

**Bay Area Toll Authority**  
**Oversight Committee**

**May 10, 2023**

**Agenda Item 4a - 23-0472**

**Update on the Open Road Tolling Program and Potential Future Change to the High-Occupancy Vehicle Policy at BATA Bridges**

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**Subject:**

Update on the Open Road Tolling (ORT) Program and a potential future change to the high-occupancy vehicle (HOV) policy to allow vehicles with two or more occupants to use the HOV lanes at Antioch, Benicia-Martinez, Carquinez, Richmond-San Rafael, Dumbarton, and San Mateo-Hayward Bridges while providing the HOV discount to vehicles with three or more occupants using FasTrak Flex®.

**Background:**

**Update to ORT Program:**

The Bay Area Toll Authority operates electronic toll collection at the seven state-owned toll bridges in the Bay Area (BATA bridges). In late 2018, this Committee approved transitioning BATA bridges to all electronic tolling (AET). In response to the COVID shelter-in-place order in March 2020, the Committee approved the expedited deployment of AET. Starting January 1, 2021, invoicing began on all State-owned bridges and roadway signage was updated to reflect AET conditions.

The project will convert toll operations to ORT allowing users to drive through toll gantries at highway speeds without having to slow down while paying their toll electronically with FasTrak® toll tags, license plate account, toll invoice or one-time payment. The project will construct new gantries, realign the tolling area, reduce travel lanes, demolish existing toll booths and most toll canopies, and install new toll system equipment to create a safer and more efficient environment for the traveling public. Additionally, at the Richmond-San Rafael Bridge, BATA proposes, as part of the Forward Project, extending the westbound HOV lane eastward from the toll plaza along I-580 to encourage carpooling and transit by providing time savings.

Since 2021, staff has awarded contracts to three firms to complete the environmental and civil design for ORT for the Richmond San Rafael Bridge, Northern and Southern bridges (Antioch, Benicia-Martinez, Carquinez, Dumbarton, San Mateo-Hayward), and the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge. All bridges are currently in various stages of the environmental and preliminary design phases, with BATA as the lead for environmental and design.

BATA staff is partnering with Caltrans to award a Construction Manager/General Contractor (CMGC) contract, through Caltrans, in Spring 2023, to construct the project at all bridges. The CMGC project delivery method brings on early a prime contractor starting in the design phase to collaborate and provide innovative solutions to maximize efficiencies to ensure the project is delivered within budget and schedule. This project delivery method is intended to result in time and construction cost savings with less impact and delays to the traveling public, thus maximizing public safety.

#### **Possible Future Change to HOV Policy at BATA Bridges**

All BATA bridges have designated HOV lanes to incentivize carpooling and transit use by providing priority and time savings benefits through the toll plazas. The ORT project and removal of the toll booths will increase vehicles' speeds through the toll plazas and likely necessitate changes in HOV policy to maintain safety and person throughput within the existing plaza areas.

The existing toll schedule at the Bay Area state-owned bridges allows vehicles with three or more occupants (HOV 3+) a discounted toll, with the exception of the Dumbarton and San-Mateo Hayward bridges, where a discounted toll is available to vehicles with two or more occupants (HOV 2+). The HOV 2+ discount for the Dumbarton and San-Mateo bridges originated from a statute specifying that vehicles containing two or more persons could have exclusive or preferential use of HOV lanes on those bridges. That statute has since been repealed. To provide regional consistency, staff proposes offering the HOV discount on all bridges only to HOV3+ vehicles. However, to improve safety, person throughput, and due to relatively low HOV3+ volumes, staff proposes allowing HOV 2 vehicles to use the HOV lanes at the Antioch, Benicia-Martinez, Carquinez, Richmond-San Rafael, Dumbarton, and San Mateo-Hayward Bridges. HOV 3+ drivers using the HOV lanes would need to declare their occupancy using the FasTrak Flex toll tag in order to receive the discounted toll. Given high HOV3+ volumes, no change is proposed for the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge, which will continue to limit HOV lane access to

HOV3+ and provide the discounted toll to HOV3+ vehicles in the dedicated approach lanes with a FasTrak account.

At the Richmond-San Rafael Bridge, the proposed HOV policy change is likely needed to implement the extension of the westbound HOV lane on I-580 from Regatta Boulevard to the Richmond-San Rafael Bridge toll plaza. The traffic analysis for the Richmond-San Rafael Bridge project indicates the current traffic volume supports the conversion of the general-purpose lane to a HOV2+ lane to facilitate sufficient HOV lane usage for HOV2, HOV3, and transit buses.

There is sufficient HOV lane capacity at all bridges, except the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge, to accommodate this change to allow HOV2+ on the bridge approaches. This change is expected to increase person throughput by encouraging carpooling and bus usage with time savings through the tolling zones.

The proposed policy is being evaluated as part of the ORT project environmental documents as it directly impacts project design. Ultimately, the HOV policy change would necessitate a change to the toll schedule through future approval by the Authority.

**Next Steps:**

Staff is seeking Committee comment on this informational item and will return to the Committee at a later time with a recommendation for the approval of the toll schedule with the updated HOV policy prior to the implementation of the ORT Program. Staff will also return to the Committee for other ORT-related approvals as needed.

**Issues:**

None identified.

**Attachments:**

- Attachment A: PowerPoint



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