

Riverside County Carpool Lane Hours of Operation Report



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Report to the Legislature

2019

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Executive Summary

The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) has prepared this report, as required by Assembly Bill (AB) 91 (Cervantes, Chapter 468, Statutes of 2018), which requires Caltrans to report to the Legislature on the feasibility and appropriateness of limiting the use of high-occupancy vehicle lanes (carpool lanes) to high-occupancy vehicles and eligible vehicles only during the hours of heavy commuter traffic on both State Route 91 (SR-91) between Interstate 15 (I-15) and Interstate 215 (I-215) and State Route 60 (SR-60) in Riverside County.

With some exceptions, single-occupancy vehicles are currently prohibited from using carpool lanes on SR-60, SR-91 and I-215 in Riverside County. This report explores the potential impacts and concerns that Caltrans has with converting the operation of carpool lanes on the three freeway corridors from a full-time to part-time basis, such as vehicle-moving capability and air quality implications.

It should be noted that Caltrans is currently in the process of conducting a study that will result in a Managed Lanes System Plan for Caltrans District 8, covering Riverside and San Bernardino counties. Until this study has been completed, the department would be unable to make a fully-informed decision on the future of these lanes, taking into account alternatives and their potential impacts on congestion, vehicle miles traveled, air quality, or greenhouse gas emissions.

Caltrans recommends deferring a decision on whether to convert carpool lanes on SR-60, SR-91 or I-215 in Riverside County from full-time to part-time operations until the Managed Lanes System Plan is developed.

Background

Statutory Reference and Purpose

AB 91 requires Caltrans to report to the Legislature on the feasibility and appropriateness of moving carpool lanes from full-time operation to part-time on SR-91 between I-15 and I-215, and SR-60 in Riverside County.

This bill was in part due to the California Transportation Commission's recommendation in its 2016 annual report to the Legislature that Caltrans review the hours of carpool lane operation in southern California, as part of the department's statutorily-required report to the Legislature on the degradation status of carpool lanes on the State highway system.

Program Background

Carpool lanes are a type of "managed lane." A managed lane is an exclusive- or preferential-use lane that is managed proactively in response to changing conditions in order to achieve improved efficiency and performance. Managed lanes use operational strategies such as access control, vehicle eligibility, and tolling, or some combination thereof. Carpool lanes in particular are used to promote carpooling and transit usage, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and maximize the efficiency of a freeway by increasing person throughput.

Carpool lanes are reserved for passenger vehicles with more than one occupant; an "occupant" is considered any person who occupies a safety restraint device (i.e., a seat-belt). Motorcycles and certain qualifying low-emission and zero-emission vehicles with only a single occupant are also eligible to use these lanes. Carpool lane operational hours vary in the northern and southern parts of the State. In northern California, carpool lanes are only operational on Monday through Friday during posted peak congestion hours, for example, between 6 a.m. to 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. to 7 p.m. All other vehicles may use the carpool lanes during off-peak hours. This is referred to as "part-time" operation. The carpool lanes in southern California generally operate 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, which is referred to as "full-time" operation.

Future Study and Potential Impacts

Managed Lanes System Plan Study

Caltrans requires each district that currently operates or expects to operate managed lanes within the next 20 years to prepare a Managed Lanes System Plan, in cooperation with regional transportation agencies and other stakeholders. Caltrans District 8 is currently developing its plan. The district is

studying the viability of converting, constructing, or adding managed lanes on freeways in western Riverside and San Bernardino Counties. The study will gather data, conduct analyses, perform public outreach, and report on specific aspects of the feasibility of adding to the planned 56-mile managed lane network in District 8. The department expects this plan to be complete within the next two years.

Traffic and Greenhouse Gas Emission Impacts

Conversion of carpool lanes to part-time operation could have negative impacts on vehicle miles traveled and greenhouse gas emissions as a result of induced demand. By increasing the number of single-occupancy vehicles operating in carpool lanes there is reduced incentive for the motoring public to carpool or use public transit. Additionally, given the full-time carpool lane statuses of neighboring and connecting highways, a change in this area alone could cause motorist confusion and result in unintended congestion.

Air Quality Impacts

Any changes to part-time carpool lanes could additionally result in negative air quality impacts. If air quality impacts occur, the department would be responsible for implementing costly air quality mitigation measures. This concern is compounded by the fact that the areas surrounding SR-91, between I-15 and I-215, and SR-60 in Riverside County are part of federal non-attainment areas for multiple criteria pollutants. Until these potential impacts are better studied and understood, it would not be appropriate for Caltrans to advocate for their change at this time.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Caltrans recommends that any decisions on the conversion of carpool lanes on SR-91 between I-15 and I-215, and SR-60 in Riverside County from full-time to part-time should be deferred until Caltrans District 8 develops a Managed Lanes System Plan. The department would not be able to make a fully informed decision on the impacts of these changes or how best to approach such a conversion until this study is concluded.

Appendix A. Statutory Reporting Reference

STREETS AND HIGHWAYS CODE - SHC

DIVISION 1. STATE HIGHWAYS

CHAPTER 1. ADMINISTRATION

ARTICLE 3. THE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

149.2. (a) The department shall report to the transportation policy committees of the Legislature, in compliance with Section 9795 of the Government Code, on or before January 1, 2020, on the feasibility and appropriateness of limiting the use of high-occupancy vehicle lanes to high-occupancy vehicles and eligible vehicles only during the hours of heavy commuter traffic on both State Route 91 between Interstate 15 and Interstate 215 in the County of Riverside, and State Route 60 in the County of Riverside.

(b) For purposes of this section, "eligible vehicle" means a vehicle listed by the State Air Resources Board as eligible for a Clean Air Vehicle decal.

(c) The requirement for submitting a report imposed under subdivision (a) is inoperative on January 1, 2024, pursuant to Section 10231.5 of the Government Code.

(Added by Stats. 2018, Ch. 468, Sec. 1. (AB 91) Effective January 1, 2019.)