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Plenty of Demand for High-Occupancy/Toll Lanes, Poll Finds ***I-680 Commuters Support Lane by 2-to-1 Margin***

OAKLAND, CA (September 21, 2007) – Commuters on Interstate 680 are in favor of a new high-occupancy/toll lane on the freeway by a margin of 2 to 1, according to a new study conducted for the Alameda County Congestion Management Agency. Sixty-four percent think the lane is a very good or good idea.

“The lane gives solo drivers the choice of paying for a speedier trip while carpools and buses continue to ride for free,” said Jean Hart, executive director of the I-680 Smart Lane Project. “The poll indicates that this lane will attract enough users to be financially successful, but not so many that the lane will be too crowded.”

Planners are completing design work for a 14-mile southbound high-occupancy vehicle/toll lane on I-680 between Pleasanton and Milpitas over the Sunol Grade. The project is scheduled to open in 2010.

The HOT lane would be available for free to carpools, motorcycles and buses, and also be available to solo drivers who pay a toll electronically using a FasTrak transponder. There would be no toll booths. Tolls would vary depending on the level of traffic congestion and would be higher when the freeway is busiest and lower when there is less demand, in order to keep traffic in the lane flowing smoothly. Toll revenue would pay the costs of operating the lane and also support public transit and other improvements in the corridor.

Alameda County commissioned a survey of commuters who use the I-680 corridor to test opinions about the proposed toll lanes. Among the poll’s findings:

- Freeway traffic is a major concern of survey respondents, higher than schools, jobs, crime or housing.
- Overall, commuters support high-occupancy/toll lanes 64% to 33%.

- 12% of commuters say they would use a toll lane every day, 9% three or four times a week, 15% once or twice a week, 23% a few times a month, and 42% would not use the lane.
- Major benefits seen are electronic collection with no toll booths, carpoolers continue to use the lane for free, and toll revenue helps public transportation.

Similar lanes operate in Southern California on State Route 91 in Orange County and on Interstate 15 in San Diego County. I-680 is planned as the first combined high-occupancy vehicle/toll lane in Northern California.

People want a choice to pay for a faster ride when time is essential,” said Hart. “Southern California studies show that users are parents rushing to pick up their kids, or people who can’t be late for appointments. If 20 percent of drivers use the toll lane, congestion will be reduced for everyone.”

The Alameda County Congestion Management Agency is managing the project in cooperation with the Alameda County Transportation Improvement Authority, the Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority, and Caltrans.

The poll, conducted by SA Opinion Research of San Francisco, measured attitudes of 466 licensed drivers who commute along I-580 and I-680 -- 117 who commute on I-680, 282 on I-580 and 67 who commute on both highways. The margin of error was 4.5 percentage points.

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