

PART 1—PLENARY SESSIONS

A National and International Status Report

Jerry Baxter, California Department of Transportation—Presiding

Welcome and Opening Remarks

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Thank you and welcome to California. We do not have an earthquake scheduled for today, but sometimes they happen unannounced. We want to focus on HOV facilities over the next few days. Although we do not have all the solutions here in the Los Angeles area, we do have experience with different approaches and techniques. We certainly have major problems with traffic congestion that need to be addressed.

One of the things we have learned is that HOV facilities have to be approached as a system. Also, as we learned a number of years ago with the Santa Monica Diamond lane, there has to be public understanding and public support for the system. It appears that commuters now support HOV lanes. Part of this support relates to the realization that HOV facilities make it easier to live and work where people want to and to make other discretionary trips.

HOV facilities should include a total system of HOV lanes, park-and-ride lots, bus services, ridesharing programs, and other elements. A coordinated approach is needed to make these systems work. In the Los Angeles area, the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) is working with the Los Angeles Metropolitan Transportation Authority (LAMTA) and other transit agencies, the county transportation agencies, and the California Highway Patrol to ensure that all these elements are present. The HOV lanes are also being coordinated with the development of the light rail transit (LRT), heavy rail, and commuter rail systems. Thus, we have found

that one key to successful HOV development and operation is coordination among agencies and the supporting services.

Providing information to commuters on all these travel options is also critical. In the Los Angeles area, the 1-800-COMMUTE telephone number provides information on all modes. This system allows commuters to easily obtain information on alternatives to driving alone.

The partnership in the Los Angeles area is committed to developing and operating an extensive HOV system. You will have the opportunity to see many elements of this system on the tours over the next few days. In addition to the fixed facilities, extensive ridesharing programs, bus services, and marketing efforts are also being used. All of these elements are focused on providing quality services that commuters will find attractive enough to change from driving alone to using an HOV. The system must be safe, secure, and convenient.

An issue currently being examined in California and in other parts of the country is congestion pricing on HOV lanes. One idea is to allow single-occupant vehicles to use HOV lanes for a price. There are a number of issues associated with this concept, including potential degradation of travel times in the HOV lane and how to use the revenues generated from the pricing program. It is important to remember that raising revenues through congestion pricing and relieving congestion through the use of HOV facilities are two different concepts. Sometimes the lines between these two concepts get blurred, especially by public officials looking for ways to raise revenues. I hope you will discuss congestion pricing on HOV facilities at this conference.

You will also have the opportunity at the conference to hear about the experience with the recent earthquake in Los Angeles and the role HOV lanes, bus and rail services, and carpooling played in responding to the significant damage on many freeways. Temporary HOV lanes and detours were established, extra bus and rail service was added, and commuters were encouraged to carpool. Many commuters did change their travel modes during this time, and we hope they will continue to do so after the major repairs to the freeway system are complete.

I hope you will find the conference enjoyable and challenging. I would encourage you to ask questions and to share your experiences with others. I also hope you enjoy your stay in the Los Angeles area. Thank you.