



Transportation Bill Enables Hybrid Drivers To Use HOV Lanes in California July 29, 2005

Washington, DC - The Transportation Authorization Conference Report includes a provision allowing California drivers in hybrid vehicles to use high-occupancy-vehicle lanes even if the driver is alone in the car, U.S. Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) announced today. It also includes \$130 million for a car-pool lane on the northbound 405 Freeway and cracks down on predatory tow truck operators.

“This is a major step forward in our efforts to encourage lower fuel consumption by providing an incentive for drivers to use hybrid, fuel-efficient vehicles,” Senator Feinstein said. **“Almost one-third of the greenhouse gases emitted in the U.S. come from cars, trucks and other vehicles. We should be doing all we can to help reduce our thirst for gasoline and to cut emissions that cause global warming,”**

California has had a law since Jan. 1 allowing hybrid cars to use the diamond lanes on freeways even if the driver is alone in the car, but the state needed a waiver from the federal government. Senator Feinstein introduced legislation in March with Senator George Allen (R-VA) so that California could obtain that waiver. Once the Transportation Authorization bill is signed into law, the state will receive that waiver.

Regarding the 405 Freeway, Senator Feinstein had joined with Senator Barbara Boxer (D-CA), Representative Howard Berman (D-Van Nuys) and others to urge that \$400 million in federal funds be authorized to speed construction of a northbound carpool lane through the Sepulveda Pass.

While the Transportation bill only provided \$130 million, it will jump-start the project along a stretch of the highway that is estimated to carry 300,000 commuters a day. **“The competition is very tough for these federal transportation dollars, so it is great news that we were able to secure \$130 million for this very important project,”** Senator Feinstein said.

The bill also allows local jurisdictions to crack down on aggressive tow truck drivers by permitting California and other states to require prior permission from property owners before a tow truck can remove a vehicle from a lot. It also directs the Transportation Department to investigate ways of dealing with predatory tow trucks.

“Currently, tow truck companies act without any local, state or federal regulation,” Senator Feinstein said. **“While most are good actors, there are a few that have taken advantage of the lack of regulation to prey on consumers. This has become a serious problem throughout California.”**