

Focus Group with Transit Operators

SACOG, October 14, 2009

Conducted by Nancy Kays of MIG and Tad Widby of HNTB.

Those Present:

1. Megan Siren, City of Auburn Transit
2. Mike Wixon, Roseville Transit
3. Will Garner, Placer County Transit
4. Mike Wiley, Sacramento Regional Transit
5. Kwai Reitz, Yolo County Transit District
6. Janice Phillips, Yolo County Transit District
7. Jim Brown, SACOG

Observers:

Rebecca Sloan, SACOG

Nieves Castro, Caltrans District 3

The meeting started with a basic overview of HOT lanes and the different forms they can take, given by Tad Widby. He then led the group through a series of probing questions.

What experiences have you had with tolling?

- Bay Area bridges
- New Jersey turnpikes

How many of you have Fastrak devices in your car?

- Four

Regarding HOT lanes, what are your impressions and questions?

- Why do it? There were issues in Orange County over the concessionaire. Are they worth doing financially? (Answer – yes, over time)
- Is there research on the impact of HOT lanes on single-occupant vehicle trip length (i.e. does it encourage longer trips)? If it does encourage longer trips, then there are impacts on greenhouse gases and air quality.
- What about congestion that can take place at the end of the lanes?
- Why use HOT lanes – who benefits, who wants to use them?
- Would shorter transit headways (i.e. more transit) be a problem on HOT lanes?
- Would they operate only during commute hours?
 - On Friday and Sunday evenings, there is recreational congestion.
 - This is a potential revenue generator from non-residents
- Would trucks be allowed to use the HOT lanes? (Answer – no). Are there federal regulations about this?

- Who owns and operates HOT lanes? (Answer – it varies)
- Who funds HOT lanes? (Answer – there is no proposal yet, and it varies)
- Is there additional enforcement needed and is it included? (Answer – yes, and inclusion varies)
- What is the impact of HOT lanes on growth and development, related to Blueprint, for example? (Answer – this is a key question)

Anything else?

- There is probably a higher benefit to Placer County, so how do the costs and benefits accrue to Placer versus Sacramento Counties? (Answer – issues of gains, losses, and governance are to be determined)
- Can the excess revenue be used outside the corridor, for example by the transit agency to improve transit generally or perhaps for Capital Corridor trains?
- Is the study including the conversion of existing lanes? (Answer – no, it's not in the scope of work)
- Social equity – the use of excess revenues for transit? (Answer – this is a policy issue. There's also the issue of what should be “off the top” and what should be “excess”)
- Congestion pricing (higher during peak periods) raises the social equity issue. (Answer – calling HOT lanes “Lexus lanes” is only slightly true in terms of who actually uses the lanes)
- Would extra federal funding be generated through FTA 5307 and 5309 by these lanes (would they be considered “fixed guideways”)?
- When would HOT lanes be put in? Phased? At same time as HOV extensions? (Answer – Key question. Would they be put in all at once so they are continuous, would they connect to I-5 HOV lanes?)
- There is a plan for Bus Rapid Transit between Roseville and Sacramento that would be able to use the lanes. The HOV/HOT lanes facilitate this plan (or not!)
- Is limited access to the lanes better for throughput?
 - Transit is potentially more competitive with driving if it is more efficient using the HOT lanes (Answer – there's a tradeoff between access to the lanes and demand to use them)
- You should check to see if there is useful data from the Dulles Tollway.
- You need to identify the objectives of these lanes
 - Throughput?
 - Revenue generation? (Placer may want this)
- What is the outcome of the study? (Answer – comparative information on designing HOT lanes on I-80 from I-5 (and possibly County line) to SR 65)

Who should weigh in?

- Existing list of interviewees sounds good.

What would electeds be interested in knowing?

- Depends on the elected
- Revenue and use of excess revenue
- Possibly equity
- Cost of project and if it requires any local resources
- Results of the public poll
- Impacts on local streets
- Impacts on the end points of the HOT lanes, when they funnel down
- What happens at destinations – e.g. parking needs
- Are there induced trips?
- With existing growth projections, will this change travel behavior, i.e. driving versus taking the bus?
- Will HOT lanes increase VMP? (there's still no data on this)

What are the impacts of HOT lanes on transit?

- Same impacts as HOV lanes unless demand is not controlled
- The issue is competition with cars, not bus vs. rail use in the corridor
- Would HOT lanes affect light rail planning? (Mike Wiley – no, the next extension leaves the corridor at Watt and heads to American River College. There is BRT planned for Watt, there are increases to the Capitol Corridor trains planned).
- The PCTPA Board will want to know the capacity of the Capitol Corridor trains versus HOT lanes (although analysis shows that everything is needed in the I-80 Corridor).
- Is the economic downturn taken into consideration in this study? (Answer – it will use the existing model with existing assumptions, but a qualitative analysis will be performed).