



METROPOLITAN
TRANSPORTATION
COMMISSION

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Memorandum

TO: Legislation Committee

DATE: April 4, 2014

FR: Executive Director

W. I. 1131

RE: AB 1721 (Linder): Express Lanes/Clean Fuel Vehicles

Background

This bill would exclude the Riverside County Transportation Commission's planned I-15 high-occupancy toll "express" lanes from a state law requiring toll-free passage for low-emission vehicles that have qualified for and obtained a Clean Air Vehicle "white sticker" or an advanced technology partial zero-emission vehicle (Enhanced ATPZEV) "green sticker" decal. Such an allowance already was granted on a pilot basis to the Los Angeles Metro express lane pilot program on Interstate 10 and 110. That exception expired last month.

Recommendation: Support and Seek Amendment

Discussion

As noted above, current law grants toll free express lane access to a single-occupant vehicle (SOV) with green or white Clean Air stickers (generally plug-in hybrid vehicles, all electric vehicles or compressed natural gas vehicles). Staff agrees that it does not make sense to provide toll-free express lane passage to SOV, regardless of type. Today, there are far more miles of high occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes than there are express lanes, and this will continue to be the case for many years. The time-savings incentive that the Clean Air Vehicle stickers provide by allowing SOV access to HOV lanes is a strong enough incentive for the purchase of such vehicles. The ability to save a few dollars for an express lane trip is very unlikely to affect a person's vehicle purchasing decision. Furthermore, subsidizing express lane usage by clean fuel vehicle owners raises social equity concerns given that the vehicles that qualify for the carpool access stickers typically are priced beyond the reach of many Californians.

Staff supports the policy rationale for AB 1721 but would like to see it broadened to remove the clean vehicle toll exemption for express lanes statewide, rather than for a single facility in Southern California. The policy issues raised by the legislation are relevant statewide and it does not make sense to require motorists with the clean vehicle carpool lane stickers to pay tolls in some express lanes while not in others. Lastly, the toll-free provision applicable to clean fuel vehicles imposes a risk to express lane revenue which could affect bond ratings and the ultimate cost of building the Bay Area's express lane network. This risk is only exacerbated by the Legislature's frequent interest in expanding and extending the duration of the clean vehicle carpool lane access program.

For this reason, we recommend a support position on the bill with the amendments described above.

Known Positions

Support
Riverside County Transportation Commission

Oppose
None on file



Steve Heminger

SH: RL
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