


Project Bulletin 4160-7B

Project 0-4160: Operating Freeways with Managed Lanes

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## Marketing the Managed Lanes Concept



The managed lane concept is currently being considered on major freeway projects in Texas cities. While the high-occupancy vehicle (HOV) concept is familiar in most urban areas, motorists are less familiar with managed lanes.

The term “managed lanes” encompasses a variety of facility types, including high occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes, high occupancy toll (HOT) lanes, single occupancy vehicle (SOV) express lanes, special use lanes, and truck lanes. The premise of the managed lanes concept is to increase freeway efficiency and provide free flow operations for certain freeway users by packaging various operational and design strategies. Most of these actions offer the flexibility to be adjusted to match changing corridor and regional goals.

Public acceptance plays a critical role in the success of any project. Marketing a new product or concept can be challenging. Effective

marketing campaigns must consider the goals of the project and tailor the message to meet those goals. Several different techniques can be used to communicate with the public depending on the message that is to be delivered and the objectives. Likewise, a message may be tailored to particular audiences. It is important that the public, or the audience, be correctly defined. Audiences will depend on the nature or scope of the project and may change throughout the different phases of the project.

### **What We Did . . .**

Currently, there is no one facility in operation that embraces the complete range of managed lane strategies. There are, however, several unique projects putting lane management into practice by using one or more of the above strategies. Researchers found a number of recently completed managed lane

feasibility studies that address public perception and marketing.

The researchers reviewed selected projects to focus attention on the newer concept of pricing separate travel lanes, including HOT lanes and toll lanes, since previous research has addressed marketing and gaining public support for HOV lanes, SOV lanes, and truck lanes. The goal in reviewing these types of projects was to gain an understanding of public perception and public interaction when an unfamiliar and complex concept for managing travel demand is introduced.

This review of managed lane facilities worked to answer the following questions:

- What messages about managed lanes were communicated to the public, and how did they relate to the goals of the project?

- How were the messages communicated?
- Who were the target audiences?
- What was initial public perception?
- How was perception measured?
- Has perception changed since the project was implemented?
- What are the best approaches for communicating project goals and gaining acceptance?
- What lessons can we learn from the national project experience that will assist TxDOT in both communicating the managed lane concept in Texas and in developing public support at the project level?

The researchers examined several projects currently in operation to answer these questions. These projects included:

- State Route 91 in Orange County, California;
- I-15 in San Diego, California;
- I-10, Katy Freeway in Houston, Texas; and
- Tappan Zee Bridge in Westchester County, New York.

Additionally, researchers also reviewed a number of feasibility studies because of the documented market research efforts. These studies were as follows:

- I-394 in Minneapolis/St. Paul, Minnesota;
- Regional Pricing Study in Portland, Oregon;
- US 50 HOT Lane Study in Maryland;
- South Florida HOT Lanes Study;
- I-405 in Seattle, Washington; and
- Value Express Lanes Feasibility Study in Denver, Colorado.

## ***What We Found . . .***

Pricing in particular, and other operational actions in general, can be used as mechanisms to regulate demand on a managed lane facility. When coupled with a comprehensive transportation plan the strategies can be very effective. Studies indicate that when certain factors, such as severe congestion, are present and prevalent issues, such as revenue use, toll collection, and long-range planning, are addressed the likelihood of a project's success increases.

Public involvement has become an important step in the project planning process. However, when considering a managed lanes project, public involvement must go one step further and include a more comprehensive public education component. In this regard, public education differs from public involvement in that people are unfamiliar with the concept. It must be thoroughly communicated and it must include all aspects of the project, such as goals, objectives, operations, and revenue use. While the public is familiar with some examples of pricing to manage demand, many do not see the government's role in this endeavor. Research has shown that in focus groups, individuals are more supportive of the concept after they are shown examples of successful projects and how they operate.

Public education should be a consideration at the first stage of planning a project. All interested parties should be involved in the decision-making process, and efforts should be made to contact known stakeholders as well as non-traditional stakeholders who may have a vested interest in a project. These groups may include the trucking industry, environmental groups, alternative fuel proponents, or energy conservation groups. By

involving representatives from all affected and potentially affected groups, an education process is cultivated that carries through all the stages of the project. This effort also prevents the spread of misinformation and capitalizes on the interaction between different groups.

Research has shown that public education can alleviate concerns about the equity of a project. Pricing projects have been seen as unfair to economically disadvantaged groups when originally presented to the public. However, after a project and its operation are explained many of the equity questions disappear. Additionally, studies of managed lane use indicate that users represent a fairly even distribution of economic and social groups.

Furthermore, identifying a project champion is also crucial to the success of a project. Research has found that projects that have been successfully implemented have had a strong advocate. This person can be used as a spokesperson in the education process.

Although transportation agency representatives or local elected officials might seem the most likely candidates to move a project to public acceptance, the mistrust of politicians and governmental agencies may require a champion emerge from elsewhere. Public opinion of elected officials and other politicians will help discern whether or not an elected official can effectively communicate the managed lane project message. Therefore, it is important to involve as many potential stakeholders as possible because a champion may arise from any group. For instance, Portland formed a citizen's committee to explore pricing. The MPO felt that since pricing was such a controversial issue, a

citizen's committee would provide a more credible and independent voice to the general public.

## **The Researchers Recommend . . .**

After a project champion has been identified and the public education process begins, the key messages of the project need to be communicated to the general public. Successful projects have common messages that have been well received by the public. These include:

- *Choice* – Research has shown that the public does not perceive pricing as inequitable when it is presented as a choice for commuters. The education process is key to communicating this message.
- *Tool* – The public may perceive a pricing project as a “band-aid” or short-term solution. Messages should emphasize that it is only one tool that works with a comprehensive plan.
- *Efficiency* – Typically the public does not understand techniques that may be used to maximize HOV lane utilization. When shown that pricing maximizes available capacity, the pricing concept is more acceptable.
- *Operations* – People want to know how the program will work. Presenting examples of successful projects and how they operate helps facilitate understanding and support. This is especially true in areas where there are no HOV lanes or toll roads. They need assurances that toll collection will not impede travel that is already congested because they may be unfamiliar with electronic toll collection.

- *Enforcement* – Enforcement is especially important in areas that currently operate HOV lanes. The traveling public wants to know that if they pay for a premium service others will not be allowed a “free ride.”
- *Revenue Use* – How the agency plans to use the revenue must be clearly defined from the outset of the project. Successful projects have targeted the money for improvements in a corridor where the project is occurring. Public opinion research indicates that people are evenly split on revenue use for transit improvements or to fund roadway projects. Additionally,

as part of on-going public information, improvements that are made with revenue should be highlighted.

- *Transportation Funding* – Research has shown that the public is unaware of how transportation projects are funded. Where pricing is used messages should focus on the funding shortfall and show pricing as a means to raise revenue for projects that otherwise might not be funded. This reinforces the idea that a pricing project is a management tool in a comprehensive plan that will impact the entire region.

## **For More Details . . .**

### **Related Report:**

Report 4160-7, *Marketing the Managed Lanes Concept*.

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