

Rules

The North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) may designate one or more travel lanes as High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) lanes on streets and highways on the State Highway System. Cities may designate one or more travel lanes as HOV lanes on streets on the Municipal Street System. HOV lanes shall be reserved for vehicles with a specified number of passengers as determined by NCDOT or the city having jurisdiction over the street or highway.

The HOV Lane Fine for not having the required number of people in the vehicle is up to \$100 plus court costs. A HOV violation also will result in two points being assessed to the violator's driving record.

Exemptions to the Rules:

- Motorcycles are permitted to use HOV lanes in North Carolina.
- Emergency vehicles (any law enforcement, fire, police, or other governmental vehicle, and any public or privately owned ambulance or emergency service vehicle) are permitted on HOV lanes when responding to an emergency.
- Buses designed to transport 15 or more passengers, regardless of the actual number of occupants, can use HOV lanes in the state.
- A motor vehicle with more than three axles is not permitted to use HOV lanes in North Carolina.

Keys to Success

A successful HOV lane has the ability to move more people in fewer automobiles than a general-purpose lane. However, not all transportation projects that include additional general-purpose lanes will make successful HOV projects. There are certain characteristics-or keys to success-a project should exhibit before transportation officials consider HOV solutions. There are also other issues to consider when contemplating HOV lanes.

Legend:  = Essential Characteristic  = Desirable Characteristic

-  Clear set of objectives and measures of success.
-  HOV lanes are developed as additional travel lanes.
-  Existing Congestion within the corridor.
-  HOV lane will save one minute per mile and 5 to 8 minutes in total trip time.
-  Traffic volumes are projected to increase in the future.
-  Collaborative relationship with enforcement agencies in development and implementation of HOV lanes.
-  Agency and public support.
-  A lane that can be safely operated and enforced.

- Policies and programs supporting transit use are in place.
- Rideshare program in corridor is in existence.
- Successful HOV facilities already in operation in same corridor or adjacent corridors.
- High existing volume of 2+ HOV's (700 or more vehicles per hour).
- Traffic system management program in place along the corridor.
- High level of convenient transit service along the corridor (local/express/ Park & Ride routes).
- Establish commute trip reduction legislation.
- Existing communication network with employers along the corridor.
- Collaborative working relationships with environmental agencies/groups.
- Collaborative working relationships with neighborhood/community groups.
- Collaborative working relationships with local jurisdictions, transit agencies, and metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) along the corridor.
- Commitment to evaluate and accurately show benefits/risks.
- Existence of origin-destination pattern that can benefit from the HOV lane implementation.

Issues to Consider

There are several issues a transportation official will consider when deciding which transportation solution will provide the most benefit in a particular corridor. These issues, along with established keys to success, will aid the transportation official in planning a successful project.

- Will adding an HOV lane reduce high accident rate along the corridor?
 - Will enforcement agencies (Police and Judicial System) support HOV lanes?
 - What is existing volume of HOVs in the corridor?
 - What is the level of support for HOV facilities by public and local elected officials?
 - What are the impacts of designating a general-purpose lane for HOV use during construction?
 - Is transit service available in the region?
 - Is transit funding available in the region?
 - Are support facilities available, such as Park & Ride lots?
 - Is an operational, incident management program in place?
 - Are ride matching services adequate?
 - Will pavement maintenance of existing facilities be required as a result of HOV lane construction?
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Personal Benefits of HOV Lanes

Why should I use HOV lanes?

Faster trips

HOV lanes are designed to move more people, more quickly than general-purpose highway lanes. While commuters in general-purpose lanes can get stuck in slow-moving peak-hour traffic, HOV lane users can drive at much faster speeds.

Reliable travel times

By using a HOV facility, your commute will take about the same amount of time each day. This reliability is particularly important for buses because their riders and schedules rely upon prompt and consistent travel times.

Save money

Driving in your car alone means you can expect to spend more money on gas, maintenance and repairs than if you shared the expense. On average, people who carpool, vanpool or ride transit can reduce their annual commuting costs by about \$3,000.

Less pollution

As fewer vehicles use North Carolina's highways, the less pollution is created. Carbon monoxide from vehicle emissions is a major contributor to air pollution.

Less stress

Sharing a ride can make your commute more pleasant and less stressful. In addition to a faster, more reliable commute in the HOV lane, letting someone else drive gives you time to read, snooze, chat or daydream. Driving with a spouse, co-worker or friend or on a bus can make a long commute more productive.

Reduced wear and tear on your vehicle

Your vehicle will last longer if you drive fewer miles. Carpooling, vanpooling or riding the bus save wear and tear on your personal vehicle.

Facts and Myths

HOV Facts:

- Provide predictable and daily travel timesaving.
- Support air quality goals.
- Enhance bus transit operations.
- Preserve at least one lane for free flow of high occupancy vehicles (cars carrying more than one occupant), buses and emergency vehicles.

HOV Myths, HOV lanes cannot:

- Be as effective without complimentary transit and rideshare services that help build demand
- Be a replacement for other transportation solutions, such as needed general purpose lanes, transit guideways and other improvements that form the basis for a comprehensive regional transportation plan. All types of congestion management strategies are typically needed.
- By themselves, make a substantial improvement in a region's air quality or level of congestion being experienced. However, HOV lanes can be an effective component to addressing a region's mobility needs and air quality goals.
- Be successfully implemented by taking away an existing lane and converting it to HOV use, due to operational impacts caused to other motorists. HOV lanes are best implemented as added lanes to an existing 6- or 8-lane freeway.

HOV Lane Experience around the U.S.

A large number of metropolitan areas around the U.S. and abroad apply HOV lanes to help manage traffic and provide mobility to transit and carpools. Currently, over 125 projects exist in 30 cities. Collectively, HOV lanes in America move more than 3 million commuters each day, and this number is growing as HOV lane systems are expanding. Right now, there are more than 2,500 lane-miles of operating HOV facilities-more than enough to stretch between Charlotte and Raleigh 14 times. This number is expected to double in the next 25 years.

These HOV lanes have a long track record of proven benefits.

- HOV lanes in Houston move 40,000 commuters in express transit buses each day, up from virtually no express transit riders in 1979 when HOV lanes were first introduced.
- Los Angeles area HOV lanes move almost a million people each day, and they save an accumulated total of more than 30,000 hours of delay.
- In Seattle an HOV lane moves as many people as four adjacent lanes during rush hours.
- A bus-only HOV lane in New Jersey moves over 32,000 people each hour, which is more people than could be moved in 15 congested freeway lanes.

HOV lanes also exhibit very high popularity with the public.

- Recent surveys in Seattle show over an 80% approval rating with their area's HOV lane system.
- Los Angeles commuters, including those who don't take the HOV lanes, give their HOV lane system an 88% approval rating.

HOV lanes are only effective and successful where there is recurring congestion, potential for travel time savings and demand for transit and ridesharing. Not all projects have been successful. Over the last 30 years, 6 projects (about 4% of all projects) were removed because these attributes were not evidenced.

Areas close to North Carolina with current HOV lane operations include Atlanta, Pittsburgh, Nashville, Memphis, Norfolk-Hampton Roads and the Washington D.C. metropolitan area.

For more information about HOV lane facilities in the U.S., go to the following websites:

- [HOV World](#)
- [HOV Pooled-Fund Study](#)
- [HOV Facilities](#)