



PETER ZIERLEIN For The Times

Something to ponder while you're parked on the 101

WITH THE CITY considering converting Pico and Olympic boulevards into one-way streets, Opinion asked some experts for other quick and inexpensive ways to reduce traffic in L.A. Longer versions of their responses are available at latimes.com/opinion/oneway.

End the MTA's monopoly

By James E. Moore II, director of the transportation engineering program at USC.

The first step is to end the Metropolitan Transportation Authority's virtual monopoly and allow private jitney and bus operators to enter the transportation market to compete with the MTA and with each other. Transit entrepreneurs who get 100% of their revenues from fares (unlike the MTA, which is heavily subsidized by taxpayers) would quickly figure out what kinds of services would attract car drivers. Unfortunately, any entrepreneurs who dare to try right now would be prosecuted for defying the MTA's state-sanctioned monopoly.

That's ridiculous. It would cost nothing to end the monopoly and allow independent jitney services to freely enter the transit market. The result would be a burst of new travel options and fewer cars on the street with one occupant.

Increase parking meter rates

By Donald Shoup, professor of urban planning at the UCLA School of Public

Affairs and author of "The High Cost of Free Parking."

A surprising amount of traffic isn't caused by people on their way somewhere. Rather, it is caused by drivers who clog the streets while searching for parking spaces. For instance, about 8,000 cars a day park at the 470 meters in Westwood Village, so even a small amount of cruising time for each car adds up to a lot of traffic. Over a year, this cruising amounts to about 950,000 miles of travel — the equivalent of 38 trips around the Earth.

What causes this astonishing waste? The fact that an hour at the meter costs 50 cents — only 20% of the price for off-street parking, so drivers have a strong incentive to cruise.

Some cities adjust their meter rates to eliminate the incentive to cruise for parking. For instance, Redwood City, Calif., sets its downtown meter rates to achieve an 85% occupancy rate for curb parking. The price is 75 cents an hour at the center of downtown, and less elsewhere. Drivers can usually find a vacant space near their destination because the vacancy rate is about 15% elsewhere, and the cruising time is near zero.

If Los Angeles wants to reduce traffic congestion, it should charge the right price for curb parking and spend the new revenue for public services in the metered neighborhoods.

Make the bus system easier

By Joel Kotkin, Irvine fellow with the New America Foundation and author of

"The City: A Global History."

What Los Angeles needs is a transit system that better reflects what it is — a sprawling mid-density city. So build the world's easiest-to-use bus system. This network should expand such transit innovations as the MTA's Metro Rapid buses, which run in dedicated lanes, and Rapid Express buses, which make few stops. These systems are far less expensive to build than light rail or a "subway to the sea."

Make connections

By Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris, professor and chairwoman of the UCLA Department of Urban Planning.

Short term, these ideas, collectively implemented, could ease traffic congestion:

- Make bus rides faster by creating dedicated bus lanes on the 10, 101 and 405 freeways and expand the MTA's Metro Rapid bus system to connect such major employment centers as downtown, the Wilshire corridor, LAX, UCLA, USC and the South Bay.

- Connect subway, rail and bus stations to outlying neighborhoods through shuttles or the DASH system.

- To improve traffic flow, synchronize more traffic signals; make some major thoroughfares one-way; minimize left-turn opportunities during rush hours; use side streets for access to parking lots connected to retail outlets.

Turn carpool lanes into toll lanes

By Ted Balaker, Jacobs fellow at the Reason Foundation.

A big roadblock to faster traffic flow is the now-outdated notion that carpool lanes, or high-occupancy vehicle lanes, are good congestion-busters. For the

most part, they're not. Carpool commuting is becoming less common even as more lanes to accommodate it are being built. Better that we turn these carpool lanes into special toll lanes.

The toll would go up or down depending on the flow of cars: The greater the congestion, the more expensive to use these high-occupancy-toll lanes, or HOT lanes. But the flexible-pricing system would maintain free-flow conditions, allowing more vehicles to fly along the same lanes that today are often as congested as the regular ones.

Apart from buying special software and hiring some back-office staff, setting up HOT lanes would be simply a matter of installing antennas for communication with electronic toll collectors, video cameras to catch cheaters, changeable message signs at various points along the route and plastic pylons to separate the lanes from the regular ones.

Cut bus fares to boost ridership

By Joel R. Reynolds, senior attorney and director of the Natural Resources Defense Council's urban program.

Instead of increasing bus fares, as the Metropolitan Transportation Authority has proposed, we should freeze or cut them to attract even more riders. To pay for this, new capital projects should be deferred and subsidies allocated to keep bus fares affordable.

Long-term transportation planning is essential, but the MTA must not be allowed to starve its bus system to feed a future rail system. And reasonable alternatives to the subway, such as a monorail system that may be both cheaper and quicker to build, should not be dismissed out of hand.

Hit drivers in the pocketbook

By Brian D. Taylor, associate professor of urban planning and director of the Institute of Transportation Studies at UCLA.

Bring road supply and travel demand into balance with prices. Instead of paying for transportation projects with bonds, fuel taxes and the like, drivers would pay as they go. If they wanted to travel at rush hour in certain congested areas, they would have to pay dearly. At less congested times, they would pay much less. While common sense tells us that prices would have to be quite high to get millions of trips off the roads, common sense in this case is wrong. When it comes to traffic, small price changes can make a big difference.

Why would this reduce congestion much more than, say, one-way streets or a subway to the sea? Because added road or public transit capacity, which reduces delays in the short term, encourages additional car trips on newly (and temporarily) uncongested roads over the longer term.

Pricing, on the other hand, replaces one cost (time spent sitting in traffic) with another (tolls paid to travel freely during rush hour). But while spending time in traffic produces no revenue, spending on tolls generates a lot of money that can be spent on improving highway and transit systems for those who benefit most from road use.