

Province opening HOV lanes to more drivers on provincial highways

By Brian Lockhart

The Ontario government is proposing a regulatory amendment to the Highway Traffic Act that would allow single-occupant vehicles to use High Occupancy Vehicle lanes during off-peak hours.

The idea is to better use existing highway infrastructure to reduce gridlock and keep drivers moving on provincial highways.

Ministry of Transportation modelling shows the change would improve travel times for all users, with average speeds increasing in both HOV and general-purpose lanes across major highways during off-peak hours.

If implemented, this change would take place before the end of 2026, following a period of public consultation.

“Gridlock is costing our economy billions of dollars every year and robbing Ontario drivers of valuable time and quality of life,” said Prabmeet Sarkaria, Minister of Transportation. “By allowing single-occupant vehicles to use HOV lanes during off-peak hours, we would help keep drivers moving across the province, so they can spend less time in traffic and more time with their families and friends.”

HOV lanes are currently restricted to vehicles with two or more occupants, buses, licensed taxis, green-plate vehicles, airport limousines, motorcycles, and emergency vehicles.

The government is exploring regulatory changes to allow single-occupant vehicles to drive on all existing, planned, and future HOV lanes during off-peak hours.

Existing HOV lane rules would apply outside of off-peak hours.

These times will not include the busiest weekday morning or evening commute periods.

Ontario currently has 237 kilometres of HOV lanes, with plans underway to add another 146 kilometres to the network.

Single-occupant vehicles remain the dominant mode of transportation on Ontario highways, representing 72 per cent of vehicles on provincial roadways in 2022.

Single-occupant vehicles with High-Occupancy Toll permits can pay to access HOV lanes on sections of the Queen Elizabeth Way, Highway 403, and Highway 410.

Commercial motor vehicles longer than 6.5 metres would remain restricted from using HOV lanes under the proposed changes.