

## **HOT lanes can ease Ontario traffic congestion, says RCCAO**

by Lindsey Cole - Nov 10, 2014

As the 2015 Pan Am Games inch closer, the **Residential and Civil Construction Alliance of Ontario (RCCAO)** is again suggesting the province move forward and test drive the idea of High Occupancy Toll (HOT) lanes as a way to ease congestion.



RCCAO Executive Director Andy Manahan reiterated the alliance's views on HOT lanes after Ed Clark, the chair of the Advisory Council on Government Assets, recently suggested ways the province could improve managing its assets and invest in transit and transportation infrastructure.

Clark's recommendations mainly focused on Hydro One, Ontario Power Generation and the Liquor Control Board of Ontario (LCBO), which are major provincial assets. Clark warned against selling off assets like the LCBO and suggested an incremental approach to improving Ontario's current economic situation.

He stated \$2 to \$3 billion could be invested in transit and transportation infrastructure without increasing the overall debt or deficit.

"These investments would create jobs directly and indirectly through removing impediments to economic growth," said Clark in a release.

While this news is encouraging, Manahan explains to "truly manage congestion, road and parking pricing solutions are essential."

After the Pan Am Games, he says, there is a chance to see just how effective HOT lanes can be.

Expanded High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) lane networks, the RCCAO states, will move athletes and spectators around the Greater Toronto Hamilton Area (GTHA) faster during the events. These lanes could be kept in place afterwards and used by single occupant drivers who are willing to pay a per-kilometre trip charge.

"We thought that a move towards HOT lanes would be an incremental step towards road pricing. It would be a good way to test pilot it by starting to pay for roads on existing highways by using the ability for people to drive in the HOV lanes," he says.

"The HOV lane and the HOT lane in this context would be one and the same. It would allow single occupant drivers to drive in the HOV lanes if they pay a certain price per kilometre."

Manahan points to a [June 2014 report commissioned by the RCCAO](#) that Trent University Professor Harry Kitchen wrote that road pricing on a regional scale, such as the GTHA, is an "effective travel demand management tool."

"Right now the only toll road we have is the 407," Manahan states.

"Other than that we have nothing else in Ontario in terms of priced roads. This is a way to give people a choice, if they prefer to drive in the non-toll lanes. If they are willing to pay a little bit then they will move faster. It's a choice concept."

According to the provincial government's Progress Report 2014: transit and infrastructure, HOV lanes are now in use on Highways 403 and 404 in the GTA, the 417 in Ottawa and the Queen Elizabeth Way in Halton Region.

"The province said they will be expanding the HOV network in anticipation of the Pan Am Games, so you'll have more white lines painted on the asphalt so to speak. The status is, as far as I know...it has been mentioned in the budget that HOT lanes is a pilot that should be done," Manahan explains.

"While the revenue potential of HOT lanes will be limited in a pilot test, these lanes offer drivers a choice and open up the capacity of the road network."

The RCCAO also states HOT lanes have been used successfully in many jurisdictions in the U.S., with more HOT-HOV projects being rolled out.

"There's a good database in the U.S.," Manahan says, adding there are about 18 jurisdictions in the U.S. that have HOT lane facilities and another 13 could be on the way.

Overall, the implementation of the project could be done in variety of ways through smartphone and GPS technology so that a gantry system, similar to that used to get on the 407, wouldn't need to be used, therefore avoiding significant implementation costs, Manahan explains.

"In the long run, road pricing over the entire network... (can) start bringing in revenue which could be funneled back into other transportation purposes," he adds.

"This is a longer term issue. The incremental approach is basically; let's try out HOT lanes in this region."