

Managed Lanes 101

Overview

Managed lanes are special highway lanes designed to move people and goods more efficiently by adjusting access based on factors such as vehicle occupancy, type of vehicle, time of day, direction, tolling, and more. Types of managed lanes include:

- High-occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes: Accessible to vehicles with two or more occupants (also known as carpool lanes)
- Express lanes or high-occupancy toll (HOT) lanes: Accessible to transit vehicles, HOVs (often for free), and solo drivers (for a fee)
- Toll lanes/roads: Accessible to all drivers for a fee

In the San Diego region, we have a long history of various types of managed lanes, including express lanes on the I-15 and high-occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes on the I-5 and I-805.

Key Considerations

Managed lanes have been included in our region’s transportation plans since the 1970s. The I-15 Express Lanes began operations in the late 1990s and SANDAG has continued to plan for the expansion of express lanes, consistent with TransNet, state plans, and the Regional Plan since then.

Consistent with this, SANDAG and Caltrans are preparing for the next phase of the express lanes system, starting with the conversion of the existing I-5 and I-805 HOV lanes to express lanes. Both projects are fully funded for construction and scheduled for completion by 2030.

Regulatory and Planning Framework

Managed lanes are planned through public processes with federal, state and regional oversight. Various federal, state, and local regulations and plans govern their operations. Discount programs and audits help ensure benefits are broadly shared and the system remains accountable to the public.

- Federal regulations require managed facilities to maintain a certain level of performance¹.
- State regulations allow a regional transportation agency to develop and operate HOT lanes if certain conditions and requirements are met and approved by the CTC².

Action: Discussion

Staff from SANDAG and partner agencies will present an overview of Managed Lanes and Express Lanes. The Board of Directors is asked to discuss potential goals for the regional express lane network.

Fiscal Impact:

Regional Managed Lanes System Implementation is funded in the FY 2026 Program Budget under Capital Improvement Program No. [1200514 \(I-5 HOV Conversion to Express Lanes\)](#) and [1280517 \(I-805 HOV Conversion to Express Lanes\)](#). [1200517](#).

Schedule/Scope Impact:

SANDAG and Caltrans expect to submit an application to the California Transportation Commission by summer 2026 to convert the I-5 and I-805 High-occupancy vehicle lanes to express lanes.

¹ 23 USC 166 HOV facilities

² SHC 149.7 State Highways

- Caltrans District 11 maintains a Managed Lanes System Plan (MLSP), which outlines a network of managed lanes for the San Diego region. This plan is updated every four years and is consistent with the Regional Plan and the [TransNet Ordinance](#).

Regional Policy Framework

Building out the express lanes network will require a comprehensive policy that starts with confirming goals for operations, defining business rules, and determining an operational model that will apply to existing and future facilities.

The goals that the Board establishes will help to inform business rules, which are the operational policies that govern the use of express lanes. Business rules cover performance thresholds, pricing structure, eligibility, occupancy of vehicles using the system, toll collection, and enforcement. Some business rules may be defined at the corridor level, and others should be established at a regional level to ensure consistent user experience across the system.

While business rules define how the facility will operate, the operational model defines who will serve as the toll authority with the responsibility of operating and maintaining the facilities. Operational models vary across the state and nation with regional agencies serving as the toll authority in some areas; Joint Powers Authorities, which are collaboratives formed by two or more public agencies to operate tolled facilities; and various versions of Public Private Partnerships where a private entity is under contract to design, build, finance, operate, and maintain tolled facilities.

Next Steps

Over the coming months, staff will bring various topics related to the regional express lanes system and operations to the Board for discussion and direction in preparation for updating regional policies and developing an application to the California Transportation Commission to approve the conversion of the I-5 and I-805 HOV lanes to express lanes.

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