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Priced managed lanes - a proven mobility option grows in popularity

Today, states across the country face the daunting challenge of providing reliable transportation alternatives in their metropolitan areas. Urban congestion results in wasted fuel and time for people and puts American businesses at a disadvantage when compared to their global competitors.

While urban transit options help some people commute to work, and freight railroads keep goods moving, the vast majority of Americans drive their cars to work and the vast majority of goods are distributed by trucks. Moving into the future, transit and freight railroads will continue to play an important role, but the overwhelming majority of economic activity in urban areas will depend on roadways - a simple and undeniable statistical fact.

Fortunately, there is a solution to urban congestion. That solution is congestion pricing through delivery mechanisms such as priced managed lanes. Priced managed lanes work by tolling some lanes in an urban corridor. The toll rate varies to ensure a reliable travel speed is maintained and the lanes function without congestion. What was once an economic theory first offered in 1952 by Nobel Prize winner in economics, William Vickrey, has become a reality in nearly a dozen urban areas across the country. Miami; Atlanta; Washington, D.C.; Seattle; Dallas; Houston; San Diego; Minneapolis; Denver; Los Angeles; Orlando, Fla.; and Salt Lake City have, or soon will have, priced managed lanes operating in their urban areas. Once a simple concept, using pricing to control transportation demand has now

successfully been piloted, tested and approved by the motoring public.

When capacity (i.e., new lanes) is added to a roadway it is immediately occupied by the existing latent demand in the rush hour(s). Or, the existing rush hour time period compresses and consumes the new roadway capacity. When new transit service is added in a corridor, roadway capacity that becomes available by that modal shift is again consumed by latent roadway demand. In other words, there is no capacity building strategy that can fully solve congestion, and even if there was, it is not affordable or sustainable. The only strategy that can solve for congestion is an operational strategy using the congestion pricing concept with deployment strategies like priced managed lanes. Not only do priced managed lanes provide a mobility option for automobile customers, they also provide a reliable transit corridor for buses at a much lower cost than traditional fixed-rail transit.

All trips on a roadway are not the same, therefore, all lanes on a roadway should not be the same. Motorists value their time differently - whether driving to a job, getting to the airport to catch a plane or picking up a child at day care, versus more leisurely trips for shopping or movies. Urban corridors need to provide choices for motorists who can evolve into customers of priced managed lanes, a mobility option available to motorists when they need it.

The time for debate has passed. Fifteen successful operational corridors have proven the business

case to the public and almost all of the urban areas that have tested a priced managed lane corridor now have several more corridors in operation or development. As urban areas like Miami, Houston, Atlanta and Los Angeles deploy multiple priced managed lane corridors they are now looking to create seamless, interconnected networks providing even greater and more robust mobility options for their customers.

Vickrey's concept has been pioneered, tested and proven by bold state departments of transportation and regional authorities. Now is the time for more DOTs, regional authorities and metropolitan planning organizations to consider, expand and implement priced managed lanes strategies in other urban, congested corridors across the country.

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Matthew Click is the Southeast Division director for tolls. With more than 16 years of extensive experience in tolling, transportation finance, congestion pricing and priced managed lanes, Click is one of the industry's most recognized specialists in priced managed lanes. He travels across the nation advising state DOTs and other transportation agencies about planning, financing and implementing priced managed lanes, corridors and networks in congested urban areas.

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