

Charlotte Region HOV/HOT/Managed Lanes Study
Regional Technical Team
Meeting #1

June 19, 2007 10:30am – 12:30pm
Charlotte Mecklenburg Government Center, Rooms 270-271

Meeting Summary

After a welcome by Tim Gibbs of the Charlotte Department of Transportation (CDOT) and self-introductions, Jack Flaherty of the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) reminded the group of the steps that had led to funding for the project. Given the large number of regional partners, Mr. Flaherty was pleased at how fast everything had been wrapped up.

Lynn Purnell of PB briefed the Regional Technical Team (RTT) on the scope and schedule for the work, including who on the PB Team would lead each of the feasibility assessments: Technical, Financial and Institutional. The schedule has two phases. Corridor screening in Phase 1 should be finished in September or October. This initial phase also includes an August workshop involving RTT members and other invited participants. RTT members were cautioned that, although projects might indicate initial feasibility, if they were not embraced by decision makers, they would not be approved. They were also told that congestion pricing and revenue maximization were often competing interests when considering high occupancy toll (HOT) lanes. Chuck Fuhs of PB noted that managed lanes only make sense where congestion exists now or in the horizon years. The screening would look at how much congestion is occurring, whether it is during one or more hours a day, as well as whether it was taking place on one segment or all segments of the corridor. Mr. Fuhs discussed three techniques to manage congestion: eligibility, access control, and pricing. He reviewed the history of use of eligibility and access control on highway facilities in the United States. The use of pricing is a more recent way of maximizing person throughput in a lane. Mr. Fuhs contrasted pricing for congestion management with the use of tolls for construction of new facilities, such as the Monroe Bypass-Connector. Emerging toll technologies now permit the price charged on HOT lanes to change throughout the day. Of over 130 managed lane projects in the US and Canada, seven projects currently use pricing. Possible reasons for dedicating a lane to managed lanes include a lack of fiscal resources or a lack of physical resources (there is a lack of right-of-way to build additional capacity). Mr. Fuhs gave the example that 60 percent of the high occupancy vehicle (HOV) lane system in L.A. is overloaded so they are considering raising HOV eligibility to 3+ and adding pricing.

Mr. Fuhs encouraged RTT members to ask questions in order that the PB Team could bring relevant managed lanes experiences in other urban areas to this study. He expects value pricing to become “main-stream” primarily because it is a finer grained management tool than eligibility alone. Current technology allows value pricing to

change every three minutes, providing greater flexibility to changing traffic conditions. What people say they want to know are the price and the benefits, so they can make an immediate decision on whether to use a HOT lane. Based on experiences from other cities, motorists typically use a managed lane on a discretionary basis, or about once every eight days. The managed lane gives them a choice that they didn't have before.

Sashi Amatya reviewed ProjectSolve, a web-based management tool developed by the company to better coordinate planning activities. The study website is designed for exclusive use by RTT members and the PB Team in order to store files, keep track of versions of technical memoranda, manage calendars to which notices and minutes may be attached, and upload/download large files because there is no capacity limit. At the end of the project, the ProjectSolve study site can be copied to a DVD, providing a study history.

Bob Cook of the Mecklenburg-Union Metropolitan Planning Organization (MUMPO) stated that more public involvement may be needed in order to educate people adequately about managed lanes and their applicability to the Charlotte Region. Attendees also raised the question of who is responsible for media relations. It was noted that the anti-rail advocates in Charlotte-Mecklenburg are mentioning HOT lanes as a possible solution to congestion. Rebecca Yarbrough of the Lake Norman Rural Planning Organization (RPO) said it is not unusual for people to jump to the latest idea as a panacea. She added that it will be important that managed lanes be presented as an example of yet another tool in the toolbox. Norm Steinman of CDOT noted that the Charlotte Region is projected to double in population over the next 25 to 30 years. That amount growth would require the region to produce the same amount of transportation capacity which was built over the last 150 years. Because it is highly unlikely that the region could provide required transportation capacity using traditional ways, new congestion management techniques are necessary. Mr. Steinman stated that there is no one single way to solve the problem and the region's future must be linked to a wide variety of transportation solutions.

Mr. Fuhs distributed some interactive CD ROMs that includes example HOV projects implemented and operated around the country. He also passed out a survey and asked RTT members to select up to three areas for PB to research to emphasize. Research will be discussed at the next meeting. Mr. Purnell reviewed the types of data which will need to be compiled for the study, including the physical attributes of the roadway facilities (lane, median and shoulder widths) and available right-of-way. During corridor screening, Mr. Fuhs indicated volume-to-capacity ratios by segment and travel speed would be analyzed.

Mr. Amayta will coordinate the HOV, HOT and managed lanes modeling results produced by CDOT. The modeling will have a lot of information so it will be important to make it as transparent as possible. Roads that will be looked at are not just freeways, but other important commuting routes. Mr. Steinman mentioned the addition of US-521 to Lancaster County to the routes under consideration. Dana Stoogenke of the Rocky River RPO asked if NC-24/27 to Stanly County could be included.

Ms. Yarbrough asked if the modeling would project the VMT growth rate. Mr. Steinman and Mr. Fuhs pointed out some of the problems with model results at saturation conditions. Mr. Fuhs indicated that the Bay Area considered pricing in order to complete a road more quickly, but when they projected the revenue stream into the deep future, revenue actually decreased according to the model. He added that not all parameters always go in the same direction when reviewing model results.

Mary Hopper of Hopper Communications discussed study outreach and the importance of getting a sense of public perceptions of managed lanes. This task will include interviews drawn from representatives from throughout the region, adding that RTT members will be crucial in suggesting names. The workshop will be by invitation only with input from the RTT. Ms. Hopper noted that the PB Team will work with the City and NCDOT to tag onto existing citizen surveys (such as annual survey by UNCC's Urban Institute) to obtain broader public input on HOV and HOT implementation. Gail Grimes of the North Carolina Turnpike Authority (NCTA) mentioned surveys completed a year ago on toll facilities, and Mr. Gibbs will provide those to the PB Team. Mr. Gibbs added the possibility of tagging onto an annual survey of York County residents performed by Winthrop University. Knowing when meetings might be happening throughout the region where HOV/HOT/Managed Lane data might be presented was judged to be an invaluable way to extend the work.

Mr. Cook raised the question about the impact on the study of the possible repeal of the ½-cent sales tax in Mecklenburg County. RTT members thought it wouldn't affect Phase I, but that if it were repealed, it would make a major change in the dynamics of Phase II. Attendees concurred that the purpose of this study was not linked to the possible sales tax repeal. As stated by Jonathan Parker of NCDOT, it is important for people to understand that there is still a long range transportation plan in effect for MUMPO. Any financing decisions would not have to be made quickly since the funding stream would not officially go away until July 2008 if the tax is repealed. Even if the tax is repealed, the need for transportation choices will not. Mr. Fuhs recounted a number of urban areas in the United States where transit taxes have been repealed and then reinstated. Over time all major cities tend to provide a full array of transportation tools offering a wide mix of travel choices. It's important for people to understand that this is not an either/or decision.

Mr. Fuhs indicated that the corridor screening results at the end of Phase I would look like a *Consumer Reports* chart and be easy to understand. Because not all corridors will likely move into Phase II, the schedule includes time to review Phase I results with the RTT, MPOs and RPOs.

Jennifer Harris of NCTA said there will be a number of ways that we can tag-team with work underway by NCTA. As an example, the agency has meetings scheduled on June 25th and 26th on the Monroe Bypass-Connector. Similar meetings opportunities may arise for the Garden Parkway in Gaston County.

Mr. Cook commented on the need for a public study website hosted by MUMPO but be linked to the various partners' sites. The group was asked what types of information should be included. The thought was that it should be educational, visual and include some of the cases on the CD ROM.

Mr. Flaherty concluded the meeting by talking about next steps, including scheduling of the workshop. Attendees were asked to fill out the calendar indicating their availability over the next two months in order to facilitate scheduling the next RTT meeting and workshop.