MOVING PEOPLE,
NOT JUST CARS
Ensuring Choice, Equity & Innovation
in MTC’s Express Lane Network

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
BY JEFF HOBSON & CLARRISSA CABANSAGAN
MAY 2013

Formerly TALC, the Transportation and Land Use Coalition
MOVING PEOPLE, NOT JUST CARS

Express lanes, also known as high-occupancy toll lanes or “HOT lanes,” could provide a regional highway network where transit and high-occupancy vehicle lanes work together to seamlessly provide convenient and swift transit connections through the Bay Area. Planned as a transit system that sells excess system capacity to non-carpool vehicles, this network could move more people and reduce greenhouse gas pollution by providing new transportation choices.

But MTC’s proposed Express Lane Network is out of balance. The Express Lane Network is the 2nd-largest project in Plan Bay Area, the region’s comprehensive transportation and land use plan that is supposed to reduce greenhouse gas pollution. MTC plans to collect $6.5 billion in tolls from drivers and spend most of the money to build – or pay financing costs for – hundreds of miles of new highway lanes. There is no funding to expand transportation choices to support long-term congestion reduction. Nor is there funding for programs to ensure low-income families receive equitable benefits from this new transportation system.

Once billed as an innovative way to help manage traffic and provide a wide array of new transportation choices, MTC’s Express Lane Network has now primarily become a highway-building program whose main beneficiaries will be solo drivers who can afford to buy their way into new lanes.

Other regions have recognized the potentially inequitable impacts of HOT lanes, as higher-income drivers use them much more frequently and are the main beneficiaries of the travel-time savings. In Seattle, over 50% of HOT lane users had household incomes over $100,000, while only 15% had incomes under $50,000. These concerns have prompted other regions to incorporate expanded transportation choices – transit, vanpools, carpools, and other alternatives to solo driving – when they design their HOT network.

The Bay Area can do better. Some positive elements of MTC’s current network point the way. MTC plans to convert 173 miles of existing carpool lanes to HOT, mostly by 2015. These conversions are cost-effective: if done alone, they would produce net revenues that could be invested in a broad range of transportation improvements.

But MTC plans another 170 miles of new highway lanes, costing $2.8 billion (plus financing costs). This new construction would use up the revenues generated by the rest of the system and leave nothing left for more transportation choices or mitigations for low-income families.

Instead, the Bay Area could pursue what we call an “optimize-a-lane” approach. This approach could move more people at lower cost, with less pollution, and a more equitable distribution of benefits and costs. “Optimize-a-lane” would convert one existing general purpose lane to HOT, save $10+ million per mile, and use revenues to dramatically increase transportation options along the same corridor.

Properly managed, this HOT lane would flow freely, potentially carrying even more vehicles per hour than the previously-congested general purpose lane. With higher average vehicle occupancy from transportation choices paid for by HOT revenues, optimized HOT lanes would move more people, not just cars.
By contrast, MTC’s plans to build new highway lanes with no new transportation choices will sink the vast majority of drivers’ tolls into another fruitless attempt to build our way out of congestion. If we don’t change course, we will spend 20+ years paying off construction bonds with driver tolls that could have been used to provide more people with more choices.

*Moving People, Not Just Cars* is a detailed analysis of MTC’s network and how it compares to practices in regions around the country, and shows how MTC can prioritize choice, equity, and innovation to move more people for less money, make connections sooner, and invest in public transit and other long-term solutions. Key recommendations include:

**Recommendations for Choice**

- MTC should dedicate at least 50% of HOT revenues to provide new transportation choices – transit, vanpools, carpools, and other alternatives to solo driving – along HOT corridors and to mitigate the network’s impacts on low-income families.
- MTC should create a transportation choices expansion plan as part of the express lane network and include a commitment that with the opening of every new HOT lane, there will be a simultaneous improvement in transportation choices along the same corridor, over and above existing service.

**Recommendations for Equity**

- MTC should design and implement mitigations to ensure low-income families receive an equitable share of the benefits and do not bear a disproportionate burden of the HOT network. Mitigations may include access to the network itself, as well as transit investments.
- MTC should expand its environmental justice analysis of the HOT lane network to include a primary research question on the distribution of benefits across different income and ethnic groups, considering differences in expected frequency of use of the HOT lanes.

**Recommendations for Innovation**

- Along with the relevant CMA and Caltrans, MTC should study the “optimize-a-lane” approach (defined above) before pursuing new-construction projects in MTC’s Phase II (after 2015) or beyond, and for any congested corridor with at least 8 mixed flow lanes and no HOV lanes.
- MTC and a CMA should seek approval from Caltrans, the state legislature, and if necessary federal authorities to try the “optimize-a-lane” approach in at least two Bay Area locations.
TransForm works to create world-class public transportation and walkable communities in the Bay Area and beyond. We build diverse coalitions, influence policy, and develop innovative programs to improve the lives of all people and protect the environment.

Please visit our website at: www.TransFormCA.org

TransForm’s Offices

Oakland
436 14th Street, Suite 600
Oakland, CA 94612
510.740.3150 ext. 325

San Jose
48 South 7th Street, Suite 102
San Jose, CA 95112
408.406.8074

Sacramento
171 K Street, Suite 330
Sacramento, CA 95814
916.441.0204