

Metropolitan Transportation Commission Operations Committee

April 9, 2021

Agenda Item 5b

Regional Express Lanes Strategic Plan

Subject: Adoption of a Bay Area Express Lanes Strategic Plan, which links the broader Express Lanes Network purpose, goals, and strategies to the regional strategic goals of Plan Bay Area 2050. Based on over a year of research and collaboration with Bay Area express lane partners, staff proposes recommendations and near-term actions that represent concrete steps to move the Express Lanes Network forward and link it to regional strategic goals.

Background

Over the last year, a working group of Bay Area Express Lanes partners, Caltrans, and California Highway Patrol has regularly met to work on the Bay Area Express Lanes Strategic Plan (Strategic Plan). The Strategic Plan includes:

1. An express lane network to be built over 30 years that reflects key policies and goals of Plan Bay Area 2050. Staff presented the recommended Regional Express Lane Network to the MTC Operations Committee in June 2020; and
2. A detailed narrative that sets forth agreed upon goals, policies, and strategies to guide implementation of the network.

The development of the Strategic Plan arises from several concurrent regional efforts that have been gaining momentum, warranting a renewed scope and vision for the network. These include:

- A commitment to equitable access to mobility options for all Bay Area residents, with intentional focus on those with the least resources to truly improve access to opportunity;
- Increasing desire to utilize a seamless Express Lanes Network for regional transit service; and
- A strong emphasis on strategies to reduce vehicle-miles traveled (VMT) and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.

The Express Lanes Network has developed six network goals that reflect these trends:

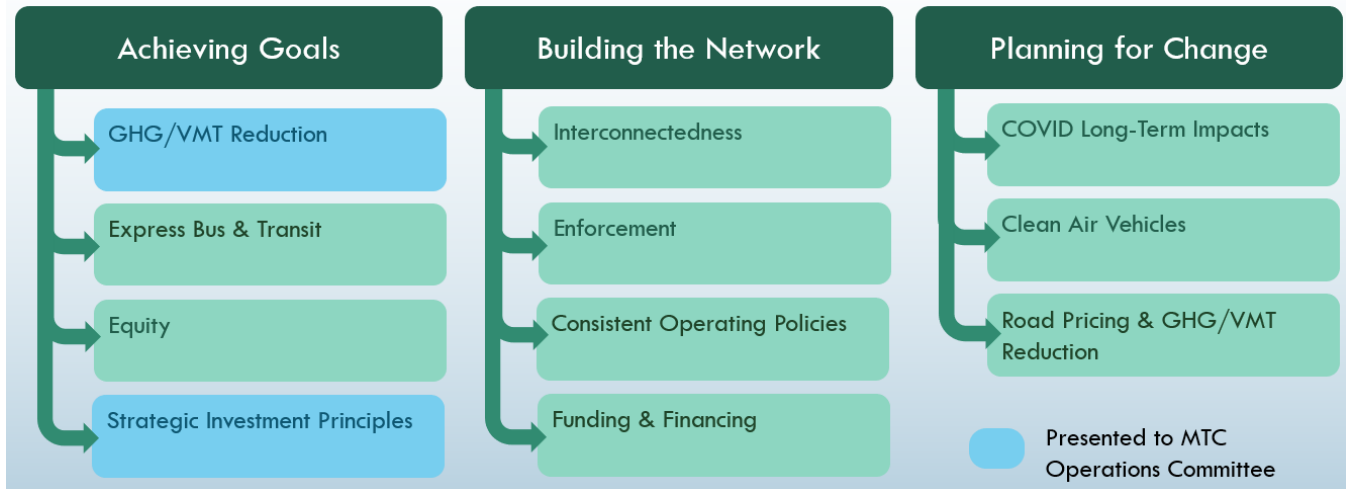
1. Manage congestion and bring reliability to the traveling public;
2. Increase person throughput by creating a seamless network that incentivizes the use of transit, vanpools, and carpools;
3. Minimize greenhouse gas emissions;
4. Focus on equity to improve transportation access and affordability, especially for Communities of Concern;
5. Deliver the Bay Area Express Lanes Network in a timely manner; and
6. Be responsible in use of public funds.

The Strategic Plan includes research on a variety of topics to explore how the network can achieve these goals and align with regional priorities. Strategic Plan topics are organized into the following focus areas:

1. Achieving Goals: Addresses the operational and programmatic strategies, as well as additional infrastructure investments, needed to align the Express Lanes Network with regional goals;
2. Building the Network: Moves beyond how we achieve goals into the practical considerations of how to build the network and what is important for its healthy functioning; and

3. Planning for Change: Looks into the future to establish expectations for disruptive events, policies, and technologies.

These focus areas break down further into individual areas of study.



Staff developed white papers on GHG/VMT Reduction, Express Bus & Transit, Strategic Investment Principles, and Funding and Financing. The other focus areas included in the Strategic Plan are Equity, Interconnectedness, Consistent Operating Policies, Enforcement, and three topics that could impact the region's express lane network: COVID-19 pandemic impacts, clean air vehicles, and additional expected regional and state GHG reduction strategies. Staff presented to the MTC Operations Committee the Greenhouse Gas (GHG)/Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) white paper and the Strategic Investment Principles white paper. The Strategic Plan also reflects key initiatives already underway based on direction from MTC, BAIFA and BATA including carpool occupancy enforcement pilot projects, FasTrakSTART, and a review of FasTrak policies and procedures.

In January 2021, staff presented to the Express Lanes Executive Steering Committee (ESC) Consistent Operating Policies. Based on ESC feedback, staff will work with partners to execute a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to establish a formalized process to vet and build consensus on consistent operating policies. This represents a good near-term step to institutionalizing consistency while not precluding other approaches.

Considering these interrelated topics together is necessary to develop a holistic vision for the Express Lanes Network and to ensure the vision aligns with Plan Bay Area 2050 and its Implementation Plan. As Plan Bay Area 2050 concludes and its strategies reference the Strategic Plan for effective implementation, staff will continue to update the Strategic Plan as lessons are learned and other challenges emerge. With this in mind, staff proposes the Recommendations and Near-Term Actions illustrated in Attachment A. Many of the recommendations are complex on their own, and when integrated, that complexity is only magnified and may lead to some contradictions. These challenging contradictions underscore the need for flexible strategies and for robust communication and collaboration between Bay Area express lane operators.

Issues: None identified.

Recommendation: Staff recommends the MTC Operations Committee approve the Regional Express Lanes Strategic Plan and refer it to the MTC Commission for adoption.

Attachments: Attachment A – Regional Express Lanes Strategic Plan Recommendations and Near-Term Actions for Express Lane Partners
Attachment B – PowerPoint
Attachment C – *Connecting the Bay Area; Express Lanes Network 2021 Strategic Plan*
Attachment D – Appendices to the Regional Express Lanes Strategic Plan



Therese W. McMillan

Regional Express Lanes Strategic Plan Recommendations and Near-Term Actions for Express Lane Partners

Note: The Strategic Plan recommendations differ from near-term actions in two ways:

1. The recommendations are longer term; and
2. All recommendations require partner support and coordination for successful execution. The near-term actions are MTC's to lead except for the execution of a Consistent Operating Policy Memorandum of Understanding, which will require all partners' participation. The designated lead for each item is noted in parentheses below.

RECOMMENDATIONS	
GHG/VMT Reduction	Promote regional- and county-level mitigation solutions. (All partners)
	Advocate for legislation to allow general purpose to express lane conversion pilots. (CTAs and MTC)
Express Bus	Work with transit planners and operators to enhance transit priority and improve accessibility to the express lanes for express buses and other high-occupancy modes. (All partners)
	Since express buses will not perform well everywhere, establish clear criteria and performance metrics to prioritize investments. (TBD)
	Advocate for operators and planners to increase connectivity and communication. (All partners)
	Identify opportunities to link transit and Transportation Demand Management (TDM) investments with SB-743 mitigation strategies while acknowledging operations funding challenges. (All partners)
Strategic Investment Principles	Evaluate projects for future funding by:
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Merit (Connected Mobility, Benefits and Costs, and Equity) 2. Readiness (MTC)
Funding and Financing Strategies	Advocate and seek opportunities for state and federal funding (All partners).
	Monitor future regional funding initiatives (All partners).
NEAR-TERM ACTIONS	
Equity	Execute a means-based tolling pilot that ties into the FasTrak® Customer Service Center Equity Action Plan to analyze how providing reduced toll rates to low-income users delivers equitable benefits and affects express lane operations. Undertake other equity initiatives and coordinate where applicable. (MTC)
Consistent Operating Policies	Come to a regional consensus on a process for reviewing toll and operating policies for consistency and execute a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with CTAs, BAIFA, Caltrans, and CHP. (All partners)
Enforcement	Continue work on current, automated HOV enforcement pilots, including camera-based occupancy detection and app-based occupancy declaration; Track other emerging technologies. (MTC)
Road Pricing Strategies	Incorporate key Express Lanes Network questions in a study of highway pricing strategies to begin in 2022. (MTC)
Plan Bay Area 2050	Integrate the findings and recommendations from the Express Lanes Network Strategic Plan to inform the Implementation Plan of Plan Bay Area 2050, where appropriate, to further advance regional strategies. (MTC)