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## Truckway could come through High Desert

### Proposed toll lanes would allow for larger trucks

By KELLY DONOVAN/Staff Writer

BARSTOW — A proposed highway just for commercial trucks could link the ports of Long Beach with Barstow, passing through Victorville.

Though the "truckway" is still just a concept, and its terminus remains undecided, the proposal is gaining momentum. The Southern California Association of Governments is moving forward with feasibility studies for truck-only toll lanes.

SCAG proposes adding the truck lanes alongside existing highway corridors — Interstate 710, State Route 60 and Interstate 15 — in a project estimated to cost more than \$16 billion, SCAG spokesman Jeff Lustgarten said.

The lanes would start at the ports of Long Beach and extend into San Bernardino County, possibly as far as to Victorville or Barstow.

Supporters such as Lustgarten say the lanes would reduce congestion, improve air quality, increase freight hauling efficiency and address a projected increase in truck traffic in Southern California.

A Los Angeles-based libertarian think tank, the Reason Public Policy Institute, released a report earlier this year that identifies the stretch of Interstate 15 between Barstow and Las Vegas as one of a handful of locations that would be suited for truck-only toll lanes.

Robert Poole, Reason's director of transportation studies, said the report names Barstow to Las Vegas partly because SCAG is mulling truck lanes from Long Beach to Barstow. Other factors in the selection of the truck lane routes included the volume of truck traffic and the amount of congestion.

Poole, who has been researching truck toll lanes for the past few years, said his ideas for them grew out of conversations with the American Trucking Association and other trucking advocates. The industry leaders expressed a desire to be able to use larger trucks in more places, he said.

So-called "longer combination vehicles" can haul significantly more freight than standard 18-wheelers, but they are not allowed in California and most other states.

"A single driver can haul up to twice as much payload if he runs one of those LCVs," said Poole, who advises the White House on transportation policy. "So that is a huge cost savings to the trucking companies."

Longer combination vehicles can have either two large trailers or three small trailers. Currently, trucks in California can only have two small trailers or one large trailer.

The problem with bigger trucks is that motorists don't want to share the road with them, Stephanie Williams, senior vice president of the California Trucking Association, said.

"They're big and scary — they just don't feel comfortable with them," Williams said. "It's just the perceived safety issue."

Some motorists are uncomfortable sharing the road even with existing trucks.

"It can be a little scary," said Corona resident Melissa Thomas, who stopped at a West Main Street gas station on her way to Las Vegas on Friday. "(Truck lanes) might be a good thing, because the traffic is just too much."

Meanwhile, some truckers don't like dealing with passenger vehicles.

Cars often cut in front of trucks and immediately slow down as they try to exit the highway, said Ed Collins, a veteran trucker from Yorba Linda who was gassing up at a Barstow truck stop Friday.

Another trucker, 50-year-old Virginia Caley, said motorists usually want to go faster than trucks, which can only go 55 miles an hour on California's highways.

"Give us our own lanes," she said during a fuel stop at the Pilot Travel Center in Lenwood Friday. "We need it. They keep us in the right hand lane (and) because of on-ramps, off-ramps, we keep having to swerve over."

Poole said that when he discussed the truck toll lane concept on a recent radio talk show in Chicago, numerous truckers called in to express support for the idea.

"They like the idea of not having all these rinky-dink car drivers that dart in and out," he said.

The question is, will the trucking industry support the truckway plans?

SCAG's current plans call for a toll rate of 70 cents a mile for each truck. For that to be cost-effective, the trucking companies would absolutely

need to be able to use bigger trucks, Williams said.

"We'd be more than willing to pay some kind of user fee if we could make up the cost," she said.

Also, the truck lanes would need to be optional for the California Trucking Association to support the truck toll lanes, Williams said.

City of Barstow spokesman John Rader said the truckway could help the city with economic development.

"If we were selected as the terminus, or the beginning point of this truckway, so goods loaded off in the port would be shipped to, potentially, Barstow, as a distribution point," he said. "Barstow's position would be greatly enhanced."

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