THE SITUATION

Transportation and the words/terms used to explain highway operations are often challenging to understand. Often the definitions and differences among various highway terms such as managed lanes, express lanes, tolled-managed lanes and HOV/HOT lanes, among others are very discreet. The terms are often assumed to be interchangeable and are frequently misunderstood. In particular, there is a growing assumption that any form of a managed lane is synonymous with a tolling operation. While this is sometimes true, it is not a given.

WHAT ARE MANAGED LANES?

According to the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), managed lanes are highway lanes where operational strategies (see sidebar) are proactively implemented and managed in response to changing conditions.

This diagram captures the potential lane management applications that fall under the broad definition of “managed lanes.” On the left of the diagram are the applications of a single operational strategy. As you move to the right on the diagram, you get into more complex managed lane facilities that blend more than one of the strategies.