

## ***The Expansion, Conversion and Creation of HOV & HOT Lanes***

### **ISSUE**

With the Highway Trust Fund facing insolvency and the motor fuel excise taxes representing the primary revenue source for the Highway Trust Fund, new funding streams and paradigms must be found. The High Occupancy Toll lane (HOT) is one of several options being put forward to both increase transportation revenue and control the negative economic effects of congestion.

### **BACKGROUND**

A high-occupancy toll is a toll enacted on single-occupant vehicles to use lanes or entire roads that are designated for the use of high-occupancy vehicles (HOVs). Tolls are collected by staffed toll booths, automatic number plate recognition or electronic toll collections systems. In some cases, like the 91 Express Lanes in the median of the already-congested State Route 91 in California, motorists have been given a choice between toll-free lanes or new lanes on which tolls are charged at different rates according to the time of day. On Interstate 15 in San Diego, single-occupant vehicles are allowed to "buy in" to HOV lanes by paying a toll, essentially converting the HOV lanes to HOT lanes.

The motorcoach is by definition a high occupancy vehicle and, as such, must be able to use HOV lanes (even when traveling empty). Use of the HOV network has allowed motorcoaches greater efficiencies and flexibility in providing service to customers and, in turn, extending the positive benefit provided by motorcoach travel. Specifically, coaches: provide the same congestion mitigation benefits as transit buses in that they have the capacity to take up to 55 cars off the road, per motorcoach; and are the most fuel efficient and least energy intensive mode of commercial passenger transportation. These valuable contributions to society come at virtually no cost to taxpayers.

The motorcoach industry has supported extension of the HOV network to reduce congestion. It is also clear that in some areas where those networks are underutilized, further congestion mitigation benefit may be achieved by conversion of HOV lanes to HOT lanes for certain vehicles and/or at certain times. However, if instead the conversion serves to make the HOV lanes significantly more crowded, or if attempts are made to toll high-occupancy-vehicles themselves, this could hinder the efficiency and wide-spread use of high-occupancy-vehicles, negatively impacting overall public benefit.

### **ABA POSITION**

The motorcoach industry supports the construction and expansion of HOV lanes given that they provide additional highway capacity or more efficient allocation of existing capacity. If implemented correctly at the state planning and operations level toll lanes have the potential to increase the efficiency of transportation for the over-the-road motorcoach fleet. This is important for effective motorcoach service whether the coach is loaded or empty. To the extent that conversion of HOV lanes to HOT lanes allows HOV lanes to remain viable for high density travel and congestion mitigation, we acknowledge that HOT lane conversion should be considered. However, if the resulting effect of HOV to HOT lane conversion is increased congestion, we would be opposed. Whether high density lanes are designated as HOV or HOT lanes, the motorcoach industry seeks the same exemptions and benefits received in those lanes as other mass transit options, reasonable tracking or tolling processes that do not unduly burden motorcoach operators, and inclusion of motorcoaches in the definition of HOV. Motorcoaches are

high occupancy vehicles and are a critical part of the solution to the increasing demand on our transportation system and with congestion and mobility issues.