

## APPENDIX 5

# regional high occupancy vehicle system policies

Regional transportation policy aims to provide priority treatment for high occupancy vehicles. Higher vehicle occupancies mean that personal mobility is achieved at a greater level of system efficiency. Higher occupancies, in the form of transit, carpools and vanpools, result in lower traffic volumes, lower vehicle emissions, less costly investment in capacity over time, and less private resources dedicated to the maintenance of the region's private vehicle fleet.

The full regional High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) system includes restricted lanes on freeways, regional arterials and local streets, limited access ramps to those facilities and designated by-pass lanes. High occupancy vehicles that use the HOV facilities include public transit, vanpools, and carpools that carry at least two or more passengers (three or more in one case). Since the adoption of the 1995 MTP, the Washington State Department of Transportation has adopted policies to direct the development and operation of the HOV system.

The region endorsed High Occupancy Vehicle System policies that were developed, reviewed, and established by the Regional HOV Policy Advisory Committee in 1998-1999. For a complete discussion of the background and development of the HOV Policy Committee and its recommendations, see the background report, *Regional HOV Policy Advisory Committee 1998-1999 Summary Report and Recommendations*, available from the Regional Council's Information Center, (206) 464-7532.

The policies recognize that strategic investments in the regional High Occupancy Vehicle system will, in part, be achieved through development of the following High Occupancy Vehicle facilities:

- Core HOV network on regional freeways, including HOV bottlenecks
- Direct access for more efficient use of HOV facilities
- Arterial HOV investments that directly link to the core HOV facilities
- HOV by-pass lanes and priority systems on arterials, corridors, and within centers

The following policies will guide development of the regional High Occupancy Vehicle System:

## **Support Full-Time Operation for Permanent Freeway HOV Lanes**

### **HOURS OF OPERATION FOR REGIONAL HOV SYSTEM**

- HOV lanes constructed for HOV purposes shall be reserved for buses, motorcycles, car pools and van pools meeting minimum occupancy requirements, 24-hours per day, seven days a week. This policy does not apply to HOV restrictions on ramps.
- Variable car pool definitions may be based on time of day.

## **Regional Approach to HOV Lane Development and HOV Lane Minimum Thresholds**

### **RELEVANT APPLICATIONS AND CRITERIA FOR HOV LANES**

HOV lanes are appropriate freeway facility improvements when current traffic volumes on existing freeway facilities or forecasts of future traffic volumes on existing or planned future freeway facilities meet certain criteria developed originally by the WSDOT and subsequently refined and clarified by the Regional HOV Policy Advisory Committee. Such criteria should be reviewed periodically to assure that they continue to address the evolving role of the freeway HOV system in supporting regional transportation system goals and policies.

### **CONDITIONS FOR GENERAL PURPOSE LANE CONVERSION TO HOV**

When proposing freeway projects to address capacity deficiencies on existing freeway facilities in the central Puget Sound region, one of the alternatives to be considered shall be the conversion of a general purpose lane to an HOV lane. The WSDOT previously developed HOV lane conversion criteria that were further refined by the Regional HOV Policy Advisory Committee to clarify how they should be applied and to assure that freight interests of shippers and carriers are consulted prior to making recommendations regarding conversion of any general purpose lane to HOV use. In addition, due consideration for safety and incident management must be made before developing substandard freeway facilities.

## **Seek Refinements and Improved Financing to Support Regional Freeway HOV System Enforcement Program**

The Regional Council should work with the State DOT, the legislature, and other interested parties to help achieve improved enforcement for effective freeway HOV operations through the following series of measures:

### **INCREASE FINES FOR HOV VIOLATIONS**

Provide greater disincentive to illegally use freeway HOV lanes use by raising the existing fine for freeway HOV lane violation and establish a graduated scale to progressively increase fines for repeat offenders.

### **RESEARCH TECHNICAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR GREATER EFFICIENCY AND SAFETY IN ENFORCEMENT**

Research and explore technical and legal aspects related to employing new electronic technologies to achieve greater efficiency and public safety in administration, monitoring and enforcement of freeway HOV lane use.

### **SEEK PROPORTIONAL INCREASES IN HOV ENFORCEMENT FUNDING TO MATCH SCALE OF REGIONAL HOV SYSTEM**

As the regional HOV system expands, the regional interests, especially WSDOT and the Washington State Patrol, need to seek increased funding for HOV system enforcement commensurate with the expanding system.

### **STRENGTHEN COMMITMENTS TO FREEWAY HOV DESIGN & RETROFIT PROJECTS TO IMPROVE ENFORCEMENT**

Request that WSDOT ensure enhanced attention to design and retrofitting features into new or existing freeway HOV facilities which improve opportunities for HOV lane enforcement with greater public safety (e.g., enforcement pockets and HOV lane shoulders).

## **Establish Sustainable Public Education Program to Support Regional Freeway HOV System**

### **IDENTIFY APPROACH TO SUSTAINABLE FUNDING PARTNERSHIPS**

The region should work with all partners having a vested interest in sustaining the regional HOV system to explore and recommend an enhanced program level of effort for a sustainable public education program. Such a program is to support on-going regional HOV public education/information elements as the HERO program, research and publication of public brochures/pamphlets, media information, and public and private sector promotional activities. This should also include identifying and recommending one or more options for proportional sharing of the funding for this enhanced program among all the parties to maintain and sustain the program as the regional HOV system expands. If the above “*enforcement*” recommendation for increasing HOV violation fines is implemented, such additional revenues could be one logical source for this program funding.

## **Regional Policy Endorsement of State HOV Policies to Achieve Freeway HOV Performance Objectives and Develop Policy Guidance for HOV System Monitoring and Annual Review**

### **ENDORSE AND RETAIN THREE EXISTING STATE FREEWAY HOV POLICIES**

The WSDOT’s three currently adopted State HOV operating policies entitled “*HOV System Performance*,” “*HOV Speed and Reliability*,” and “*Carpool Definition*” are endorsed by the Regional Council and recommended to be retained by the WSDOT.

### **DEVELOP DOCUMENT TO GUIDE POLICY ADMINISTRATION**

The WSDOT, the Regional Council, and transit operators using the freeway HOV system should collaborate on development of a brief and clearly written (consumer-friendly) document to serve as a guideline which explains how the HOV system is routinely monitored throughout the year, how such data and information is evaluated by the state and region to see if the system is meeting technical and policy standards and expectations; and, if system performance is not meeting established standards and expectations, how such identified performance issues are to be further examined and addressed to determine if HOV system changes may be recommended.

## ANNUAL REVIEW OF HOV SYSTEM PERFORMANCE BY REGIONAL HOV POLICY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The annual HOV System Performance report prepared by the WSDOT should serve a broader public regional system role. The Regional HOV Policy Advisory Committee will continue to serve as a standing regional HOV system advisory committee to conduct an annual review in the fall of each year of the WSDOT's HOV system performance report and to advise the Regional Council and WSDOT on potential HOV operational policy issues which may periodically arise.

*Destination 2030* note: The policy direction contained in the Regional HOV Policy Advisory Committee's 1998-1999 Summary Report may be used for system planning and modeling of system performance assumptions, but not for air quality conformity testing without stronger commitment language in state policies. The regional transportation plan assumptions used for air quality conformity analysis can only be based on strong commitments to future actions. During analysis of *Destination 2030* a 2 or more person carpool definition was assumed for air quality modeling purposes and 3-plus persons for policy and plan performance.

### HOV Pricing Differential

There is evolving regional support for more user-based financing to support the regional transportation system. If such future financing employs user-based fees for specific roadways in the form of tolls or variable road pricing strategies, the Regional Council strongly endorses having a clear vehicular pricing differential and advantage as an incentive for HOV pricing (buses, carpools, vanpools) when compared to tolls or fees charged for single occupant vehicles (SOVs). While it is most desirable to have such preferential pricing structures offer "free" access for high occupancy vehicles, such pricing policies should at least incorporate reduced pricing for high occupancy vehicles.

