

GUESS WHAT ARE CLOGGING HOV LANES? POPULAR HYBRIDS



As hybrid vehicles become more popular, Virginia's carpool lanes are increasingly congested.

Virginia is one of a handful of states (Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida and Georgia) to allow hybrid vehicles with only one driver access to High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) carpool lanes as an incentive to purchase these low-emission and fuel-efficient vehicles. The result of a detailed study of carpool lanes on Interstate 95 illustrated close to triple the number of hybrids in carpool lanes from spring to October of last year.

The Electric Drive Transportation Association identifies the Washington, D.C., area as the country's leading market for hybrids behind California. Virginia's hybrid exemption is due to expire in June 2006. The state's HOV task force—comprised of transportation officials and experts—urged legislators not to extend it.

Virginia has a 10-year history of allowing low-emission vehicles access to HOV lanes. But it wasn't until hybrids gained popularity in 2000 that a noticeable number of drivers took advantage of the exemption. The growth in hybrids has contributed to the increase in the number of cars in HOV lanes to 1,900 an hour, well beyond their planned operating capacity of 1,500 to 1,800 per lane per hour.

The problem has attracted the attention of the Federal Highway Administration. The agency has asked Virginia to increase enforcement and look at other options to cut down on congestion.

PAY YOUR TAXES, HELP A GOOD CAUSE

National interest in income tax check-off programs has mounted steadily since Colorado, the first state to allow taxpayers to use income tax forms to contribute to a nonpolitical charitable program, created the Colorado Nongame and Endangered Wildlife Fund in 1977. At least 35 states now have similar funds that receive taxpayer check-off money.

Nearly all states that have state income taxes offer at least one check-off option. Coloradans can contribute to 11 check-off choices this tax year, each approved separately by the legislature, and ranging from domestic abuse to homeless prevention to pet overpopulation. Although only 3 percent of Colorado taxpayers made check-off donations last year, they contributed nearly \$1.5 million, with the average donation just under \$10. Ohio taxpayers have contributed more than \$21 million since 1984.

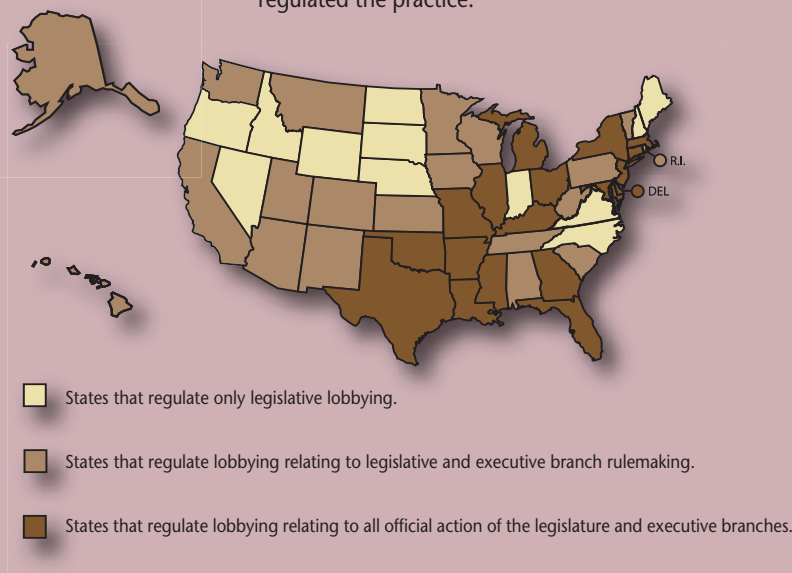
Some 220 check-off funds in 41 states and the District of Columbia help finance as many as 80 different causes, according to the Federation of Tax Administrators (FTA). They fund services for children, seniors, veterans and the homeless. They help pay for sports stadiums, memorials, buildings, disease prevention, cancer research and the Olympics.

Several states, including California, Delaware, Illinois, Maine, Michigan, Rhode Island, South Carolina and Wyoming, have embarked on check-off programs to raise relief money for military families. The Michigan fund, for example, aims to provide grants of up to \$2,000 to families that qualify.

Instructions for check-off programs note that donations through tax check-offs are voluntary and usually come from tax refunds due, although in some states they can be added to tax payments. On the other hand, most state political check-offs take their contributions from taxpayers' liability, says FTA. Like the federal check-off, they direct the government how to spend a portion of tax dollars and don't affect the refund or the amount due on the return.

LOBBYING LAWS

As the number of lobbyists has escalated, states have increasingly regulated the practice.



Source: Council on Governmental Ethics Laws



STATE CAPITOLS—THE NEW “HOT SPOTS”

Looking for a new wireless Internet access point, or “hot spot,” to surf the Web or check e-mail while keeping up with legislative events? Look no farther than your state capitol. They are the new hot spots, joining the more highly publicized Starbucks, Kinkos, and various high-tech airports.

At least 14 states now offer wireless Internet access in the capitol for anyone who has a laptop equipped for wireless. Private citizens, journalists and lobbyists, while waiting for hearings or meetings with legislators, can track bill status and committee updates on legislative Web sites, and still keep in touch with business and family matters by e-mail.

Legislatures have long been ahead of the curve on adopting wireless. The historic nature of capitol buildings sometimes makes them incompatible with the wires and cables necessary to network computers, so wireless technology has been the perfect solution in many cases.

At least 32 states have wireless networks that allow legislators and legislative staff to access information on their laptops in the chamber or in offices. But public demand for wireless Web access has now prompted many states to extend that service throughout the capitol to the public.

The Arizona Legislature in 2003 was the first to provide widespread wireless Internet access to the public. The Arizona POWER (Public Online Wireless Electronic Resource) network is one of the largest free hot spots in the state. Arizona POWER was launched through a public-private partnership with Intel and Cox Communications and with services provided by hotZona, a local ISP. Senator Dean Martin and Representative Robert Robson spearheaded the project, and the three companies donated products, services and support for the network.



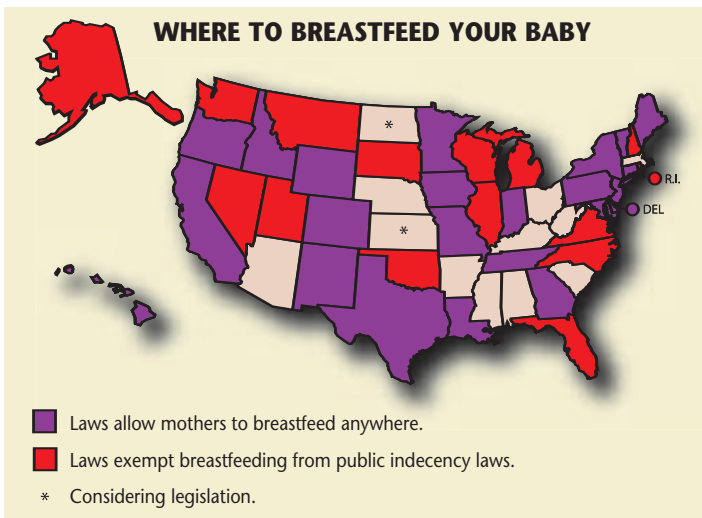
PHOTO: MAJIA BENNETT

Senate intern and Oklahoma University student Makenna Smith logs on to Oklahoma’s newest Internet hot-spot with wireless service access on the Senate’s third, fourth and fifth floors as well as in the chamber and the gallery.

Since 2003, the 13 other states that have now begun to provide public wireless Internet access in capitols are Iowa, Kentucky, Maine, Nevada, New Mexico (pilot project), North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Texas, Utah, Virginia, Vermont, Washington and West Virginia.

THE BENEFITS OF BREASTFEEDING

Mother and baby can both benefit from breastfeeding. But does that mean breastfeeding should be allowed anywhere? That’s the question several state legislatures have been dealing with.



For a mother, breastfeeding can help her return quickly to her pregnancy weight and reduce her risk of pre-menopausal breast cancer and osteoporosis. Breast milk for babies helps prevent infections, allergies and diarrhea resulting in fewer illnesses than formula-fed babies.

Breastfeeding in public, however, remains a controversial issue. Some say there is no reason not to allow breastfeeding in public—it is the mother’s right. Others believe breastfeeding should be done in private.

Fearing that breastfeeding mothers could be charged with indecency, state legislators have passed legislation to clarify the legality of breastfeeding in public places.

Thirty-two states specifically state that mothers are allowed to breastfeed anywhere and 15 simply exempt breastfeeding from public indecency laws. Kansas and North Dakota are currently considering legislation.

Research has indicated that breast milk is the best form of nutrition for babies and it saves families and the government money. However, the United States has one of the lowest breastfeeding rates in the developed world. The U. S. Department of Health and Human Services and the Ad Council are trying to change that through a new public relations campaign. According to the campaign: “Babies were born to be breastfed.”

To learn more, visit: www.adcouncil.org/campaigns/breastfeeding.