

September 24, 2021

To: Ron Kozinski

Re: I-405 Express Lane Project

The Bel Air Beverly Crest Neighborhood Council is located in the Santa Monica Mountains. Our borders are Sepulveda Blvd on the west, Laurel Canyon Blvd on the east, Mulholland Dr. on the north, and Sunset Blvd on the south. We are a part of City of Los Angeles Council Districts 4 and 5 and Los Angeles County Supervisorial District 3.

Many thousands of residents live in our Neighborhood Council area, which includes numerous Santa Monica Mountains canyon communities. Because of our location, we are highly impacted by increased traffic to the Westside, including projects on the I-405 Freeway and throughout our area and highly susceptible to traffic impacts as a result of fire, this is a Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone with many streets posted as Red Flag Day streets.

The Traffic Committee of the BABCNC has examined the five choices for the Sepulveda Pass Express Lane Project. We recommend Alternative 1, the No Project alternative.

We currently have an HOV Lane, which was added as part of the I-405 Improvement Project. Changing that lane to a toll lane, on one of the most well-traveled portions of the I-405, would be a costly matter for the many vehicles whose owners do not qualify for reduced pricing. For mostly economic reasons, thousands of drivers who must use this stretch of the freeway (i.e., work, medical appointments, etc.) would be forced to stay in the remaining lanes.

Additionally, we do not believe any of the proposed changes would lessen the traffic, but rather might increase it. Martin Waxman, Rand Traffic Guru who recently passed away, always reminded us, "If you build it, they will come." Adding another lane or lanes will simply add to the traffic and all of its environmental consequences.

Specific Issues:

1. Safety

During the most recent I-405 widening Project which added a northbound HOV lane, all lanes were returned to being the standard Federally required 12 ft width because that is what safety requires. Therefore, we do not approve of compromising that width.

Furthermore, numerous I-405 exits are spaced closely together requiring vehicles to traverse many lanes within a limited amount of space to exit the freeway from the HOV lane. The additional complexity of traversing yet another lane in these areas would increase the danger of freeway travel.

2. Travel Time

We are not convinced that travel time will be sufficiently improved to warrant the proposed project. The interchanges between the I-405 and the I-10 and the I-405 and the I-101 have always been problematic. Even after recent major changes they are still difficult and dangerous locations that contribute greatly to the slowing of all three freeways. Adding Toll Lanes would only exacerbate this problem.

Increased Turbulence: When vehicles enter the freeway, they must currently cross several lanes to reach the HOV lane. When traffic is densely packed this contributes to the overall slowing of the freeway. Adding another lane would add to the time required to reach the HOV lane. Additional time when leaving the HOV lanes to exit the freeway would also increase travel times.

Commercial vehicles, such as 18 wheelers and construction vehicles (i.e., cement and dump trucks, delivery trucks for heavy materials, such as automobiles) currently cause delays on the freeways. These vehicles are “supposed to be” driven in the right two lanes. There is no enforcement. The grade on the southbound I-405 is so steep that truck speeds are severely reduced to far less than 45 mph between the I-101 and Mulholland Dr. Essentially, these two lanes do not allow traffic to flow at freeway speeds at any time. This results in two traffic lanes, sometimes three when trucks pass one another, being greatly slowed.

3. Financial Considerations

Impact to nearby roads. During the I-405 widening project the nearby streets such as Sepulveda and other cross mountain roads experienced greatly increased traffic. Motorists who wish to avoid the toll may decide to take side streets rather than the freeway. These cross mountain streets cannot absorb any increased traffic, they are already beyond capacity at peak traffic times such that vehicles sit idling spewing unhealthy emissions into neighborhoods.

We do not agree that the funds derived from the Toll Lanes should be sent to other Metro projects. Benefits of the income from Toll Lanes should be used to maintain and enhance the freeway having these lanes. If monies are sent to other Metro Transportation expenses, such as minibuses and first mile/last mile costs, where is the accountability for this use of those funds?

Suggestions:

1. We suggest that Metro enforce the law which mandates trucks use only the right two lanes on the I-405. With better enforcement of the already existing laws, traffic speed and throughput would be increased without the need for Toll Lanes.
2. Trucks are not restricted to set hours on the Freeways. If travel times for trucks were restricted to avoid peak rush hour times the rest of the vehicles could move more freely and accomplish some of the goals set forth in the I-405 Sepulveda Pass Express/Toll Lanes project.

For all the aforementioned reasons and others, such as the potential increased air pollution from possible increased traffic volumes, the BABCNC Traffic Committee supports Alternative 1, the no project option.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment on this proposed project. Sincerely,

Irene Sandler,

Chair, BABCNC Traffic Committee