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## *Memorandum*

From fall 2013 through winter 2014, BAIFA staff conducted the following public outreach to gather input on the I-680 express lane project, which will convert the existing HOV lane from Alcosta Blvd. to Livorna Rd. (northbound) and Rudgear Rd. to Alcosta Blvd. (southbound):

- Presentations to eight stakeholder groups representing about 65 stakeholders (see Attachment 1),
- A public open house held January 30, 2014 at which 32 members of the public signed in, and
- An online open house hosted on [www.BAIFAExpressLanes.org](http://www.BAIFAExpressLanes.org) active from January 30, 2014 through February 13, 2014 and viewed 246 times

Staff consolidated comments from the efforts, in order of prevalence:

1. Questions about project benefits relative to cost
2. Concern about impacts on HOV lane users
3. Questions about toll tags
4. Questions about the decision-making process
5. Questions about revenues
6. Concern the lanes are not fair to lower-income travelers (equity)
7. Concern about having to pay a toll to use a lane paid for with taxes
8. Questions about enforcement
9. Questions about other activity in the corridor

Attachment 2 summarizes the verbal and written comments and staff's responses.

### Attachment 1: Outreach Meetings

<b>Meeting</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>~ # Stakeholders Attending</b>
Southwest Area Transportation Authority (SWAT) (CCTA)	11/4/13	7
Alamo Municipal Advisory Committee (MAC)	11/5/13	5
City of San Ramon Directors	12/5/13	7
Danville Town Council Study Session	12/10/13	5
San Ramon Policy Advisory Committee	12/18/13	7
San Ramon Transportation Advisory Committee	1/16/14	7
San Ramon Chamber of Commerce	1/28/14	20
San Ramon City County	1/28/14	7
Open House	1/30/14	32 (signed in)
Online Open House	1/30/14 thru 2/13/14	246 views

## Attachment 2: Summary of Verbal and Written Comments

Comment Summary by Theme	Responses
<p><u>1) Project Benefits Relative to Costs:</u></p> <p>Many people questioned the benefits of the project relative to its costs. The public expressed concern that the project would not alleviate traffic congestion, because a) not enough capacity exists in the HOV lane and b) queuing will occur at the express lane access points. People suggested that there are better ways to spend the money, especially converting the HOV lanes to general purpose lanes. Other suggestions included providing BART in the I-680 corridor, providing bus rapid transit in the corridor or providing basic HOV lanes throughout the corridor from I-80 to I-880.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The benefit to cost ratio of express lane conversion projects (from MTC's application to the California Transportation Commission) is greater than 5 to 1, meaning that the benefits from travel-time savings, reductions in accidents and reductions in emissions outweigh the capital and operating costs 5 to 1. [Note: express lane revenue was not included in this calculation.]</li><li>• Based on traffic analysis conducted for the project, the 2015 average peak period speed in the general purpose lanes is projected to be up to 35% faster in 2015 if the express lane is built. This speed improvement varies by direction and A.M. vs. P.M. peak period. The traffic analysis also showed there is 37% available capacity in the HOV lane in the A.M. operating hours in the north and southbound directions and 23% available capacity in the P.M.</li><li>• This express lane will have open access, so cars will enter and exit the express lanes similar to how they enter and exit the HOV lanes today thereby preventing queuing at limited access locations. [Note: public response to this concept was received positively.]</li></ul>
<p><u>2) HOV Lane Users:</u></p> <p>Several people expressed concern that the conversion of the HOV lane to an express lane would be used as an opportunity to raise the occupancy requirements to 3+ or to increase the hours of operation of the lanes. These were seen as part of a larger strategy to generate revenue. Others stated that the conversions would slow down the HOV lanes and that express lanes are counter to encouraging carpooling, because they take away an advantage to carpooling. Finally, a few stated that having to obtain</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The dynamic tolling system will be designed to keep traffic in the express lanes flowing smoothly, as required by state and federal law. If traffic gets heavy enough, the express lanes will revert to HOV only, allowing carpools to maintain their advantage.</li><li>• Under current law, Caltrans must ensure HOV lanes meet federal performance thresholds for speed. Increasing the HOV occupancy requirement is one possible response, if the volume of HOV and other permissible vehicles causes the corridor to fail to meet the federal standard. Increasing the requirement in conjunction with the opening</li></ul>

## Comment Summary by Theme

## Responses

a switchable toll tag was an inconvenience and a cost to carpoolers.

of express lanes gives 2-person carpools the choice to continue to use the lanes at a lower cost than non-carpools.

- Hours of operation of HOV lanes and express lanes are driven by traffic volumes. If the peak traffic period expands, the hours of HOV lane or express lane operation could expand.
- Carpoolers will have to obtain switchable toll tags. Like the existing FasTrak® tags, BATA will purchase switchable toll tags and make them available to customers with a refundable deposit. These tags will help enforce proper use of the express lanes and improve conditions for current carpools by making it easier to identify and stop violators. BAIFA staff will explore the potential to provide incentives to people using their switchable tags to carpool in the express lanes.

### 3) Toll Tags:

People wanted to know how switchable toll tags would work, when they would be available and how they would get them. They also had comments about the design of the tags and the need for user consistency across the state.

- Toll-free vehicles will need FasTrak® switchable toll tags (already in use in Southern California) properly mounted in their vehicles. These tags allow users to toggle a switch declaring that the vehicle is carrying two or more occupants. When set on 2 or 3, the tolling equipment knows not to charge that vehicle a toll.
- FasTrak® switchable toll tags will become available in spring 2015.
- Switchable tags will be able to be read on all express lanes in the Bay Area and throughout the state. BAIFA participates in a statewide group exploring statewide tolling consistency.

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## Comment Summary by Theme

## Responses

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### 4) Decision-Making Process:

Some people asked about the agencies involved in the planning, design and operations of the lanes and how these agencies would work together and be held accountable. Others asked how their comments would be heard and if they made a difference. A few also questioned if the CEQA process was being followed, including analysis of cumulative impacts.

- BAIFA is a Joint Powers Authority (JPA) between the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) and the Bay Area Toll Authority (BATA). The Authority's current composition consists of elected officials from Alameda, Contra Costa, Napa and Solano Counties.
- BAIFA and Caltrans will consider the comments provided by the public prior to approving the project.
- Caltrans as the lead agency is following the process documented on the Standard Environmental Reference (SER), which is the Caltrans guidance on how it and its partner agencies working on the State Highway System comply with environmental laws (CEQA and NEPA). It can be found at <http://www.dot.ca.gov/ser/>.

### 5) Revenues:

There were several questions related to toll revenue including how it will be used, how long it will take to pay back the project cost, if the revenues will be spent in the corridor or in the county, how much will be generated over time and who makes decisions about revenue use.

- The first priority is to pay for the operations and maintenance of the express lanes. Within the next year, BAIFA board members will review the policy for building out the network and distribution of remaining revenue. First, however, BAIFA staff will revise the revenue projections to get an updated understanding of projected revenue.

### 6) Equity:

There were several comments received expressing concern over the fairness of express lanes to lower income travelers.

- In fall 2012, MTC conducted focus groups and surveys with low-income and minority travelers living or working along BAIFA Express Lane corridors and found that these populations like the choice express lanes offer solo drivers. 62% of respondents said they'd be willing to pay to use the lanes sometimes. Surveys conducted elsewhere in the country have shown that even though high-income households travel by car more frequently than lower- and middle-income households, all income levels value and utilize toll lanes for better reliability of travel.
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## Comment Summary by Theme

## Responses

### 7) Taxation:

Several people mentioned that they should not have to pay to use something that their tax dollars paid to build.

- The lanes will remain free for HOV users. This project will give single drivers a choice do something they currently can't do, for a fee. Data from other lanes suggest most people pay to use the lane occasionally, when they really need a reliable trip – to pick a child up from day care, get to the airport or make a critical appointment.
- While transportation tax revenues support highway operations and maintenance, which is chronically underfunded. Toll revenues from express lanes will be used to address this funding need for express lane operations and maintenance.

### 8) Enforcement:

People expressed the need for better HOV enforcement, but mostly just asked how enforcement would work.

- If a driver uses the express lane without a FasTrak® toll tag account, BAIFA will issue a toll violation based on the license plate pictures taken by the toll system. This process is how FasTrak® works at Bay Area bridges. The California Highway Patrol will verify that drivers in the lane are correctly representing themselves as carpools (or other toll-free vehicles) through observations and using express lane technology.
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## Comment Summary by Theme

## Responses

### 9) Corridor Issues:

The final theme included questions about the relationship between this express lane and the Direct Access Ramp (DAR) proposed in the corridor, the relationship between this project and ramp metering and finally the relationship between this project and sound walls.

[Note: The DAR is a proposed HOV on/off-ramp from I-680 to the San Ramon employment center, Bishop Ranch. It is not fully funded yet.]

- The DAR is a separate project. It is not contingent on this project and this project is not contingent on the DAR. It is being studied as HOV access ONLY.
- Ramp metering equipment is partially installed in this corridor, but it is not sufficiently complete to be usable. This express lane project will not complete metering installation or activation. MTC and Caltrans, in coordination with local agencies, decide when the meters should be turned on with a goal of activating meters to mitigate existing congestion along a usable segment consisting of at least five consecutive interchanges.
- If a project in the corridor is adding capacity, sound walls must be considered during the environmental document process and meet certain criteria to end up being constructed. BAIFA evaluated traffic noise resulting from the project and found that because the project does not add additional lanes or bring traffic closer to homes or other sensitive land uses, changes in noise levels from the project would be negligible and not perceptible. The existing sound walls effectively shield residences from highway noise; existing sound wall locations and heights would not be changed as a result of the project.