



STATE OF MINNESOTA

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GOVERNOR PAWLENTY AND LT. GOVERNOR MOLNAU ANNOUNCE FIRST "HOT" LANE PROJECT FOR MINNESOTA INTERSTATE 394 ~Pay-per-use HOV lanes could be a reality as soon as December 2004, Governor says~

Saint Paul — Governor Tim Pawlenty and Lt. Governor/Transportation Commissioner Carol Molnau today announced the next tool for Minnesota drivers who battle highway congestion.

The state will implement *MnPass*, which will convert the I-394 high occupancy vehicle lanes into pay-per-use, high occupancy toll (HOT) lanes that will allow single occupancy drivers to get out of traffic and speed up their commute. The lanes will also remain open to high occupancy use at no charge.

"Minnesota commuters want congestion relief, and our administration is responding with viable solutions," Governor Pawlenty said. "In addition to passing the largest transportation funding package in state history, *MnPass* is another bold, innovative way to reduce congestion for Minnesota drivers."

MnPass, Minnesota's first HOT lane project, would affect existing car pool lanes on I-394 from Highway 101 to I-94. Drivers of single occupancy vehicles, currently restricted from using I-394's high occupant vehicle lanes, could choose to use the *MnPass* lanes by paying a fee. *MnPass* will not utilize traditional toll booths. Rather, HOT lane users will be billed electronically. Transit riders, motorcyclists and car pools will continue to use the lane free of charge.

Governor Pawlenty said *MnPass* could be a reality as early as December 2004. The project will be developed and completed through a public/private partnership involving the state of Minnesota and service vendor Wilbur Smith Associates. The private firm will fund 25 percent of the project's estimated \$8 to \$10 million price tag.

Federal law regulates the use of high occupancy vehicle lanes and prohibits the use of such lanes for general traffic. However, federal exemptions are provided for programs such as *MnPass*, which charge a fee for single occupancy users.

"While opening the lanes for general use may be a good idea, federal law simply does not allow it unless we charge a fee," Lt. Governor Molnau said.

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“This project is an excellent example of the success that results when a public entity and a private organization join efforts to accomplish one goal,” Molnau said. “We are innovatively using existing infrastructure to give drivers more choice on the road.”

Minnesota lawmakers during the 2003 Legislative session authorized Mn/DOT to charge a fee for using high occupancy lanes. As part of those efforts, Molnau created the I-394 Express Lane Community Task Force. The task force has given initial review to the HOT lane concept and its application to I-394, including conferring with citizens and public officials along the corridor. Members of the task force have visited similar facilities and operations in California to witness their use firsthand. The task force will also periodically review the project and offer its recommendations for the project. The group is composed of state and local elected officials, transit representatives and private citizens who live or work along the I-394 corridor.

Next week, Mn/DOT officials and Wilbur Smith Associates will begin negotiating the operating details of the system — including the price per use, access, hours of operation and enforcement. The administration will make a final decision about the *MnPass* operational plan by early 2004.

“Today we are adding another tool for improving the way we manage traffic congestion,” Molnau said. “By opening the car pool lanes to people willing to pay, we maintain the advantage for transit users, motorcyclists and carpoolers while improving the flow of traffic in all lanes.”

For more information, visit <http://www.dot.state.mn.us/information/mnpass>.