

**Metropolitan Transportation Commission
Policy Advisory Council Equity and Access Subcommittee**

July 22, 2022

Agenda Item 5

Express Carpool Check Smartphone App Pilot

Subject:

Update on MTC's carpool verification smartphone app pilot on Interstate-680 (I-680) Contra Costa Express Lanes.

Background:

Since 2018, the Commission has encouraged staff to explore new technologies to improve compliance with occupancy requirements in express lanes. Ensuring adherence to vehicle occupancy rules helps express lanes perform their best for carpools, buses and those who choose to pay to drive in the lanes. Today, occupancy declaration depends on driver honesty. Drivers use a FasTrak Flex[®] toll tag to indicate the number of people in a vehicle, determining whether a vehicle is toll-free or tolled. Enforcement is limited to verification by the California Highway Patrol (CHP), which has limitations given CHP's other duties and inherent challenges associated with verifying occupancy manually. Looking ahead, MTC is investigating using a smartphone app to allow users to self-verify their carpool status. Depending on testing, this technology may someday complement or replace toll tag technology to verify toll-free or discounted travel in express lanes.

A Request for Proposals (RFP) was issued in November 2019, and MTC Operations Committee awarded a contract to RideFlag Technologies (Rideflag) to pilot its smartphone app in May 2020. Following a pandemic related postponement, staff is preparing pilot plans. The pilot is called the 'Express Carpool Check Smartphone App Pilot.'

Pilot Concept:

Phase 1 of the pilot will involve recruiting approximately 500 to 600 volunteers who carpool in the I-680 Express Lanes between Martinez and San Ramon (the only operating express lane run by the Bay Area Infrastructure Financing Authority (BAIFA)—which shares the same board and staff as MTC—when the vendor procurement was issued). Participants will use RideFlag's smartphone app to report the number of people in their carpool. MTC will test two versions of the RideFlag app: one that does not store data on the phone and one that does. The version that does not store data will only confirm that the number of people in the carpool meets occupancy

rules at the start and end of the trip. The version that stores data will also confirm that the people who started the trip are likely the same as those who completed it. Phase 1 pilot objectives are to assess the functionality and accuracy of the technology, gauge user acceptance and ease of use, assess privacy concerns, inform full deployment costs, and assess future customization opportunities. The pilot will run for approximately three months, during which time all participants will be incentivized to provide periodic feedback through an online survey. At the end of the pilot, volunteers may be asked if they would like to participate in focus group meetings, which may be compensated.

Depending on Phase 1 pilot results, MTC may pursue additional pilots or deployment of this technology.

Equity Considerations:

With the Executive Director's introduction of MTC's Equity Platform on October 23, 2019, staff began to consider how to consider equity more purposefully in the context of the pilot. Staff selected a consultant, Center for Neighborhood Technology (CNT), from MTC's equity bench who has advised on pilot structure, technology usability, recruitment/outreach, and evaluation.

Next Steps:

Staff will share pilot plans and seek feedback on how equity is being considered at your July 22, 2022 meeting. This item has not been previously presented to this subcommittee.

Attachments:

- Attachment A: PowerPoint