be re-interviewed. These executive interviews allow the study team to determine the attitudes and perceptions of key decision makers regarding the project process and outcomes. Their input is especially useful in the development of future HOV planning strategies.

### ***Final Report***

Whew...we're finally there! The final report should outline the process and procedures used in the design, development and implementation of marketing activities undertaken in all four phases of the HOV project.

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<sup>15</sup>Thomas V. Bonoma, *Managing Marketing*, New York: The Free Press, 1984

## Conclusions

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Developing a planning orientation which marries marketing and technical activities can help the project team to achieve their goals effectively and efficiently. However, developing a marketing orientation takes time and trial, sometimes merely because the term "marketing"

has become (to many) a catch-word standing for all the undesirable elements in American business: the foisting of worthless products on an unsuspecting public; the aggressiveness of Madison Avenue and its immortal manipulation of people. In short, marketing is looked upon by many as being fundamentally self-seeking and thus unacceptable by its very nature...(If) anything is undesirable about marketing, it is not the activity per se; rather it is the motives of those guiding the activity and manner in which it is carried out."<sup>16</sup>

Because of this unfortunate pre-disposition, HOV team members should be prepared for some initial skepticism regarding the inclusion of marketing as a part of the planning process. Comments like "We've never done it that way before", "We could use that money to pay for some signalization (or maintenance, etc.)" or "Marketing? Why do we need marketing?" may arise.

This paper has sought to provide some answers to those questions by showing that marketing is a management function that provides a link between the organization and its constituents. The benefits of this link -- heightened public awareness of the organizational mission; building constituencies, creating partnerships and fostering support; increasing public confidence; developing accurate expectations; facilitating immediate use of the facility and providing information which enhances future project planning activities -- extend far beyond the confines of the HOV project at hand to encourage confidence, respect and greater success for the organization as a whole.

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<sup>16</sup>A.R. Krachenberg, "Bringing the Concept of Marketing to Higher Education", Journal of Higher Education, May, 1972, p. 380



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