

WOW Transportation Focus Group

Volume 1, Issue 6

January 20, 2016

I-405 Managed Express Toll (HOT) Lanes – A Revolt!

The HOT (High Occupancy Toll) lanes on I-405 have increased congestion, reduced safety and failed to gain acceptance by most drivers. What a Mess! **There is a revolt at hand.**

Let's be clear. HOT lanes can't work if there is no congestion in the General Purpose (GP) lanes. If the GP lanes were allowed to work well, there would be no 'market' for the excess capacity in the HOT lanes, so no one would buy their way in. It's the same concept as the HOV lane system – you have to create congestion in the GP lanes in order to encourage more drivers to carpool to use the free HOV lanes. Therefore, the whole HOV lane system for the last 30 years - and the new HOT lane system - is a public policy to create congestion in the GP lanes so select drivers who follow the government preferred behavior (or are financially able to afford it in the new version) can use the elite lanes paid for with gas tax dollars assessed to all drivers.

The I-405 Managed Express Toll Lanes project was opened to traffic on Sept. 27, 2015 with dynamic variable tolling for two lanes between Bellevue and Bothell and one lane between Bothell and I-5 in Lynnwood. In addition, there are three non-tolled GP lanes between Bellevue and Bothell and two non-tolled GP lanes between SR 522 in Bothell and I-5. The cost of this nearly three year project is in the \$450 million range, using gas tax revenue. This revenue was authorized and raised for construction of GP lanes open to all users per the I-405 Master Plan in 2003 and 2005. In 2011 the Legislature changed the rules and reallocated the revenue to the HOT lane concept.

WSDOT reports the results as a success. The people still stuck in traffic have a different idea. Rep. Mark Harmsworth of Mill Creek has introduced a bill ([HB 2312](#)) in the 2016 Legislative session to change the current operation. Senator Andy Hill has introduced a companion bill in the Senate (SB 6231).

The Washington Policy Center has produced a Legislative Memo with an analysis of the data to date which was presented to the Senate Transportation Committee on January 14 at a hearing on the bill ([WPC memo](#)). Bob Pishue, Director, Coles Center for Transportation at the Washington Policy Center identifies four Key Findings in his memo:

1. Speeds and toll revenue are not as expected.
2. GP congestion (average speeds) has not improved as projected (after \$450 million).
3. Is the policy question about congestion relief or raising money?
4. PSRC says a single HOT lane would work better. Maybe we should try it.

How Can I Help?

Call in support of HB 2312 now (or email) the legislators on the House Transportation Committee (Click here for the [Legislators](#)). The House Committee needs a push from voters.

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I-405 History

I-405 was constructed in the 1960s into the 1970s as part of the initial Interstate Highway system funded with 90% federal gas tax revenue and 10% state gas taxes. The initial highway was constructed as a four lane suburban limited access freeway. It extended from I-5 in Tukwila to I-5 in Lynnwood through Renton, (now) Newcastle, Bellevue, Kirkland, Bothell and Snohomish County. Over the years an additional GP lane was added in each direction between Bellevue and Bothell.

In the circa 1980's a high occupancy vehicle (HOV) lane was added in the median the full length between Tukwila and Lynnwood, operated as a 2+ HOV lane. This was also funded with significant dollops of federal gas tax revenue. The intent was to get people out of their cars through the Commute Trip Reduction Act (bet you didn't know there was such a thing – see [CTR](#)), in part by encouraging car pools.

In the mid-1990's the I-405 corridor had become so congested that the Legislature authorized the I-405 Corridor Master Plan process to figure out what to do. A three year, \$7 million evaluation

The I-405 Master Plan will ultimately:

- Add up to 2 lanes in each direction in I-405
- Develop a Bus Rapid Transit line with stations along I-405 and expanded transit centers
- Improve key arterials
- Accommodate an additional 110,000 trips per day in the corridor
- Reduce time stuck in traffic by over 13 million hours per year – an average of over 40 hours per year per regular user
- Produce travel time savings valued at \$569 million each year
- Save \$42 million each year in decreased traffic accidents
- Create 1700 new vanpools – a 100% increase
- Increase local transit service by up to 50% within the study area
- Build 5,000 new park-and-ride spaces
- Create eight new pedestrian/bicycle crossings over I-405
- Enhance freight mobility through better interchanges, travel time reduction, and updated and technologies
- Provide much-needed economic benefits for Washington State – for each \$1 million spent on new construction, an additional 30 jobs are created

and SEPA/NEPA Environmental Impact Statement project culminated in adoption of the I-405 Master Plan ([I-405 Master Plan](#)) in 2002. This plan had an extensive public process, evaluated many alternatives ranging from all transit to all highway alternatives and many in between, looking at 2030 travel projections.

The I-405 Master Plan was approved by every city in the corridor, King County, Snohomish County, Sound Transit, WSDOT, and USDOT. It received a Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Record of Decision ([ROD](#)) in October, 2002, a critical document required to spend federal gas tax dollars on an Interstate Highway.

The Approved Plan included the items in the blue box, had an estimated cost of about \$7 Billion (year 2000 \$), with \$5 Billion for I-405 GP lane additions, one billion for a Bus Rapid Transit system on I-405 plus another one Billion for local arterial streets at the various interchange access points. The first item in the adjacent box means about 120 lane miles of new capacity in the 30 mile corridor. Most of the rest also add up to significant 'capacity' enhancements. **HOT lanes are not on the list.**



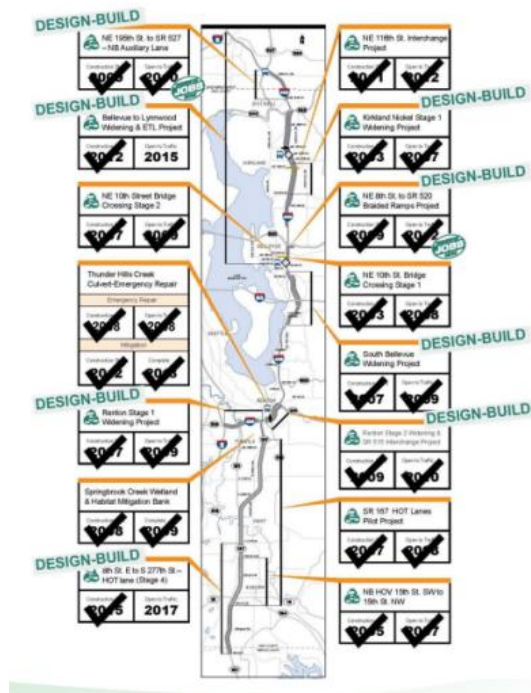
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The 2003 Nickle and the 2005 9.5 cent gas tax (Transportation Partnership Account – TPA) increases included about \$2 billion for I-405 upgrades. This provided an additional lane in each direction plus upgrades between I-5 in Tukwila to SR 167 in Renton, adding the SR 515 interchange in Renton plus upgrades to the mainline to SR 169, an auxiliary lane northbound from Coal Creek Parkway to I-90, additional lanes each direction from NE 6th St. in Bellevue to I-90 with a new bridge over I-90, the northbound braided ramps between NE 8th St. and SR 520, auxiliary lanes in Kirkland between NE 85th and Totem Lake and an auxiliary lane northbound from NE 195th St. in Bothell to SR 527 in Snohomish County. About this time WSDOT realized that SR 167 down the Kent/Auburn Valley really was an extension of I-405, so some resources were allocated to extending the SR 167 HOT lanes to Auburn. See WSDOT’s I-405 Corridor Project Progress brag sheet shown here and at slide 16 of [I-405 Capacity Projects](#).

Sound Transit effectively loaned WSDOT funds (through the so-called ‘Land Bank’ system - [Land Bank](#)) for the direct access ramps to the HOV lanes at NE 6th St. in Bellevue and NE 128th St. in Kirkland. In 2006 Sound Transit ignored the Approved I-405 Master Plan (see the second item in the box) and asked the East King County voters to approve a Light Rail line from Seattle to the Microsoft Campus through Bellevue rather than the approved bus rapid transit (BRT) on I-405. Eastlink was accepted by the voters and is starting construction this year.

By 2010 the concept of Managed Express Toll Lanes had hit the national transportation scene and WSDOT convinced the legislature that I-405 was a viable candidate. The 2011 Legislature authorized the current operation in RCW 47.56.880. The Washington Transportation Commission was commissioned to conduct an analysis which was completed by Cambridge Systematics for \$1.8 million in 2012 ([Cambridge Systematics](#)).

The analysis was devastating; the Legislature did not read it and authorized WSDOT to construct the current operation with Nickle and TPA gas tax revenue that was originally authorized for GP lanes, in RCW 47.56.880.

In July 2015 the Legislature authorized an additional \$1.2 billion for HOT lanes between Bellevue and Renton, including direct connected HOT lane ramps between I-405 and SR 167 to the south. Those interchange ramps are fully designed with construction to start in the spring of 2016. WSDOT has already signed the construction contract. If the 2016 Legislature acts on the HB 2312 this year, the design of the new HOT lanes can be revised before they are constructed.

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