

**CITY/COUNTY ASSOCIATION OF GOVERNMENTS COMMITTEE ON CONGESTION  
MANAGEMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY (CMEQ)**

**MINUTES  
MEETING OF February 24, 2014**

The meeting was called to order by Chair Garbarino in Conference Room C at City Hall of San Mateo at 3:00 pm. Attendance sheet is attached.

**1. Public comment on items not on the agenda.**

None.

**2. Approval of minutes of January 27, 2014 meeting.**

Chair Garbarino postponed this item because a quorum of members was not present at the start of the meeting.

**3. Receive a presentation on express lanes.**

Sandy Wong, C/CAG Executive Director, invited Mr. John Ristow from the Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (VTA) and Mr. Stewart Ng from the Alameda Transportation Commission (Alameda CTC) to provide a presentation on their counties' experiences with express lanes. Express lanes are specially designated highway lanes that provide solo drivers the option to pay a toll for access into the carpool/high-occupancy vehicle (HOV) lane. At present, there are two segments of express lanes that are currently operational in the Bay Area: SR 237 in Santa Clara County and I-680 (Sunol Grade) in Alameda and Santa Clara counties.

The presentations by Mr. Ristow and Mr. Ng were intended to provide CMEQ members with additional information on the operation of express lanes in the Bay Area following the update that staff provided at the last CMEQ meeting about highway improvement studies along US 101. Sandy stated that staff will likely return to the CMEQ Committee next month with an action item as to whether the express lanes concept should be studied further for San Mateo County.

Highlights from Mr. Ristow and Mr. Ng's presentations include:

- Significant population and job growth is forecasted for the region, and Mr. Ristow and Mr. Ng both talked about the growing problem of congestion in their respective counties. They suggested that constructing new freeways and expanding capacity to deal with the problem is no longer a feasible solution due to the lack of space and financial constraints.
- In Santa Clara County, a network of carpool lanes exists, and VTA plans to convert several of these to express lanes to allow single occupant vehicles to pay their way into the lane when they choose. The express lanes in Alameda and Santa Clara counties use dynamic pricing and technology to maximize the efficiency of the existing freeway and improve travel times.
- Fees paid by users of the express lanes finance their construction and can be used to fund other improvements along the corridor, including transit. According to Mr. Ristow, this is one of the benefits of express lanes; taxes do not need to be raised to pay for improvements. For the express lanes in Santa Clara County, the VTA Board of Directors will decide how express lane revenues are spent.

- VTA conducted significant public outreach prior to implementing express lanes. Survey data gathered by the agency during this phase of the work disputed the idea that express lanes are only used by the wealthy. Findings from the survey suggested that people from all income levels are likely to use express lanes to save time if needed. According to Mr. Ristow, the results of national studies corroborate these findings.
- The SR 237 express lane project in Santa Clara County cost approximately \$12 million to construct. At present, the lane grosses around \$1 million in revenue per year with annual operation and management costs of \$500,000. According to Mr. Ristow, the express lane has saved travelers around 15 minutes of travel time through a four-mile stretch of SR 237. The average toll paid by express lane users is \$1.90, and the toll ranges from \$0.30 to \$5.00. The price is recalculated every five minutes depending on the average speed and congestion. If the average speed drops below 45 miles per hour, carpool only mode is triggered, as state legislation requires these lanes to operate at an average of 45 miles per hour at least 90 percent of the time.
- Tolls for the express lanes are paid by solo drivers through the FastTrak system, in a similar manner to how drivers pay for bridge tolls in the Bay Area. At present there is only one toll zone for the express lane on SR 237, which covers four miles. In future express lanes in both Alameda and Santa Clara counties, multiple toll zones are planned, and solo drivers will be charged a toll for each zone through which they travel.
- According to Mr. Ng, in Alameda County, use of the express lane on the southbound side I-680 has increased over the past three years. The northbound express lane is currently under construction. The average toll paid by solo drivers in the southbound lane is around \$2.30 and ranges from \$0.30 to \$7.50 depending on congestion. Mr. Ng reported that a technical analysis of the conditions on I-680 before and after the express lane came into operation found that traffic speeds increased in the general purpose lane following implementation.
- According to Mr. Ng, Alameda CTC is looking into near continuous access for future express lanes that are planned in Alameda County based on lessons learned from the current lane on I-680. This will allow drivers to enter and exit from the toll lane freely instead of through designated access points. Alameda CTC is also looking into implementing automated toll violations and is supporting state legislation that will require all toll vehicles to carry transponders that declare whether or not the car is a single driver or a carpool. According to Mr. Ng, this concept is generally well accepted where it has been implemented in the Los Angeles area.

A question and answer session followed the two presentations, and Mr. Ristow and Mr. Ng responded to several questions from committee members.

- Responding to a question on controlled access points, Mr. Ristow stated that drivers will need to remember where to enter and exit the express lanes, as the lanes do not currently allow vehicles to freely enter and exit. He said that limited access lanes like these have been operational in the Los Angeles area for some time.
- Regarding the cost-per-mile for express lanes, Mr. Ristow reported that the total cost for the express lane projects that are planned for Santa Clara County, which will involve a mix of converting existing carpool lanes and building new lanes, is around \$600 million. User fees from the express lanes are expected to finance the construction of these lanes over 30 years.
- Answering a question as to how express lane revenues can be used and whether they can be accessed for other improvements to the corridor, Mr. Ristow stated that the SR 237 is currently operating at a net positive position and that the VTA Board of Directors will ultimately decide how to spend the revenues generated by the express lanes. According to Mr. Ristow, it will take a few years for the new express lanes currently under construction to operate at a surplus,

as the usage of the lanes is forecasted to increase over time. He added that the agency is required by statute to reinvest any net revenues back into the corridor. Mr. Ng reported that the southbound I-680 operation is currently operating at a small deficit, but added that this will likely change when construction of northbound express lane is completed, as there are economies of scale to operating and managing the lanes.

- Responding to a question as to whether there has been a Proposition 218 challenge to express lanes, Mr. Ristow stated that he is not aware of any challenges and added that VTA has not yet distributed any express lane funds. He reported that VTA will keep reinvesting the funds back into the corridor, as required by statute. Several potential projects along the corridor that have been discussed include express buses, discounts to low-income riders, discounts on transit, and increased transit service.
- Member Olbert commented on the number of years of benefit that the express lanes will provide. He questioned whether the county will be no better off than where it is now in five years even after implementing express lanes given growing levels of congestion. Mr. Ristow responded that express lanes are one step in the evolution of the freeway corridor and that in the future other steps may be considered to address increasing congestion, such as increasing occupancy requirements in high-occupancy lanes or increasing the caps on express lane tolls.

#### **4. Receive information on a proposal to develop an Alternative Fuel Readiness Plan.**

John Hoang, C/CAG staff, and Larry Waterland of Life Cycle Associates, provided an overview of a proposal that C/CAG recently submitted to the California Energy Commission (CEC) to develop an Alternative Fuel Readiness Plan for the county. There are \$2 million in funds available on a competitive basis from the program, and C/CAG expects to hear back from the CEC in two to three weeks. The intent of the plan is to prepare county agencies and municipalities for alternative fuel commercialization and provide a blueprint for public agencies in permitting and deploying the infrastructure needed for alternative fuel vehicles.

The plan will address the six technical tasks that the CEC requires in its funding guidelines:

- Analyze existing and potential incentives for use of alternative fuels;
- Identify challenges and opportunities for sharing best practices for planning, permitting, deployment, maintenance, and inspection of alternative fuel infrastructure;
- Develop training materials for fleet operators, planners, first responders, and decision-makers regarding alternative fuel infrastructure development;
- Develop strategies and best practices to increase procurement of alternative fuels;
- Develop marketing analyses, marketing materials, and outreach strategies to communicate the benefits of alternative fuel usage to target groups, such as fleet owners/operators; and
- Develop strategies to assist alternative fuel wholesalers/retailers to increase the availability and/or reduce the cost of alternative fuels.

#### **5. Update on Potential Countywide Stormwater Funding Initiative.**

Matt Fabry, C/CAG staff, reported that AB 418, the enabling legislation that would allow C/CAG to issue a special tax or property-related fee, passed out of the Senate with a two-thirds vote. It is now headed to the State Assembly and Local Government Committee.

Matt also reported that the Funding Needs Analysis report is being finalized and that staff is continuing to work with the cities to determine how much it costs them to comply with regional permit requirements. In the upcoming weeks, Matt and Sandy will be meeting with each jurisdiction to talk

about needs and potential rate levels. A mail survey is planned for late March to determine the level of public support for various fee levels.

According to Matt, if everything lines up, staff could seek authorization from the C/CAG Board in June to move forward with an initiative and begin mail-out property-related fee balloting in August or September. This would allow C/CAG to generate revenue as quickly as possible, as soon as FY 2015/2016. However, this timeline may be aggressive, as other potential initiatives that may be on the November ballot may hamper the stormwater funding initiative.

**2. Approval of minutes of January 27, 2014 meeting. (revisited)**

*Motion: To approve the Minutes of the January 27, 2014 meeting, Bigelow/Pierce. Motion carried unanimously with two abstentions, Roberts and O'Neil.*

**6. Executive Director Report.**

Sandy Wong, C/CAG Executive Director, reported that the C/CAG Board will have its annual retreat on April 10.

She also reported that Sustainable San Mateo County (SSMC) will be hosting an event on February 27 in the SamTrans Auditorium in San Carlos for the launch SSMC Indicators Report.

**7. Member comments and announcements.**

Member Bigelow reported that the Dumbarton Rail project will be discussed at the Metropolitan Transportation Commission meeting in May.

Meeting adjourned at 4:17 pm.

The next regular meeting was scheduled for March 31, 2014.