

**Senate Committee on Transportation and Homeland Security  
Public Hearing**

**Amarillo, June 8, 2010**

Good morning. My name is Vince Obregon and I am the Associate Vice President for Capital Program Implementation for the Metropolitan Transit Authority of Harris County (METRO).

I would like to thank Chairman Carona and the Committee for inviting us to be a part of the hearing today.

I am here this morning to share with you some of the tactics and initiatives we are using and planning to use to help manage our traffic congestion.

Houston is our nation's fourth largest city with a regional population of over 4 million. Not only are we managing existing congestion problems on our highways but the problem will only become more challenging as we expect the region to continue growing.

Houston benefits from a very successful suburban commuter service-offering express bus service from a choice of 29 park & ride lots with over 33,000 parking spaces with transit service as often as every three minutes. Our commuter gains a significant travel advantage from nonstop trips on free-flowing High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) lanes.

We manage approximately 104 miles of HOV lanes in the system located on six of the Houston's major freeways. This is accomplished under a Master Agreement between METRO and TxDOT who co-manage the facilities. METRO is responsible for daily operation and enforcement, while METRO and TxDOT share responsibility for maintenance. HOV lanes provide a high speed travel options for buses, vanpools and carpools as an incentive to share a vehicle and reduce the number of vehicle trips. HOV lanes have played a significant role in the management of congestion on the area freeways.

There are three (3) key elements to successful commuter service

- (1) Park and Rides need to be located in the right location
- (2) Good access to the HOV lanes. Working collaboratively with TxDOT over the years has proven to be a tremendous benefit to implementing these facilities as seamlessly as possible.
- (3) Free-flowing conditions in the HOV lane

The HOV system carries over 45,000 vehicles and over 133,000 people per day. During the peak hour, one HOV lane carries the same as three (3) freeway lanes. Our HOV system helps manage congestion, reduce vehicle emissions and is a more cost effective use of the infrastructure.

We believe the next generation of our HOV lanes is leading us to Managed Lanes or High Occupancy Toll (HOT) lanes. We are currently planning on converting 88 miles of the HOV lanes into HOT lanes. By using technology to help manage and monitor traffic conditions we have the opportunity to introduce a single occupant vehicle (SOV) for a toll and access to the HOV system. The traffic analysis of our HOV lanes shows us that we have capacity on the shoulders of the peak period and could increase utilization of our HOV lanes by as much as 50%. The toll rate will be dynamically set and adjusted to control the volume on non-HOV vehicles in the HOT lane. As congestion builds and speed reduces, the toll will be increased to discourage drivers from entering the lane. The toll is decreased as speeds increase and congestion improves. We believe this project will maximize HOV utilization and further reduce the congestion in general purpose lanes.

Last, but not the least, METRO is one of the sponsors of the Motorist Assistance Program (M.A.P.) which is designed to help stranded motorists on most Houston area freeways. Operated by METRO Police and Harris County, about 15,000 motorists are helped a year, thus further aiding to congestion mitigation.

Our experience has demonstrated that creative use of park and rides and HOV lanes can be an effective component of the overall transportation system in an urban area.

Again thank you for including us in the hearing today and I would be happy to expand further on these thoughts or answer any questions you may have.