



Tinseltown Needs Freeways Covered in Diamonds

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If freeways are our regional arteries, then Los Angeles has the diet of a long-haul trucker in the 1950's. Our freeway congestion is the worst in the country. It hobbles the economic vitality of our region, poisons us with toxic air pollution, and drives our cars to drink more foreign oil.

This increased fuel consumption in traffic may be our region's silent killer. Californians import about 20% of our oil directly from Saudi Arabia and Iraq. Chaos in the Middle East may soon disrupt this flow of fuel from the Persian Gulf to Los Angeles, generating price shocks that would send our local economy into cardiac arrest.

Still our elected officials want to super-size our highways and encourage our gluttony for Vehicle Miles Traveled. The California Transportation Commission recently approved \$4.5 billion in infrastructure bond allocations for statewide road improvements. Our politicians successfully lobbied for \$1.2 billion to expand Los Angeles County's highways. These earmarks will fund three local projects, including \$730 million to build a High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) lane along the 405 Freeway at the Sepulveda Pass.

But the truth is that even the entire \$4.5 billion would not remedy Los Angeles's congestion crisis. Traffic analysts say that simply adding lanes will not solve the problem. By the time the expansions are finished in 2012, more single-passenger vehicles will simply feast on these new lanes to capacity. The core problem is that Los Angeles has too many people commuting alone in cars – more than any other city in the nation.

So we do not need to build more freeway lanes in Los Angeles. Instead we should do more with the freeways that we already have. Empty passenger seats are essentially slack in our freeway system. California should mandate the use of these seats. During rush hours, all freeway lanes in Los Angeles County should be designated HOV lanes, free for only commuters who carpool to work.

By executive order, the Governor should instruct Caltrans to deem the freeways in Los Angeles County to be "HOV-ways"

from 7am to 7pm, Monday through Friday. Only passenger vehicles with at least two riders, buses, commercial vehicles, government cars, and certain HOV-decaled vehicles would be permitted. Penalties for HOV violations would remain the same. The CHP would continue to provide enforcement, with waivers for emergency medical use.

Commuters would have several options, including:

- 1) Carpooling
- 2) Using public transportation
- 3) Telecommuting
- 4) Using surface streets
- 5) Driving alone during off hours

The policy would have immediate regional benefits for all Angelenos:

- 1) Reduced Congestion
- 2) Reduced Air Pollution
- 3) Reduced Reliance on Foreign Oil
- 4) Reduced Greenhouse Gas Emissions
- 5) Greater Supply-Chain Mobility

Caltrans says that HOV lanes save commuters one minute for each mile that they drive during rush hours. A thirty-mile commute saves thirty minutes each way. What would you do with an extra hour every day?

Yes, this policy will disrupt the lives of commuters and business owners. Workers may change jobs. Business owners may need to offer vanpools or other solutions for employees. Some citizens may be furious that their taxes will support freeways that they cannot drive alone whenever they want. Despite these costs, the benefits for all Angelenos from reduced freeway traffic will be far greater.

Our freeway arteries do not need widening. They need an emergency infusion of statins: the Governor should establish a one-year demonstration project, beginning January 1, 2008. That timeframe would give Angelenos one year to adjust our commutes effectively. With flowing arteries, Los Angeles will become a stronger city.