Plug In America

We drive electric. You can too.

Recommendations for PEV HOV Lane Access

Programs that allow plug-in electric vehicles (PEVs) to use highway lanes designated for high occupancy vehicles (HOV lanes) are an important element in the suite of policies that promote vehicle electrification. For many drivers, HOV lane access is a powerful incentive that can save an hour or more daily from a commute and thus can be an effective driver for PEV purchases.

Plug in America is a strong supporter of a decal program that allows PEVs access to HOV lanes. It is a critical component in maintaining and growing the PEV market. Studies from UC Davis have shown that this incentive may be worth as much as $5,000 per vehicle for some consumers.[1] This non-monetary incentive for PEVs benefits the state as well. We recommend the following elements be incorporated into any HOV lane access program:

1. **Separate decals are needed for plug-in electric vehicles (PHEVs) and battery electric vehicles (BEVs):** Separate decals will allow for changes to be made to the PHEV decal program over time without affecting the BEV decal program. For example, once the PEV market has moved into the mass market stage, it may be desirable to phase out PHEV decals and only permit BEVs in the HOV lanes, depending on if there are certain air quality or emission reduction goals to meet.

2. **Equivalent treatment for BEVs and PHEVs:** Eligible BEVs and PHEVs should be treated equally under any decal program and allowed unlimited numbers of decals during the program period. This will allow for simpler administration.

3. **Minimum—and increasing—threshold for eligibility by PHEVs:** Only PHEVs that meet a minimum threshold should be eligible for the program. The threshold could be either for the electric range or battery capacity that would be at least adequate for a typical daily commute. Cars that do not meet this threshold provide far less environmental benefit to the state because they are primarily running on gasoline. A minimum electric range of 25 miles could be considered initially and then increased to 30 miles after 18 months, as technology improves.

4. **PEVs should abide by State and Federal HOV lane performance standards:** Both BEVs and PHEVs should be able to comply with the minimum electric driving speeds while running on electricity for the HOV lane.[2]

5. **Decals should be available at the point of sale:** The decals should be provided to the dealerships so that the consumer does not need to take additional cumbersome steps to apply for the decal. It is a far more attractive deal for consumers to receive the decal immediately.

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[1] Tal, Gil and Nicholas, Michael. "Exploring the Impact of High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) Lane Access on Plug-in Vehicle Sales and Usage in California." UC Davis Institute of Transportation Studies. April 2014. Available at: http://docs.trb.org/prp/15-5180.pdf. More information on the current California Clean Air Vehicle Program is available at: https://www.dmv.ca.gov/portal/dmv/detail/vr/decal.

[2] For example, the Washington State Transportation Commission has adopted a performance standard for HOV lanes that states vehicles should average 45 mph or greater at least 90% of the time the HOV lane is accessed during peak hours.

6. **Long-term sunset date for the decals and the program:** Policies with long-term sunset or phase-down terms work best in providing confidence to consumers, auto manufacturers and dealers that not only will the decals be available, but that the PEV can access the HOV lane for the duration of the program.

7. **Program review one year before the sunset date:** Twelve months before the sunset date, the program should be reviewed to determine the need for a further extension if the penetration rate of PEVs is still below the state target and congestion of state HOV lanes has not become a concern. At that point, it may be appropriate to scale back the eligibility of the vehicles with the least environmental benefit, by further increasing the minimum range threshold for PHEVs or phasing out the green decal program entirely.

About Plug In America

Plug In America is the nation's leading independent consumer voice for accelerating the use of plug-in electric vehicles in the United States to consumers, policymakers, auto manufacturers and others. Formed as a non-profit in 2008, Plug In America provides practical, objective information collected from our coalition of plug-in vehicle drivers, through public outreach and education, policy work and a range of technical advisory services. Our expertise represents the world's deepest pool of experience of driving and living with plug-in vehicles. The organization conceived National Drive Electric Week. We drive electric. You can too.