



VIEWPOINTS | 2019

Priced managed lanes – a proven mobility strategy – are rapidly expanding across the US

PMLs are a critical mechanism for reducing urban traffic congestion

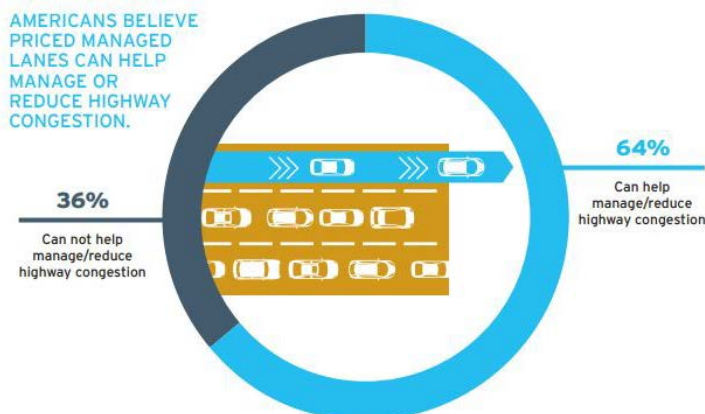
Today, metropolitan areas across the nation face the increasingly difficult challenge of providing reliable transportation alternatives in and around their urban cores. Urban congestion results in wasted fuel and time for people and puts American cities at a disadvantage when compared to their surrounding suburban areas.

As cities across the country compete to attract new businesses and top talent to drive economic growth, the need to address and mitigate urban congestion becomes increasingly critical. In many urban cores, these congested corridors are geometrically constrained, limiting opportunities for future widening, and driving up the cost of adding needed capacity. Often there is just one remaining “bite at the apple” to implement capacity expansion.

Fortunately, there are solutions to urban congestion. One increasingly viable solution is congestion pricing through delivery mechanisms such as priced managed lanes. PMLs work by tolling some lanes in an urban corridor, and are most impactful where there is acute, recurring congestion. 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 the 1950s has become a reality in 16 urban areas across the country. Cities such as Miami; Atlanta; Washington, D.C.; Seattle; Dallas; Houston; Austin; San Diego; Minneapolis; Denver; Los Angeles; San Francisco; and Salt Lake City have PMLs 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. Not only that, but the market has spoken, and public sector owners are advancing plans for more of these projects around the country.

The need for pricing as a management mechanism in congested corridors is well documented. When capacity 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 slightly contracts and consumes the new roadway capacity.

One option for reducing urban traffic congestion is deployment of strategies such as PMLs. Not only do PMLs provide a mobility option for automobile customers, they also provide a reliable transit corridor for buses at a much lower cost than traditional fixed-guideway transit.



Source: 2018 HNTB America THINKS survey

All trips in a roadway corridor are not valued equally all of the time, therefore, all lanes on a roadway should not be operated the same all the time. Motorists and transit riders value their time differently depending on when they are making a trip and what type of trip they are making. Urban corridors need to provide choices for motorists and transit riders who can evolve into part-time customers of PMLs, a mobility option available to motorists and transit riders when they need it.

Dozens of successful PMLs are operational and demonstrating value to their customers; they have proven the business case to the public and almost all of the urban areas that have tested a PML corridor now have several more corridors in operation or development. In fact, several public sector owners across the country are prioritizing PML investment as the cornerstone of their capital work programs. This significant national PML project pipeline is evolving into connected, seamless networks in urban areas across the nation in places like Miami, Atlanta and San Francisco, which are providing even greater and more robust mobility options for customers.

Considering the widespread success, vast geographic reach, and technical diversity of proven PML solutions that have been deployed, now is the time for more DOTs, regional authorities, and MPOs to consider, expand and implement PML strategies to reap the benefits these projects afford for their own congested urban corridors.

About the authors

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