

Possible Revenue Sources for Public Transit: High Occupancy Toll Lanes

What are High Occupancy Toll Lanes?

High Occupancy Toll Lanes (HOT) are roadways that allow lower occupancy vehicles, such as solo drivers, to use these facilities in return for toll payments, which could vary by time-of-day or level of congestion. Simply put, HOT lanes are an example of “value pricing” (charging a price only for a higher level of service).

A high occupancy vehicle is a transportation planning term referring to a driver and one or more passengers. Qualification for High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) status varies by locality, and may require more than two people. By charging a fee and/or by limiting the types of vehicles that have access, a lane can be “managed” to maintain reliable and less congested flow. HOV lanes are supposed to encourage people to carpool or take public transit that utilizes the HOV lane.

How popular are High Occupancy Toll Lanes?

The pricing of managed lanes has been tried in several cities across the country, and many more are studying the concept, including Atlanta. In some cities, such as Dallas, San Diego and Washington D.C., such pricing has been defined as the major means of providing new capacity in the respective region's future highway network.

Areas that currently have HOT lanes include Orange and Alameda counties in California, San Diego, Houston, Denver, Miami-Dade County and Minneapolis/St. Paul.

As was the case with researching regular toll roads, there is little evidence that any funding raised by



EXAMPLE OF AN HOV LANE

the HOT lanes goes towards public transportation. Rather, the funds are used primarily for roadway construction and improvements. The funding is often used to finance the construction of such lanes.

As noted above, the chief benefit of HOT lanes in regards to public transportation is that they can be utilized by buses.

Transportation planners in Maryland are pursuing express toll lanes on several major highways. The fees would fund the construction of the lanes would be paid by all drivers and would rise during times when traffic get heavier.

What are the Pros and Cons of High Capacity Toll Lanes?

Cons

- There is some concern that the HOT lanes can be guaranteed to be congestion free.
- People who cannot afford the fee would not see any benefit.
- The system does not address the issue of taking cars off the road. Revenue collected is overwhelming used for construction of roadways and bridges.
- Revenue generation is often not the primary goal of HOT lanes.
- Concerns by some that the lanes are underutilized.

Pros

- Drivers like the idea of having the lane as an option.
- Transit vehicles can use the lanes for free, thus they are able to benefit from the travel time and trip reliability benefits associated with such lanes.
- Drivers believe the lanes are safer because of less traffic.