

# TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE

October 21, 2005

AGENDA ITEM NO.: **7**

**Action Requested: INFORMATION**

FREEWAY TRANSIT LANE DEMONSTRATION PROJECT

File Number 5000900

## **Introduction**

Over the past several years, SANDAG has been working toward increasing the speed and effectiveness of public transportation throughout the region. Over the long term, our Regional Transportation Plan calls for implementation of Managed Lanes and high occupancy vehicle facilities. Since these facilities will take a number of years to plan, design, and construct, we have been searching for an interim strategy for bypassing congested freeway corridors for existing commuter express bus services and our *TransNet* early action Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) routes.

A promising solution is an innovative concept that would allow the use of freeway shoulders as a transit priority measure. Used successfully in Minneapolis since 1992, the use of shoulders as a low-speed bypass of congested freeway lanes offers a low-cost, easily implementable strategy that will increase transit operating speeds, on-time performance, and trip reliability.

Working closely with our partners at the Metropolitan Transit System (MTS), Caltrans, and the California Highway Patrol (CHP), we are pleased to report that we will initiate a one-year demonstration project for Express Route 960 along the State Route 52 (SR 52)/Interstate 805 (I-805) corridor between Kearny Mesa and University City (see Attachment 1) starting in late October/early November.

As with any new idea, there have been a number of issues to address. The fact that these issues were satisfactorily resolved to allow us to implement the demonstration shows a strong willingness of our partners to explore innovative concepts for easing the impacts of congestion on our region. During the one-year demonstration period, substantial monitoring will be done to ascertain our ability to apply this concept to other corridors in the region. In addition, using the freeway shoulders in the planned Managed Lanes corridors will help build ridership patterns for future BRT routes.

## **Discussion**

The intent of the freeway transit lane demonstration project is to gain local operational experience with the conversion of existing shoulder lanes to transit lanes during the peak periods. SR 52 and I-805 were chosen for the demonstration project due to sufficient shoulder widths and heavy peak-period congestion levels.

SANDAG staff has worked with MTS, Caltrans, and the CHP to develop an operating plan and gain mutual consensus on the goals of the project.

## ***Project Objectives***

Experience gained through the implementation of this project will be used to assess the ability to use freeway transit lanes in other corridors where existing express services and future BRT services will operate. The demonstration project will assess five key objectives.

- *Safety* – Is there any change in accident rates with buses using the transit-only lanes, and do CHP officers and Caltrans' maintenance crews experience safety-related problems?

To gauge this we will evaluate accident data and meet with CHP staff throughout the process. SANDAG will also have trained staff on-board routinely to evaluate how the shoulders are operating and documenting any hazards or obstructions. Prior to the implementation of the project, Caltrans and SANDAG staff will videotape the shoulders and undertake a minor capital project to develop signage and re-striping for the shoulder.

- *Bus Travel Time and Reliability* – Do buses experience a measurable and repeatable time savings and enhanced trip reliability (on-time performance)?

SANDAG staff will monitor the performance of the route throughout the demonstration period. We are currently creating extensive baseline data for how the route is operating pre-demonstration; this includes collecting the baseline on-time performance, ridership, and accident data to do comparative analysis after the demonstration program is in place.

- *Bus Driver and Passenger Perceptions* – Do bus drivers feel safe using the transit-only lanes and are auto drivers comfortable with buses merging in and out of the transit-only lanes? Also, do transit riders perceive improved travel time and trip reliability and do they feel safe with the bus operating in the transit-only lane?

SANDAG's Technical Services staff will be undertaking before and after surveys of bus drivers and passengers to determine their current perception of how the service operates versus how the route is operating after the demonstration period has started.

- *Level of Service and Maintenance* – Is there any reduction in freeway levels of service from the transit-only lanes, and is there an increased level of maintenance required?

Caltrans staff will be providing ongoing freeway loop data that will be used to evaluate the flow of main lane traffic. Information will be gained to assess if there are any impacts to main lane traffic as a result of the freeway transit lane demonstration project. In addition, SANDAG will be working with the CHP, Caltrans, and the Freeway Service Patrol contractors to maintain a clear shoulder for bus operations.

- *Capital Improvements* - What kinds of physical improvements to shoulder lanes would be required if this concept were to be implemented permanently?

For the demonstration project, only minor improvements will be made to the shoulder. Sections will be re-striped to provide a wider shoulder. Significant signage will also be positioned along the corridor.

### ***Additional Implementation/Monitoring Activities***

- *Driver Training* – MTS and SANDAG have developed an extensive driver training program. All Route 960 drivers will receive four hours of classroom training, two hours on-the-road training, and refresher training throughout the demonstration period. New drivers will be trained as they are hired.
- *Marketing* – A marketing plan has been developed which includes extensive radio spots, print media, a Web page, “Take-One” notices on the buses, and outreach to agencies in the demonstration area.
- *Public Agency Outreach* – Fire, police, and other essential support agencies in the corridor are scheduled to be briefed on the demonstration project in October. In addition, an outreach letter will be sent to other public and private transportation operators in the corridor. The purpose of this letter will be to let them know of the parameters of the demonstration project and ensure that no copycat use of the transit-only lanes occurs.
- *Project Team Meetings* – Beginning in October, the project team, which includes SANDAG, Caltrans, CHP, and MTS staff, will hold bi-weekly meetings to coordinate the implementation of the project. After implementation, this group will meet monthly or as often as needed.
- *Monitoring Reports* – Every quarter SANDAG staff will bring a report to the Transportation Committee and MTS Board outlining the status of the freeway shoulder lane project. This report will include the following data:
  - Safety (accidents, obstructions, CHP comments);
  - Main lane operations (loop data assessing how the main lanes are operating);
  - Bus Operations and Ridership (On-time performance data and ridership data); and
  - Survey results (bus driver and passenger perception surveys).

BOB LEITER

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Attachment: 1. Map of Demonstration Project Area

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# Proposed Freeway Transit Lanes Demo SR 52/I-805



-  SR 52/I-805 Shoulder Lane Project
-  Route 960 Alignment
-  Existing Transit Center
-  Proposed Transit Center