

BACK-SEAT DRIVER

A weekly look at transportation issues

College wants park-and-walk RT rail garage

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Down at Cosumnes River College in south Sacramento, officials are laying plans for a light-rail station, served by a multi-level garage.

Problem is, the garage would be the equivalent of a city block or more from the station, and across a street.

College officials want the garage at that site, away from the college entrance. They and transit consultants point out that the station will be built next to an existing surface lot that at least some light-rail riders could use, if they don't want to walk to the garage.

Still, that strikes some south area residents as odd, including one with more than a little clout - City Councilwoman Bonnie Pannell, who also happens to be on the Regional Transit board.

"We're going to have to talk about this," Pannell said last week.

We'll stay tuned.

Caltrans has some talking it needs to do this week - about its plan to build more carpool lanes on Highway 50. Officials will hold public hearings Tuesday and Wednesday. For project info, check: www.dot.ca.gov/dist3/projects/Sac50bus_carpool/index.htm.

Highway 50 carpool lanes currently run from El Dorado Hills to Sunrise Boulevard. Caltrans proposes continuing them either to Watt Avenue or to the Highway 99 junction. For now. At some point, they say, they'd like to bring them all the way along the W/X freeway.

Carpool lanes always stir debate. Some love them, some hate them.

But our argument about them today is pretty basic: They need a new name.

For years, "carpool" was the word. A lot of people call them diamond lanes because of the diamond-shaped emblem painted on the pavement.

More recently, however, Caltrans has been calling them high-occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes. Local Caltrans official Wayne Lewis says he's taken lately to calling them "bus/carpool" lanes.

That's because commuter buses also use them. But so do motorcycles, electric cars, emergency vehicles and high-mileage hybrid cars. None of them is high-occupancy because each can be driven in the lane by a solo occupant.

We could call them Everybody But Us lanes.

Nearby, on the Capital City Freeway, reader George Thompson lamented to us a while back that drivers there don't seem to notice that the speed limit is only 55, not 65 and certainly not 75.

Our advice: You're right, George, but stay in the slow lane anyway.

How many people, by the way, know what the Capital City Freeway is, much less the speed limit? We weren't completely sure ourselves.

Indeed, the CCF is a road of many disguises, plus an unexpected twist.

Caltrans tells us the CCF officially starts in West Sacramento at the Interstate 80 split, where I-80 heads north to loop through Natomas ("over the top" as they say at Caltrans). Officially, at this point, the CCF is also Highway 50.

The CCF crosses the Sacramento River into the Central City where it gains another alias - the W/X freeway as it runs between W and X streets.

If that's not confusing enough, the CCF suddenly swoops sharply north at the Highway 99 junction. That stretch is known in the Caltrans numbers world as State Route 51.

Finally, it deposits drivers back on I-80 eastbound, just beyond Watt Avenue.

Ironically, the Capital City Freeway moniker came about as a way to reduce confusion. The freeway had been called Business 80, but having both an I-80 and a Business 80 running through town confused the unwary.

So, in 1995, the city won state approval to rename the freeway. Some rejected suggestions: Camellia Freeway, River City Freeway and Yellow Brick Road. One guy suggested Hell Highway, given the congestion.

Maybe Caltrans would like some suggestions on a new name for carpool lanes? Then again, if the Hell Highway guy is still around, maybe not.

E-mail your transportation concerns to backseat@sacbee.com or call The Bee's Tony Bizjak at (916) 321-1059. Please leave your name and a telephone number so we can contact you.