

## The San Francisco Examiner

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### News

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# Carpool growth coming

**Area highways to receive facelift with more lanes.**

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As part of a sweeping plan to fix the Bay Area's chaotic traffic mess, the California Department of Transportation will construct 230 miles of new carpool lanes over the next two decades, resulting in a connected route for high-occupancy vehicles.

"We don't have a seamless system right now. We are trying to get them all together," said Randy Rentschler, legislative affairs director at the Metropolitan Transportation Commission.

Currently, carpool lanes connect only on major South Bay freeways. The lanes throughout the rest of the Bay Area are isolated segments in Marin, Contra Costa and Alameda counties.

By Caltrans' own figures, some lanes in the region's existing 348-mile carpool lane network reduce commutes along major corridors by more than half an hour, though the time savings along most routes is only a few minutes. During rush hours, the lanes are only open to cars with two or more occupants. Violators face fines upwards of \$271.

On Monday, Caltrans loosened the noose on one oft-congested East Bay artery, opening the region's newest carpool lane on a five-mile section of southbound Interstate 680 between Concord and Walnut Creek.

In addition to Caltrans' 230-mile expansion of carpool lanes by 2025, the Metropolitan Transportation Commission is considering a solution that would allow some solo commuters to pay for the right to use carpool lanes by 2010. Known as high-occupancy toll lanes, or "Lexus lanes" by their critics, they would act just like carpool lanes but allow solo drivers to pay a variable toll to use them during peak hours.

On Thursday, Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger signed into law AB 2032, which will allow several Bay Area transit agencies to begin developing the lanes. They are envisioned as a way to ease congestion along almost every major Bay Area interstate except Interstate 280.

As was the case with the new lane between Concord and Walnut Creek, Caltrans makes room for most of its carpool lanes in the Bay Area by expanding freeways, rather than reducing space for single-passenger traffic. This allows more cars onto the road and defeats the stated purpose of the lanes, according to critics.

"It's a way of widening freeways while pretending to be doing something more benign than that," said Tom Radulovich, executive director of Transportation for a Livable City, a San Francisco-based

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advocacy group.

Caltrans spokesperson Jack Gaines rejected the notion that the carpool lanes are simply Trojan horses for widening projects.

"Carpool lanes handle a lot of people in fewer vehicles. It gets more cars off the road," Gaines said.

### **Carpool vs. normal lanes**

#### **Greatest time savings (morning commute)**

##### **Alameda County**

I-80, Westbound at Bay Bridge toll plaza 24 min.

I-880, 16th Street to Bay Bridge 31 min.

I-880, Whipple Ave. to Mission Blvd. 40 min.

##### **Contra Costa County**

I-80, West from Rte. 4 to Alameda County 13 min.

##### **Marin County**

Hwy 101, South from Rte. 37 to N. San Pedro Rd. 13 min.

##### **San Mateo/Santa Clara County**

Hwy 101, South from Whipple Ave. to Ellis St. 15 min.

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