


**CITY OF LOS ANGELES  
INTER-DEPARTMENTAL MEMORANDUM**

Date: November 7, 2024

To: Honorable City Council  
c/o City Clerk, Room 395  
Attention: Honorable Councilmember Hutt, Chair, Transportation Committee

From: Laura Rubio-Cornejo, General Manager   
Department of Transportation

Subject: **EVALUATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS TO RETAIN, REPURPOSE, OR REMOVE PEAK-HOUR LANES**

**SUMMARY**

In response to Council File (CF) 22-1465, the Los Angeles Department of Transportation (LADOT) inventoried peak-hour lanes, analyzed traffic volumes to identify where existing peak-hour lanes are most effective and where they are not significantly improving traffic capacity and flow, and applied evaluation criteria previously approved by the City Council (Council) to develop recommendations to retain, repurpose, or remove peak-hour lanes. This report describes LADOT's evaluation and findings, provides recommendations, and outlines next steps.

**RECOMMENDATION**

That the City Council, subject to approval by the Mayor:

1. APPROVE LADOT's recommendations to retain, repurpose, or remove peak-hour lanes based on the criteria outlined within this report;
2. DIRECT LADOT to remove peak-hour lanes and restore parking on corridors that operate below traffic volume thresholds to achieve immediate safety benefits as defined in this report, and identify which corridors can accommodate bicycle lanes, subject to pavement quality verification by the Bureau of Street Services (BSS);
3. DIRECT LADOT to report back with an engagement plan and resources needed to remove, repurpose, or retain peak-hour lanes on corridors that operate above traffic volume thresholds.

**BACKGROUND**

In December 2022, Council directed LADOT to evaluate all existing peak-hour travel lanes to determine whether they are still needed, whether those streets are wide enough to accommodate new bike/scooter lanes, and whether it is feasible to re-purpose underutilized peak-hour lanes for transit or other uses. The Council further directed that LADOT prioritize streets on the High-Injury Network and/or have the highest posted speed limits.

Peak-hour travel lanes generally refer to lanes that provide parking during most hours of the day, but allow for vehicle travel at specified times when traffic volume is high. Depending on traffic patterns, some peak-hour lanes restrict parking only during the morning or evening peak period, while others are restricted during both peak travel periods. Decades ago, the City of Los Angeles (City) restricted parking

on select street segments during peak traffic periods and converted those parking lanes to peak-hour travel lanes in an effort to expand roadway capacity and increase vehicle throughput.

As outlined in the Mobility Plan 2035 and the Green New Deal, LADOT's Strategic Plan sets specific transportation equity, safety, and sustainability goals. These goals include implementing new bus-only lanes and bicycle or scooter lanes to provide high-quality transportation choices that can improve access to jobs and services, reduce vehicle miles traveled, and eliminate traffic deaths. Modifying, repurposing, and in some cases, eliminating peak-hour lanes to restore full time parking can create safer streets and allow for new bus and bicycle facilities where appropriate.

In April 2023, LADOT provided Council with an overview of peak-hour lanes and a proposed work plan. In May 2023, Council approved LADOT's proposed work plan to identify existing peak-hour lanes Citywide and determine their future use, and directed the Department to report back with findings and recommendations to retain, convert, or eliminate peak-hour travel lanes.

## **DISCUSSION**

LADOT conducted a comprehensive evaluation to develop recommendations to retain, repurpose, or remove existing peak-hour lanes Citywide. This evaluation includes an assessment of the benefits and tradeoffs of peak-hour lanes broadly, an inventory of all existing peak-hour lanes in the City, traffic counts to determine volumes on each corridor with peak-hour lanes, and safety and mobility criteria. LADOT overlaid the peak-hour lane inventory and traffic volume assessment with the HIN, as well as the priority corridors outlined in the City's Mobility Plan 2035 (MP2035) to inform these recommendations and prioritize work based on the city's mobility and safety goals.

### Benefits and tradeoffs

Peak-hour lanes can add vehicular capacity to roadways by restricting parking and providing an additional through lane of traffic during periods of the day when traffic volume is at its highest levels. However, traffic conditions and driver behavior often reduce or negate the expected capacity benefits.

Peak-hour lanes are not exclusively used for vehicle travel, and are shared by through traffic, buses, bicycles, and right-turning traffic. Despite posted restrictions, vehicles often remain parked or stopped in peak-hour lanes during peak travel times, and while LADOT does issue citations for violating posted peak-hour lane signs, staffing vacancies and increasing service demands impacted our ability to consistently cover daily assignments.

Together, these uses and misuses can impede and reduce throughput of the lane, or even effectively end the peak hour lane where vehicles are stopped and disrupt flow in the adjacent lanes when drivers using the peak hour lane must merge to get around stopped vehicles.

Not only do peak-hour lanes tend to underperform in achieving their stated goals, they can also introduce several unintended, negative consequences. The National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO) Urban Street Design Guide states: "Peak-hour parking restrictions for general purpose travel should be limited or converted to other uses. Peak-hour lanes in urban areas, especially those next to the pedestrian's path of travel, should be avoided. Peak-hour parking restrictions also limit the

use of many other beneficial treatments such as curb extensions, parklets, and bikeways.” Specifically, peak-hour lanes may result in the following adverse impacts:

- *Safety*: Studies show that peak-hour lanes are associated with higher rates of traffic fatalities and injuries at all times of day<sup>1</sup>, a reality underscored by the fact that 86% of all peak-hour lanes in the City are located on the High Injury Network (HIN). Additionally, the Federal Highway Administration notes that streets with fewer travel lanes experience safer driving speeds, fewer and less severe crashes, and safer pedestrian crossings. Streets with fewer travel lanes also create safer left turn maneuvers for drivers who have fewer lanes of opposing traffic at lower speeds.
- *Parking availability*: Peak-hour lanes involve a prohibition of parking during certain hours of the day, causing disruption and a loss of parking supply for businesses and residences that rely on or benefit from street parking and loading. For street segments with parking meters, restricting parking to accommodate peak-hour traffic flow also results in a potential revenue loss to the City.
- *Quality of life*: Peak-hour lanes feature moving traffic immediately adjacent to the curb and sidewalk. This can make walking along sidewalks and sidewalk dining on streets with peak-hour lanes uncomfortable, due to the speed and noise of that traffic.
- *Unpredictable driving behavior*: Even when parking is permitted, gaps often exist between cars, particularly in areas with low parking demand. While peak-hour lanes are only intended for use during peak periods, the lane lines are always visible, and drivers may unknowingly enter an inactive peak-hour lane only to be surprised by the sudden obstacle of a parked vehicle in front of them. Other drivers more familiar with the parking conditions may intentionally use an underutilized peak-hour lane to speed, pass on the right, or accelerate and cut in front of other traffic past intersections, creating safety hazards and further undermining the stated purpose of the peak-hour lane.

In order to assess current peak-hour lanes in the City of Los Angeles and develop recommendations, LADOT created an inventory, gathered traffic volume data, and applied safety and mobility criteria to achieve the City’s active transportation and transit goals.

#### Peak-hour lane assessment

There are 221 lane-miles of peak-hour lanes in the City of Los Angeles, of which 30% have PM-only restrictions, 18% have AM-only restrictions, 50% have both AM and PM restrictions, and 2% have all-day restrictions (but allow overnight parking). Among peak-hour lanes Citywide, 21% are on streets with one full-time adjacent lane, 78% are on roadways with two full-time adjacent lanes, and 1% are on roads with three full-time adjacent lanes. A few segments are unique in that they provide a lane that

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<sup>1</sup> Peak Hour Parking Restrictions & Traffic Safety,” M. Caswell, June 2016, published by the UCLA Institute of Transportation Studies

transitions immediately into a turn lane, allowing for increased storage for turning traffic instead of increased mainline throughput.

To make recommendations to retain, repurpose, or remove these peak-hour lanes, LADOT assessed traffic volumes on all existing peak-hour lanes in the City, and applied safety, transit, and active transportation criteria as defined by the City's High Injury Network and MP2035 goals.

### *Traffic volumes*

While traffic volume is neither the sole nor primary consideration as to whether a peak-hour lane should be repurposed, LADOT collected traffic count data on streets with peak-hour lanes during the hours when the lanes are active to assess whether the peak-hour lanes were critical to increase capacity and improve flow, and whether any travel delay might be expected if they are removed.

Per LADOT's adopted guidelines, a street can generally carry up to 750 vehicles per through lane per hour without resulting in significant delays for drivers, including at signalized intersections. Corridors that operate at or below this capacity do not require peak-hour lanes to increase capacity and improve flow, and would be unlikely to experience increased congestion without the peak-hour lanes.

The guidelines anticipate that a street carrying between 751 and 875 vehicles per through lane per hour may experience some moderate delay, and a street carrying more than 875 vehicles per through lane per hour may experience significant delay. Corridors with peak-hour lanes that operate at or above this capacity may see some increase to travel times if the lanes are removed. Repurposing peak-hour lanes on these corridors to meet safety and mobility goals will require additional assessment and community engagement.

### *Safety*

Peak-hour lanes are associated with higher rates of traffic fatalities and injuries when compared to other similar streets without peak-hour lanes. The inventory of peak-hour lanes Citywide reveals that 86% of all peak-hour lanes are located on the HIN. LADOT did not conduct an extensive collision study, but this increased rate of death and serious injury may be caused by less orderly, more erratic driving behavior as peak-hour lanes are used as passing lanes, or as drivers are forced to make unexpected maneuvers to avoid vehicles that remain parked during restricted hours. This may be exacerbated by the fact that peak-hour lanes increase the effective width of the street, increasing exposure and crash risk to crossing pedestrians. Removing peak-hour lanes on these corridors would create safer operating conditions for all road users. LADOT identified HIN corridors with peak-hour lanes and evaluated current traffic volumes to determine recommended next steps.

Based on the safety concerns associated with peak-hour lanes, and their prevalence on the City's HIN, LADOT recommends removing or repurposing all peak-hour lanes on HIN corridors. Peak-hour lanes on HIN corridors that operate below traffic capacity thresholds can be removed immediately, but those on corridors operating above capacity require additional community engagement as LADOT further explores removal of Peak Hour Lanes along these corridors.

### *Transit enhancement*

Informed by MP2035 designations and LA Metro's (Metro) NextGen Plan, and as directed in CF 19-0885, LADOT converted several peak-hour travel lanes to peak-hour dedicated bus lanes. These peak-hour bus lanes restrict parking at peak travel times to provide a dedicated travel lane to public transit buses, on corridors with high-frequency bus service, and where buses experience delays due to congestion. During their hours of operation, peak-hour bus lanes are exclusive to buses, bicycles, and right turning vehicles. These peak-hour bus lanes typically serve low-income transit dependent riders and can reduce end to end bus travel times by up to 15%.

The National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO)'s Urban Street Design Guide states that dedicated bus lanes are typically applied on major routes with frequent headways (10 minutes at peak) or where traffic congestion may significantly affect service reliability. They are not typically necessary on corridors that operate below traffic capacity thresholds, or where transit service is infrequent. Installing bus lanes only where there is congestion and where bus frequency is substantial ensures meaningful benefits for buses and avoids situations where bus lanes are empty most of the time, inviting scofflaw driver behavior.

LADOT recommends repurposing peak-hour lanes to peak-hour dedicated bus lanes on corridors that operate above traffic capacity thresholds with peak frequencies of at least six buses per direction per hour. To evaluate where additional peak-hour lanes could be converted to improve bus service, LADOT referred to both MP2035 designations and Metro's NextGen plan, consulted with transit agencies, and inventoried transit bus lines and frequencies.

### *Active transportation*

Peak-hour lanes are generally incompatible with, and prohibit the installation of bicycle lanes because bicycle lanes require space within the roadway that is consistently available during all times of the day. In some cases, if a peak-hour lane is removed and full-time parking is restored, there may be sufficient space to also install Class II bicycle lanes without further changes to the street design. Peak-hour lanes can typically be removed to accommodate both full parking restoration and Class II bicycle lanes if they meet the following criteria:

1. A roadway width of 54 feet or greater for streets with one full-time lane in each direction (and assuming retention of any left turn or two-way left turn lanes).
2. A roadway width of 74 feet or greater for streets with two full-time lanes in each direction (and assuming retention of any left turn or two-way left turn lanes).
3. A roadway width commensurate with retaining the existing configuration of full-time lanes and parking with at least minimum lane widths for streets with asymmetrical cross-sections or other configurations not already noted, as allowed by LADOT's Manual of Policies and Procedures.

Peak-hour lanes on MP2035 Bicycle Network streets that meet these criteria should be prioritized for removal, and can be replaced with both full-time parking and a bicycle lane. However, based on a cursory review, it is anticipated that few streets will have the width and geometry and pavement quality necessary as described above. Furthermore, streets on the Bicycle Enhanced Network are planned for protected bicycle lanes, which require more width than a striped bicycle facility. These projects will be separately planned, designed, and delivered by LADOT's active transportation team.

Implementing bicycle lanes on the corridors that meet these criteria will also require a pavement assessment by the Bureau of Street Services to ensure there is “good” or better pavement quality, as directed in CF 17-1142-S1, to implement bicycle infrastructure. Corridors that do not meet this pavement quality rating will require pavement restoration prior to bicycle lane improvements.

Peak-hour lanes on MP2035 Bicycle Network streets that do not meet these criteria will require additional evaluation, engagement, design, and in some cases pavement rehabilitation. Additional street segments that are not on the MP2035 Bicycle Network but are recommended for peak-hour lane removal that meet this criteria should also be considered for bike lane implementation if it can improve overall bicycle connectivity.

### Recommendations

Based on the inventory and analysis, LADOT recommends that the City:

1. Retain peak-hour lanes *only* on streets with traffic counts above defined volume thresholds, that are not on the HIN, and are not designated on any of the MP2035 networks, and adjust the hours of these retained peak-hour lanes to limit restricted times to when traffic counts show they are critical to vehicle throughput.
2. Remove all peak-hour lanes on HIN corridors.
  - a. Restore full-time parking where traffic volumes are below capacity, and evaluate for bike lane feasibility based on MP2035 designations, street widths, and pavement quality.
  - b. Restore full-time parking or convert to peak-hour bus lanes where traffic volumes are above capacity, based on MP2035 designations and/or service frequency, and implement bike lanes depending on MP2035 designations, street widths, and pavement quality.
3. Remove peak-hour lanes on all other corridors where traffic counts are below capacity, restore full-time parking, and implement bike lanes depending on MP2035 designations, street widths, and pavement quality.
4. Further evaluate peak-hour lanes on corridors that are above defined traffic volume thresholds that have MP2035 or NextGen designations and develop recommendations for future removal or repurposing.

Given the anticipated minimal impacts of removing peak-hour lanes on streets that operate below traffic volume thresholds, LADOT can proceed with many corridors without additional evaluation and minimal engagement. However, this work will require both staff and material resources to implement.

Removing or repurposing peak-hour lanes on corridors currently operating above traffic thresholds that are on the HIN or otherwise identified for mobility treatments, will require additional evaluation, engagement, and design in addition to the staff and materials resources required to implement.

### Next steps

In order to prioritize and implement the recommendations outlined in this report, LADOT recommends the following next steps.

1. Remove peak-hour lanes and restore full time parking on HIN corridors that operate below the traffic volume thresholds defined in this report, using existing Vision Zero funding.
2. Remove peak-hour lanes on all non-HIN corridors that operate below traffic volume thresholds and restore parking, based on available resources.
3. Conduct a more detailed assessment of the feasibility of bike lanes on those corridors that operate below stated traffic volumes, where peak-hour lanes will be removed, including pavement assessment to be conducted by BSS.
4. Further evaluate peak-hour lanes on corridors with traffic counts above defined traffic volume thresholds that are on the HIN, have MP2035 designations, or are otherwise recommended to be removed or repurposed. Develop recommendations to remove or repurpose these peak-hour lanes and identify the resources and engagement required to implement those recommendations.
5. Adjust the hours of retained peak-hour lanes to limit restrictions to the hours of peak travel on each street segment and install signage to effectuate the new hours.

LADOT's evaluation emphasizes the immediate opportunity to improve traffic safety by removing peak-hour lanes that do not provide the intended benefit of improving traffic flow and will have little to no negative impact once removed. In some cases, removing these lanes and restoring parking will also allow LADOT to reallocate space to deliver new mobility improvements.

LADOT calculated the needed staff and resources in order to prioritize peak-hour lane removal on HIN corridors where traffic volumes do not warrant additional evaluation or engagement. The cost to restore parking on these corridors with existing staff resources is approximately \$475,000 in staff overtime, sign fabrication, and related materials. This work can be completed with existing Vision Zero funds and completed over approximately six months. Prior to removal or repurposing, LADOT will meet with and provide the list of corridors to each individual Council office, notify residents and businesses, and promote on social media. Once complete, this first phase will improve safety with little to no expected traffic delay on an estimated 100 miles of the City's HIN.

Implementing the recommendations on corridors with traffic counts above defined traffic volume thresholds will require additional resources for engagement, materials, and staff time. As with the first phase of this work, LADOT will prioritize providing needed safety improvements on these corridors, and seek opportunities to deliver mobility improvements wherever possible.

### **FINANCIAL IMPACT**

LADOT does not anticipate any impact to the General Fund as a result of these recommendations, and will report back with resources needed to further implement the next steps included in the report. While removing peak-hour lanes may reduce the number of citations issued on these corridors, parking enforcement officers currently assigned to enforce peak-hour restrictions can be deployed to address other parking violations throughout the City. The Special Parking Revenue Fund may experience an increase in parking meter revenue since peak-hour lanes limit the hours that parking meters can

operate. With peak-hour lanes removed or their hours reduced, the hours that parking meters can operate increases. LADOT calculated the maximum additional annual revenue per corridor based on the report's recommendations. LADOT derived these estimates based on the potential extra hours of meter operation, 100 percent occupancy, current meter rates based on time of day, and 249 non-holiday weekdays of operation per year. Based on this methodology, the maximum annual increase in parking meter revenues from the recommended peak-hour lane modifications is over \$482,000 annually once all of the peak-hour lanes are repurposed.

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# PEAK-HOUR LANE NEXT STEPS

