

Chapter 1

The Conflict Diamonds of Adriana Gianturco

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“Ms. Gianturco and Caltrans believe they know better than the public what’s best for Los Angeles...With people as stubborn as she is, it doesn’t pay to be diplomatic.”

LA City Councilman Zev Yaroslavsky¹

Anyone who has driven on California freeways is likely to be familiar with HOV or “High Occupancy Vehicle” lanes. Such lanes, typically near the center median, allow only cars with a designated number of occupants (always more than one), and are generally marked by diamonds. They are sometimes referred to as “Diamond Lanes” because of the markings and are intended to encourage carpooling.

One place where drivers won’t see such lanes is on the Santa Monica Freeway between downtown LA and the City of Santa Monica (I-10). They were briefly used on that route after the 1994 Northridge earthquake. Carpoolers at that time could bypass some of the heavy congestion caused by a collapsed overpass. But once the overpass was repaired, the temporary Diamond Lanes reverted to all-vehicle traffic. Few remember that short quake-related episode of Diamond Lanes on the Santa Monica Freeway. But old timers will more likely recall the furor caused in 1976, when Diamond Lanes were installed on the Santa Monica Freeway – and then removed as public anger grew and a court intervened.

At the center of the tempest back in 1976 was Adriana Gianturco, the newly installed head of a (then) recently created California Department of Transportation (Caltrans). Gianturco had been appointed by Governor Jerry Brown during the first term of his first gubernatorial iteration. And the Diamond Lane episode on the Santa Monica Freeway was a contributor to his reputation of that era as “Governor Moonbeam.”

The Diamond Lane brouhaha seemed to be a byproduct of Brown’s belief during that gubernatorial iteration in an “era of limits” and, more generally, of his liking for new and unconventional ways of thinking. Along with his preference for new thinking came appointments of officials who didn’t fit the traditional mold. Yet before the axe fell on the Santa Monica Diamond Lanes, it was largely Gianturco – not Brown – who was blamed. Indeed, the Diamond Lanes episode followed her throughout her career as the Caltrans’ chief and colored her image thereafter. Diamonds were forever in her case. And just as Jerry Brown had to live with the “Moonbeam” appellation, Gianturco was tarred with “Giant Turkey.”²

In this chapter, we look at the 1976 Diamond Lane fiasco, and what lessons can be drawn from it, both in terms of transportation and of governance.

¹Quoted in Ray Hebert, “Caltrans Accused of Breaking Pact on Diamond Lane,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 1, 1976, p. C3.

²Bettijane Levine, “A Driven Woman: Adriana Gianturco fought a lonely battle for car-pool lanes in 1976. Now they’re a part of the L.A. Map,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 22, 1994, pp. E1-E2. To a lesser extent, Gianturco is also associated with the effort to name Interstate 10 – including the Santa Monica Freeway – as the “Christopher Columbus Transcontinental Highway” (before Columbus became politically incorrect). See Steve Harvey, “Traffic Update for Record Book: Santa Monica Freeway Is No. 1,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 23, 1988.

Freeway Background

"In just a couple more days they're going to close the freeway, and you won't be able to go anywhere on the 405. As opposed to when it's open and you can't go anywhere on the 405."

TV comedian Jay Leno on "Carmaggedon," the temporary 2011 closure of I-405 to rebuild an overpass³

The first California freeway – essentially a limited access, high-speed highway – was what is now the Pasadena Freeway, completed in 1940, in part as a Great Depression job-creation project. However, any further freeway building was delayed by World War II. After the war, California, under Governor Earl Warren, searched for a funding mechanism to develop a more extensive freeway system and found it in the 1947 Collier-Burns Act. The Collier-Burns model, a gasoline tax put in a trust fund earmarked for roads, was emulated at the federal level under the Eisenhower Administration in 1956.⁴ Thereafter, state funds for building the interstate highway system were heavily subsidized by the feds, spurring a burst of freeway construction in California.

The added federal funding in the late 1950s coincided with the 1958 election of Governor Pat Brown – father of Jerry – and a man steeped in the New Deal orientation of the Democratic Party towards spending on public works and on economic planning. Pat Brown is remembered not only for the freeway expansion during his two terms in office, for creation of the State Water Project, and for the Master Plan for Higher Education and its creation of new University of California and Cal State campuses. Father Pat, unlike son Jerry, was definitely not a believer in an "era of limits." Perhaps that is one reason he was defeated in his campaign for a third term by Ronald Reagan (there were no term limits back then). Brown the Elder found himself in the midst of a state budget crisis during his 1966 campaign, always a bad place to be in for an incumbent seeking reelection.⁵

Despite Pat Brown's loss to Reagan, he left a legacy of freeway construction, which peaked in terms of miles added, around the time of the 1966 election.⁶ Construction continued under Reagan but trended down. In the gubernatorial election of 1974, Pat Brown's son Jerry followed

³Quoted in Lee Breslouer, "11 Quintessential Quotations from Californians About Traffic," *Thrillist*, July 29, 2015. <https://www.thrillist.com/entertainment/nation/quotes-about-traffic-californians-about-traffic>.

⁴Daniel J.B. Mitchell. (Summer 2006). Earl Warren's Fight for California's Freeways, Setting a Path for the Nation. *Southern California Quarterly*, Vol. 88, pp. 205-238. Available at http://www.anderson.ucla.edu/documents/areas/fac/hrob/mitchell_freeway.pdf.

⁵This episode is discussed in Daniel J.B. Mitchell, "Standing in Front of the Ballot-Box Train: The Past and Present of Ballot-Box Budgeting," *California Policy Options: 2006* (UCLA Luskin School of Public Affairs, 2006), pp. 15-91, especially pp. 50-53. Available at <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/2tt6917g>.

⁶Brian D. Taylor, "Why California Stopped Building Freeways," *Access*, Fall 1993. Available at <https://www.accessmagazine.org/fall-1993/why-california-stopped-building-freeways/>.

Reagan as governor after the latter's two terms.⁷ And Jerry seemed to take lessons from his father's earlier defeat by Reagan. In particular, as a result of father Pat's budget crisis, he picked up fiscal conservatism and the notion of building up a budgetary reserve. Thus, son Jerry's "era of limits" can be seen as a desire to avoid large state commitments both to social programs and to public works.

Moreover, by the time Jerry Brown first took office in 1975, the freeway system in California had already been substantially enlarged; adding to it would be costly and was already colliding with the growing environmental movement in California. Thus, the notion of using the *existing* freeway infrastructure more efficiently, rather than expanding it, was an appealing concept. At least in the abstract, the idea of increased efficiency was something on which both liberals (particularly those with environmental leanings) and conservatives (with concerns about government spending) could agree.

HOV lanes in theory provided incentives for carpooling or bus use. If you formed a carpool or took the bus, you could access a relatively empty Diamond Lane and bypass the congestion of single-passenger vehicles. And if more people could be moved with fewer cars, the freeways would be used more efficiently. Who could object to that? What could possibly go wrong? As it turned out, lots of people could object, and lots could go wrong, but we'll return to that story later in this chapter.

The Gianturco Appointment

"Many legislators...have told me 'Adriana, you have a problem with so-and-so' because it bothers him that a woman is talking back to him or a woman seems to know this subject better than he does, or whatever."

Caltrans Director Adriana Gianturco⁸

California had a history of road building going back into the 19th century. With the development of the automobile, particularly in the early 20th century, road building as a public endeavor became an important state and local function. In that period, passenger rail transportation was mainly in private hands, whether at the long-distance level (railroads) or public transit level (streetcars and interurban railways), albeit with public support and regulation. But road construction and maintenance were seen as government responsibilities.

⁷Reagan was by that time focused on winning the Republican nomination for president in 1976. He had tried and failed to pass a ballot initiative that would have limited state spending by a complicated formula. Had he succeeded, he would have touted his California achievement as a model for the federal government. Reagan failed to take the Republican nomination away from incumbent Gerald Ford. His plans to win the presidency were thus delayed until 1980.

⁸Quoted in Claudia Luther, "Gianturco – A 6-Year Drive in the Fast Lane," *Los Angeles Times*, March 1, 1982, p. B1.

California had evolved a system in which a state Highway Commission (created in 1911) would designate projects to be undertaken. Then an administrative agency – the Department of Public Works – would carry out the design and engineering plans needed using internal personnel, and the project would be carried out through government contracts with private firms. The Highway Commission was focused on what its name implies – highways.

Given its charge, the Commission didn't consider other forms of ground transportation since intercity rail was private (or later federal – when Amtrak came along). Another bureaucracy – the Department of Aeronautics – looked after air transport. Finally, local transit was either private or, increasingly, in the hands of local government agencies. These separate arrangements and jurisdictions, it came to be felt by the early 1970s, did not foster holistic thinking about the overall transportation *system*; i.e., how the pieces fit together and what the best alternatives were.

Under Governor Reagan, the Department of Public Works and the Department of Aeronautics were merged into the Department of Transportation in 1972. In concept, the new agency – nicknamed Caltrans – was supposed to embody the holistic view of all forms of transportation. However, the Highway Commission remained in place and the separate entities within the larger Caltrans agency went on with business as usual. Moving boxes around on an organization chart does not necessarily change how actual work is carried out and, in the Caltrans case, it didn't.

Caltrans remained largely a highway-focused and engineering-dominated entity. Engineering, in turn, as it remains today, was a heavily-male occupation, including the specialty of civil engineering. California, and Caltrans, had some exceptions. Drivers today on the elaborate interchange between the Santa Monica and San Diego freeways in West Los Angeles may notice that the structure is named for its engineer/designer, Marilyn Jorgenson Reece. It has been so-named since 2007, three years after her death.⁹ But the engineers at CalPERS – male and female – viewed their role dealing with highways; they were not likely to be eager to report to a woman who had a wider view of what the word “transportation” in the new Department of Transportation was supposed to imply.

Jerry Brown, as governor in his first iteration (1975-1983), prided himself in putting women in prominent positions. And, as noted, he liked to make unorthodox appointments. Putting a non-engineer and a woman in charge of Caltrans was certainly unorthodox. Adriana Gianturco, his choice in 1976 to head Caltrans, had a background in urban planning, not civil engineering or even in highways. She was not an orthodox choice just from that perspective.

⁹Another notable woman was Lois Cooper, an African-American who became an engineer and project manager at Caltrans. See Oral History: Lois Cooper, Society of Woman Engineers Archive, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, 2005. Available at http://ethw.org/Oral-History:Lois_Cooper.

It is true that Caltrans *was* a relatively new agency when Gianturco was appointed and thus didn't have a long history. Nonetheless, it was formed out of older agencies which retained their organizational cultures. Having a woman as leader, one with a past as a journalist and with an academic planning background, was a culture shock. Moreover, Gianturco was interested in transportation *alternatives* to highways – mainly rail alternatives – yet another shock.

Adriana Gianturco was born in Berkeley but was raised mainly on the East Coast.¹⁰ She received her BA from Smith College and later received a master's in economics from UC Berkeley. There she encountered Jerry Brown, then a student at Berkeley after he had dropped out of seminary training to become a Jesuit priest. It was apparently that encounter and friendship that ultimately led to Gianturco's appointment at Caltrans years later.

Gianturco, after obtaining her Berkeley degree, spent some time at a kibbutz (communal farm) in Israel, visited other countries in the Middle East, and found a job in Paris as a journalist for *Time* magazine. She again encountered Jerry Brown who had gotten a job at NATO, then headquartered in Paris. Gianturco subsequently came back to Berkeley and wrote for the English-language section of a Chinese-American newspaper. She began a PhD program in urban planning at Berkeley but became disappointed in the curriculum and eventually transferred to Harvard. While in the Boston area, she worked for a nonprofit consulting firm and co-authored a report on the local Latino community.¹¹ Later she worked for an agency of the Massachusetts state government.

When Jerry Brown was elected governor in 1974, he invited Gianturco to work for the California Business and Transportation Agency. But she left her position there and went back to Boston to finish her PhD at Harvard. In January 1976, she married John L. Saltonstall Jr., a partner in a Boston law firm and a former member of the Boston city council. Saltonstall was a member of a prominent "Boston Brahman" family.¹² Before Gianturco's dissertation could be finished (it never was), Brown asked her to come back as director of Caltrans, which had been headed on an acting basis by a holdover appointee from the prior Reagan administration. Taking the Caltrans job, which she did, meant that for a time she would be commuting between coasts to be with her new husband.

As noted, the California legislature under Governor Reagan had created Caltrans with the notion of taking a broader view of transportation. The buzzword was "multimodalism," the idea

¹⁰Adriana Gianturco, Oral History Interview, Conducted in 1994 by George F. Petershagen, California State University-Sacramento, for the California State Archives, State Government Oral History Program. Available at <https://archive.org/details/oh95-1-gianturco>. The biographical information that follows is largely from this source.

¹¹Adriana Gianturco and Norman Aronin, "Boston's Spanish Speaking Community: Findings of a Field Study," Action for Boston Community Development, Inc., 1973.

¹²They were later divorced. John Saltonstall died in 2007. The phrase "Boston Brahmin" refers to the wealthy elite of the Boston area.

that transportation was more than just cars on roads, and that state policy should encompass the larger vision.¹³ So, given that history of Caltrans' creation, it might be assumed that there would be legislative support for a director, such as Gianturco, who shared the wider transportation viewpoint.

Politics, however, is never simple. There was still a strong highway orientation in the legislature, especially among some key members. In the era before legislative term limits, incumbents remained in office for long periods and developed attachments to, and expertise in, particular policy areas. One example was State Senator Randolph Collier, the same Collier whose name was on the 1947 Collier-Burns Act that created the California freeway system. Collier immediately announced his opposition to Gianturco's appointment, fearing the new director – as a Jerry Brown appointee – would not be sufficiently road-oriented.¹⁴ Of course, no one had clear knowledge of Gianturco's orientation as a new appointee. Another state senator, for example, James R. Mills of San Diego, worried that Gianturco wouldn't be sufficiently pro-transit.¹⁵

Nonetheless, Collier's opposition was a Big Deal, since he was Mr. Freeway in the legislature. He claimed that Gianturco didn't even own a car – which wasn't true. In a wire service news story that ran in the *LA Times* on opening day of the Diamond Lanes, she refuted his no-car claim, but either a typo or a misquote had her saying that the car she did own was a 1939 Plymouth. A 1939 Plymouth would have been an ancient vintage in 1976. So instead of being a non-car owner, a sin in Collier's eyes, she appeared instead to be an oddball who drove an antique.¹⁶ (The actual car she drove was a 1972 Plymouth.)

When Gianturco first accepted Governor Brown's invitation to head Caltrans, she was still in Boston and wanted to take a month off before taking on her new role. Brown's representatives agreed to the delay, and the original plan was for her to start sometime in April 1976. But she suddenly received a phone call saying that Caltrans was initiating a Diamond Lane project on the Santa Monica Freeway on March 15, a project whose planning had begun in the Reagan administration. The caller told her it was important for her to be on the job when the Diamond

¹³Alex Karner, "Multimodal Dreamin': California Transportation Planning, 1967-1977," *Journal of Transportation History*, June 2013, pp. 39-57. Available at <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/258111116>.

¹⁴In her 1994 oral history, in the section about Collier's opposition, Gianturco misdates the Collier-Burns Act as 1948 instead of 1947, suggesting she had never been steeped in freeway lore. (See pp. 170-171.)

¹⁵Gianturco oral history, p. 177. Mills is identified with the effort to establish the San Diego light rail system, especially the "Tijuana Trolley." Mills had early concerns about greenhouse gas and wanted California to turn toward transportation alternatives to the automobile. James R. Mills, "A Philosophical Approach to Legislative and Election Realities, 1959-1981," oral history, 1982, pp. 98-101. Available at <https://archive.org/stream/assembstategovof00morrrih#page/n0/mode/2up>. (Click to Mills interview.)

¹⁶"Collier to Fight Approval of New Caltrans Chief," *Los Angeles Times*, March 15, 1976, p. C5; Gianturco oral history, pp. 352-353.

Lanes opened. As a result, she started work as director of Caltrans on the opening day, the ominous Ides of March.

The Ides of March didn't go well for Julius Caesar, as Shakespeare's play makes clear. And things didn't go well for Gianturco, either. In that pre-internet era, the *LA Times* put out a morning edition and a late final edition; the latter included news of earlier in the day. The front page of the *Times* in the late final edition of March 15, 1976 featured a banner headline reading **"CHAOS ON A FREEWAY."**

The non-Diamond Lanes were jammed with angry commuters, who either stared in annoyance at the largely empty Diamond Lanes or tried to use them illicitly and were ticketed by the Highway Patrol. Buses on new freeway routes designed to take advantage of the Diamond Lanes were reported to be largely empty. The one bright spot noted was that drivers in non-Diamond Lanes were courteously allowing diamond-eligible vehicles to cross the freeway, so they could travel from on-ramps to the left-most special lane.¹⁷ (Later in the experiment, however, folks were not so nice; nails were spread on the Diamond Lanes by angry motorists.)

There had been full-page ads in the *Times* before the Diamond Lanes opened explaining their use and encouraging carpooling or bus use. Caltrans had handed out brochures at on-ramps with explanations and information. An article appeared in the *Times* on March 11 with details of the new system. The fast lane in both directions of the Santa Monica freeway would be reserved for cars with three or more passengers and for buses during rush hours: 6-10 a.m. and 3-7 p.m. A Caltrans official conceded that the first few days might be a problem during "a transition period," but expected that commuters would soon learn and adapt. "People adjust pretty fast," he prognosticated.¹⁸

Not all officials were so sanguine. The day before the Diamond Lanes were to open, an official of the California Highway Patrol predicted a 10-12% increase in accidents due to congestion on the non-Diamond Lanes. An LA City official predicted that added congestion on city streets caused by motorists who abandoned the freeways would increase accidents there by a similar number. And there was concern about accidents caused as vehicles eligible for the Diamond Lanes had to cross the non-Diamond Lanes to get into them.¹⁹

¹⁷John Kendall, "CHAOS ON A FREEWAY: New System Jams West Side Traffic," *Los Angeles Times*, March 15, 1976, pp. A1, A3.

¹⁸Barbara Riker, "Concern Over Diamond Lane: Freeway Drivers Fret," *Los Angeles Times*, March 11, 1976, pp. 1, 10.

¹⁹Ray Hebert, "Controversial Experiment: Freeway Car Pool, Bus Lane Will Open Monday," *Los Angeles Times*, March 14, 1976, pp. A1, A3, A8.

Conflict Diamonds

"We are beginning a process of deliberately making it harder for drivers to use freeways."

Secretary of Business and Transportation Donald E. Burns,
speech delivered May 1975²⁰

Due to the timing of her appointment, the Diamond Lanes issue became intimately connected with Gianturco. Yet the coincidence of her leadership with opening day of the Diamond Lanes had occurred by accident. The project was developed under Governor Reagan to comply with the federal Clean Air Act, which required plans to control air pollution from both stationary and mobile sources.

Originally, the Diamond Lanes were supposed to open June 15, 1975. Had that starting date been kept, the entire episode would likely have begun and ended under the prior interim leadership at Caltrans and before the Gianturco appointment. However, a bus strike at the Rapid Transit District (RTD), a predecessor agency to today's MTA, caused the start date to be delayed until March 15, 1976.²¹ Buses, of course, would be prime users of the Diamond Lanes as the ultimate in high occupancy vehicles; they were dubbed "Diamond Lane Expresses."²² So starting during a bus strike would have made no sense.

Writer Joan Didion – a chronicler of things Los Angeles – was willing to omit Gianturco's name in describing the Diamond Lane episode. She just blamed the sorry outcome on generic government "bureaucrats" with naïve expectations about the behavior of LA's motorists.²³ Other observers of a more conservative persuasion were less kind. Referring to the Diamond Lanes, William F. Buckley Jr. described Gianturco as *"an aging hippie carpetbagger from Massachusetts... in blue jeans and bare feet."*²⁴ (Gianturco was 36 at the time of her appointment and photos of her on the job show only appropriate attire.)

But not only conservatives disparaged Gianturco. In a 1994 interview, Zev Yaroslavsky, who was a member of the LA City Council during the Diamond Lane implementation, described Gianturco, even at that late date, in unflattering terms. He called her *"a woman so arrogant that she tried to tell us it was midnight when we could see with our eyes it was high noon."*²⁵

And despite the fact that the Diamond Lanes were planned before Gianturco arrived on the scene, she became so identified with the lanes that later tellings incorrectly credit (or discredit)

²⁰Quoted in Ray Hebert, "Diamond Lanes – Let Motorists Howl," *Los Angeles Times*, March 26, 1976, p. A3.

²¹Charles P. Hobbs, *Hidden History of Transportation in Los Angeles* (History Press, 2014), p. 160.

²²Joan Didion, *White Album* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1979), p. 81.

²³Didion, pp. 79-85.

²⁴Quoted in Chip Jacobs and William J. Kelly, *Smog Town: The Lung-Burning History of Pollution in Los Angeles* (Overlook Press, 2008), p. 264.

²⁵Quoted in Levine, op. cit.

her with their creation. For example, a profile of Jerry Brown in the *Los Angeles Times*, when he ran for his third term as governor in 2010, incorrectly states that she “transformed the fast lanes on the Santa Monica Freeway into ‘Diamond Lanes’ for carpoolers.”²⁶ What is true is that after the Diamond Lanes episode, future HOV lanes were always *additions* to an existing freeway and were not “transformed” from (taken away from) the lanes already there.²⁷

Gianturco arrived, in short, at the worst possible time for a new director. Although she supported the concept of Diamond Lanes and – more generally – alternatives to conventional freeway driving, she hadn’t been part of the planning. Whether, if she had been part of the planning, the project would have gone differently is another matter, of course. She had little experience running a major agency. And she was coming into an organization that, while officially relatively new, was staffed by folks who were highway oriented and who had developed their thinking in the era of large-scale freeway construction.

Gianturco’s first day on the job, the opening of the Diamond Lanes, had not gone well for Caltrans. The reports in the news media were of jammed lanes, long commutes, accidents, and spillovers of congestion into local streets. Caltrans apparently counted fewer vehicles with three or more passengers on the Santa Monica Freeway than had been counted *before* the Diamond Lanes went into effect. Apparently, some instances of white paint thrown on the diamonds were reported. Caltrans officials indicated that it might take three weeks before a “clear picture” of the effects of the Diamond Lanes could be determined.²⁸

The First Two Weeks

“If ever a gambling man were going to bet on a revolt by the citizenry of Los Angeles, the start of the Santa Monica Freeway Diamond Lane last week would have been the proper moment.”

LA Times Writer Barry Siegel²⁹

The *LA Times*, a few days before opening day, had run an article noting that drivers were already concerned about the impending change.³⁰ Moreover, the photos included with the

²⁶Evan Halper, “Election 2010: Jerry Brown was a young man on his own path; He forged a deal with farmworkers and stood by as property taxes ignited Prop. 13,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 30, 2010, p. A1.

²⁷Juan M. Matute and Stephanie S. Pincetl, “High-Occupancy Vehicle Expansion through Lane Conversion rather than New Construction,” California Center for Sustainable Communities at UCLA, Petroleum Policy Brief Series, 2013. Available at <http://next10.org/sites/default/files/10%20High-Occupancy%20Vehicle%20Lanes.pdf>. In states other than California, there have been some instances of changing an existing lane to HOV use. In California, the only such take-away was the temporary transformation of existing lanes to HOV lanes after than Northridge earthquake mentioned earlier.

²⁸Ray Hebert, “Freeway Experiment Jams Traffic, Angers Motorists,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 16, 1976, p. B1, B3.

²⁹Barry Siegel, “Lane Shall Not Close by Congestion Alone,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 22, 1976, p. E1.

³⁰In this section, we use the *LA Times* for the chronology of events. Rather than full footnotes, we give the date of the article or editorial as a citation. The articles and editorials can be found through the ProQuest Historical Newspapers database.

article showed traffic signs that seemed to suggest that two or more vehicle occupants were needed for Diamond Lane eligibility, when in fact three or more were necessary. (March 11, 1976) The buildup in the *Times* to the opening described the rules of the new system, but the plan was denoted as “controversial.” (March 15, 1976) In short, the public was primed for problems even before opening day.

When the opening day finally arrived, the *Times* reported that commute times for those not eligible for the Diamond Lanes had doubled. While carpoolers who did qualify were ecstatic about their quick trips, the vast majority of motorists had only unkind things to say about the new system, both in news report quotes and in letters to the editor. The fact that a Caltrans spokesperson spoke about things “going pretty smoothly” despite the resulting traffic jams must have been galling to those commuters. (March 15, 1976)

By the next day, although the *Times*’ headline was no longer “Chaos on a Freeway,” the comments of motorists followed the same pattern. And the front-page photo in the *Times* showed three jammed lanes of traffic with a largely empty Diamond Lane. Scofflaws using the lanes without the requisite number of passengers were noted in the report; presumably, not all of them were caught. (March 16, 1976) In any case, the California Highway Patrol did not issue tickets to scofflaws for the first three days of the project, just warnings. (March 19, 1976)

A week after the opening day, a front-page “analysis” by *Times* reporter Ray Hebert used words such as “fiasco,” “ill-conceived,” and “confusion.” Accidents were said to have “soared.” (March 23, 1976) Although Hebert was not the only *Times* reporter covering the Diamond Lanes, he was assigned to do evaluations – which generally were negative.³¹ In sharp contrast to the Hebert analysis, the state’s Business and Transportation Secretary Donald E. Burns was arguing at the time that the Diamond Lane project had “worked like a charm.”³² (March 20, 1976)

Although the balance of the *Times*’ coverage after the first week was negative, its editorial position was initially more nuanced. The *Times*’ editorial of March 21 cited an on-ramp configuration as an obvious problem and said that Caltrans had not corrected the situation, despite the evidence.³³ But as far as the overall new system was concerned, the *Times* officially counseled readers that “it deserves more time to prove itself.” Radio hosts were not so kind. Even before the Diamond Lanes opening day, one radio personality staged a mock funeral for the fast lane. (March 21, 1976)

³¹Hebert had a long career at the *Times*, running from 1951 to 1988. He was designated as the “urban affairs writer” for the paper. He died in 2007. “Ray Hebert, 86; Times reporter one of the first to cover city planning,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 12, 2007. Available at <http://articles.latimes.com/2007/may/12/local/me-hebert12>.

³²Burns had a legal background. He was later assistant general counsel to the Federal Home Loan Bank Board which played a role in the savings and loan financial crisis of the 1980s.

³³Five days later, Caltrans was reported to have modified the on-ramp. (March 26, 1976)

By March 24, the *Times* reported that there were plans for a “fine tuning” of the new system. County Supervisor Pete Schabarum pushed for a continuing survey of the Diamond Lanes. He indicated if such a survey were not put in place, he would recommend cancelling the County subsidy that had been given to the Diamond Lane Express buses. LA Mayor Tom Bradley opined that the project had “looked good on paper,” a statement that could be interpreted as an indirect comment that it didn’t look so good in practice.

Note that in the early stages of the Diamond Lanes, Gianturco – brand new on the job – was not prominently in view. She did not become the face of the lanes initially. To the extent that state officials were cited in news accounts, they were either low-level Caltrans engineers or Business and Transportation Secretary Burns. Burns had earlier made clear that extension of the freeways was not a priority of (new) Governor Jerry Brown. “*This administration has no intention of participating in the construction of any more Cadillac-commuter systems that have very little chance of providing adequate benefits.... As for starting new freeways, I just do not see that happening.*”³⁴ However, Governor Brown tried to stay above the Diamond Lane fray as much as possible.

Times reporter Hebert on March 26 wrote that the policy of Caltrans toward motorists on the Santa Monica Freeway could be summed up as “*like it or lump it.*” Secretary Burns was quoted by Hebert as saying in a speech in San Francisco that “*we are prepared to suffer considerable public outcry in order to pry John Q. Public out of his car.*” Burns subsequently was reported to have regretted that wording, but to have stood by the “basic tenor” of what he said. The idea was to create congestion on the freeway so that the buses would be more advantageous to commuters. Hebert reported that the Santa Monica Freeway project was just the first being planned; Diamond Lanes would be coming to other freeways. Meanwhile, motorists were beginning to sport bumper stickers proclaiming “No Diamonds,” some of which were being distributed at on-ramps by a UCLA student.

Ten days into the program, according to Hebert, Secretary Burns was beginning to backtrack: “*I have not been entirely pleased... I am becoming somewhat skeptical about the project’s ultimate success.*” (March 27, 1976) If things didn’t improve in April, perhaps the project would be dropped, he indicated. Burns soon took the position that he was somehow surprised by the implementation of the Diamond Lanes in mid-March and had thought the project was “dead.” The problem, he said, was that Caltrans was a “gigantic bureaucracy” which led to communication problems. (April 1, 1976) However, there were contradictory reports about what Caltrans was planning. What is now the Century Freeway was in the design stage at the time – despite Burns’ earlier suggestion that there would be no new freeways. But reports

³⁴Quoted in Brian D. Taylor, “Why California Stopped Building Freeways,” *Access*, Fall 1993. Available at <https://www.accessmagazine.org/fall-1993/why-california-stopped-building-freeways/>.

emerged that perhaps the Century Freeway would be developed with *only* Diamond Lanes, at least during rush hours.

April Showers

"People ought to have faith that we are not trying to be perverse."

Business and Transportation Agency Secretary Donald E. Burns³⁵

Gianturco was beginning to climb into public view as a supporter of carpooling and Diamond Lanes. When the Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO) suggested that a state program to encourage carpooling was having little impact, Gianturco testified in a legislative hearing that cutting back the program would be a mistake. She indicated that some of the program's funds could be diverted into more Diamond Lane projects. (March 30, 1976)

Gianturco also met with local officials in early April saying that the project needed another six to eight weeks of evaluation and that Governor Brown agreed with her on that point. The meeting itself was private – journalists were not allowed – and the local officials invited complained it had been called at the last minute. LA County Supervisor Kenneth Hahn said he told Gianturco that her program was a "flop" and that waiting six to eight weeks was too long.³⁶ Moreover, he "resented" the fact that the County was bearing the expense of subsidizing the Diamond Lane Express buses. (April 6, 1976)

Hahn was not the only official having issues with Caltrans. LA City Traffic Engineer S.S. Taylor said he had been threatened by an unnamed Caltrans functionary because of his (Taylor's) complaints about traffic problems caused by the Diamond Lanes on city streets. Although Taylor's complaints were denied by the local director of Caltrans, LA City Councilman Zev Yaroslavsky – pushing for an immediate end to the Diamond Lanes – termed the alleged threats "outrageous." (April 9, 1976) It might be noted, however, that Yaroslavsky did not initially oppose a project on the San Diego Freeway that involved *adding* a new Diamond Lane rather than creating one from an existing lane. (April 29, 1976) That opposition was to come later.

Eventually, Governor Brown was pulled into the controversy over the Diamond Lanes. When the state assembly threatened to pass a resolution demanding an immediate halt to the project, Brown called Assemblyman Herschel Rosenthal – the leader of the effort – and got the resolution withdrawn.³⁷ However, the resolution soon came back and was approved in

³⁵ Quoted in Ray Hebert, "Live With Diamond Lanes, Burns Advises," *Los Angeles Times*, April 14, 1976, p. C4.

³⁶ Hahn was the father of current LA County Supervisor Janice Hahn and former LA City Mayor James Hahn.

³⁷ Rosenthal represented West LA and parts of the San Fernando Valley. He served in the assembly and then the state senate from 1974 until 1998. Rosenthal died in 2009.

watered-down form. The watered-down version requested Caltrans either to halt the project or modify it.³⁸ (April 23, 1976)

While an assembly resolution could have had no legal effect, two lawsuits by the Pacific Legal Foundation – a conservative group – had the potential to halt the Diamond Lanes. One in federal court sought to halt funding for the project. Another in state court claimed that there had not been an adequate environmental review for the project. Among the defendants in the state suit were Burns and Gianturco. (April 10, 1976) Ultimately, it was legal action, not legislative or administrative, that killed the lanes. However, the two courts were unwilling to issue immediate injunctions to stop the project. Instead, the court cases simmered in the background as hearings were held.

Burns, at this point, was becoming fuzzy about the evaluation date for the lanes, saying he was “not locked into any time period.” (April 14, 1976) And unlike County Supervisor Hahn who wanted to shut down the lanes immediately, Supervisor Edmund D. Edelman called for patience. (Letter, April 14, 1976) LA City Councilman Marvin Braude suggested curtailing the hours in which the Diamond Lanes operated and cutting the required vehicle occupants from three to two. (April 15, 1976) The City Traffic engineer who had complained of Caltrans’ threats backed Braude’s call to move the eligibility level down to two. He also announced that the city would remove traffic signs that had been put up to aid the Diamond Lanes project. (April 20, 1976) Finally, he indicated he would testify against the project in court if the move to two-occupant eligibility were not implemented. (April 23, 1976)

Meanwhile, there were more efforts to encourage carpooling and bus use. Some increase in bus use was reported, although when free bus tickets were handed out, few of them were actually used. A free “Commuter Computer” system was established to match persons who might form a pool. The *Times* noted, however, that the fellow running the matching operation did not carpool himself. And the usage of the matching system was well below what was planned. Most of the users came from big aerospace and other companies or government agencies that had independently encouraged employee utilization. (April 25, 1976) Caltrans reported, however, that carpool use had doubled from the level before the Diamond Lane project, and bus use had roughly tripled. (April 28, 1976)

May Flowers Into June

“Give it time.”

Statement on button worn by
Caltrans Director Adriana Gianturco³⁹

³⁸House Resolution No. 77, April 23, 1976.

³⁹Quoted in Ray Hebert, “Diamond Lane’s Morning Use to Be Cut an Hour,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 7, 1976, p. A6.

By May, Gianturco was talking about giving the project a full demonstration year. The numbers, she said, "look good." She indicated that she would meet with local officials in mid-May for further evaluation. But no plan to lower the vehicle occupancy criterion from three to two was in the works. (May 1, 1976) Some flexibility, however, appeared in that Caltrans announced that the hours for Diamond Lane operation would be reduced starting May 17 – at least in the morning – from 6-10 a.m. to 6:30-9:30 a.m. Gianturco explained that there was little use of the Diamond Lanes during the two half-hour periods that would be eliminated. (May 7, 1976) Shortly before the hours reduction went into effect, the state senate confirmed Gianturco's appointment as head of Caltrans.

There was a lessening of public discourse about the Diamond Lanes by early June. Gianturco proclaimed the Diamond Lanes to be a symbol of "environmentally responsible transportation." *Times* reporter Hebert, however, noted continued complaints by motorists about "Caltrans' obstinance." Yes, bus ridership was up, but the absolute levels were "disappointing." The same was true about carpools. Moreover, the *Times* ran a piece questioning Caltrans' data. It sent its own observers to the freeway and found more cheaters (single-occupant cars in the Diamond Lane) and fewer carpools than Caltrans was reporting. Caltrans said its car counters were more expert than those of the *Times*. (June 1, 1976) Early June also saw an organized vehicle protest. A caravan of "up to 50" ineligible cars moved into the Diamond Lane in the morning of June 3rd led by a hearse; twenty drivers were ticketed. (June 4, 1976)

The *LA Times* editorial page, as noted earlier, had first urged a wait-and-see attitude when the Diamond Lane project began. But on June 11th, the *Times* ran an editorial entitled "A Total Flop." It said Gianturco's claim that the lanes stood for environmentalism were "absurd." Due to congestion, the *Times* declared, there had been no demonstrable net cut in pollution. The increase in carpooling and bus ridership was too limited to matter. Street traffic had worsened. Congestion had been increased. Caltrans was "mulishly obstinate" in ignoring these facts. Governor Brown should step in and order an end to the Diamond Lanes.

There should be an investigation into the competence of Caltrans, in the *Times'* view, before any other freeways were the subject of its experiments. The next day, it was announced that the RTD would reduce bus service because ridership was below planned levels. Both the RTD and the Santa Monica Municipal Bus lines said they would need continued subsidy to keep the express buses operating. (June 12, 1976)

On June 16th, another *Times* editorial focused on the numbers. It cast doubt on the accuracy of Caltrans' data. But even taking those data at face value, the net effect, it said, were that fewer cars were using the freeway than before the Diamond Lanes (which it interpreted as less freeway efficiency), and more cars were using local streets. Bus ridership had increased – but

was well below planned levels (leading to a drop in buses provided). It wasn't clear what the net effect on air pollution was.

The editorial noted Caltrans had claimed that gasoline usage had fallen by 6%, but the *Times* said it found the claim dubious. Caltrans' figures showed some increase in carpooling, but that increase had occurred in the first couple of weeks. Since then, the numbers were flat, suggesting that further improvement was unlikely. Caltrans was "dishonest," "stubborn," and unable to admit that the Diamond Lanes were "clearly a failure."

On the same day those editorial comments appeared, the *Times* featured an article about Gianturco contradicting local officials who had labeled the lanes a failure. Meanwhile, Caltrans was apparently becoming fearful that its impending San Diego Freeway Diamond Lane project (adding a lane, not subtracting one) was becoming endangered by opposition to the Santa Monica Freeway project. Local officials were beginning to demand that the San Diego lane addition not be a Diamond Lane. (June 21, 1976)

The Auto Club of Southern California (ACSC) came out against Diamond Lanes *of any type*. ACSC could endorse preferential on-ramps for carpools and buses, but not preferential lanes. (June 22, 1976) And at a hearing on the lanes, LA City Traffic Engineer S.S. Taylor reported an accident fatality attributed to the Diamond Lanes.⁴⁰ (June 23, 1976)

Summertime and Uneasy Living

"Who ya gonna believe; me or your own eyes?"

Chico Marx⁴¹

Up until the summer, although Gianturco was increasingly cited in news coverage of the Diamond Lanes, she had not yet become the face of the project. But in response to the *LA Times'* critical editorials regarding the project, she published in the *Times* a lengthy op ed defense of the lanes on June 24th. She indicated that the Diamond Lanes were part of a larger pre-existing project. The Santa Monica component involved taking away an existing lane, whereas other related efforts – such as the El Monte busway – involved adding a new lane.

Gianturco disputed allegations that Caltrans' data were inaccurate and generally gave a positive interpretation of the department's data. She characterized opposition to the lanes as a "massive assault." If there was reluctance to carpool, it was because the opposition was holding out the hope that the project would soon be ended. In a separate article on the same day, Gianturco was quoted as saying that the Diamond Lanes had "great potential for conserving

⁴⁰The accident occurred on local streets but involved a woman who was on unfamiliar streets to avoid freeway congestion.

⁴¹Chico Marx pretending to be the Groucho Marx character in the Marx Brothers' movie "Duck Soup." See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cHxGUe1cjzM>.

energy," that the plan should not be attributed to Jerry Brown, and that "the outrage will diminish" eventually.

By this time, however, public opinions had hardened. And among users of the Santa Monica Freeway who were not in eligible carpools, there was no denying the resulting congestion they were experiencing. On the date Gianturco's op ed appeared, State Senator Nate Holden of south LA introduced a resolution in the senate calling for immediate discontinuation of the Diamond Lanes.⁴² Gianturco subsequently wrote to the senate that "it would be premature to conclude that the project had failed."⁴³

Although the *Times*' published Gianturco's defensive op ed, it also published – in the same edition – yet another anti-lane editorial entitled "Sin and the Diamond Lanes." Essentially, the *Times* said it was all in favor of encouraging carpools, use of buses, more efficient cars, etc., but only through subsidy and positive encouragement. It opposed making the freeways more congested so that drivers were coerced into carpools and transit vehicles. Gianturco wrote a long letter to the editor in response (published on July 3rd). She characterized the *Times*' position as a misguided "crusade against evil."

Meanwhile, opposition to the Diamond Lanes on the San Diego Freeway was growing. Robert Datel, head of the Caltrans division for the LA area, conceded in a hearing that while the San Diego lanes were already a done-deal, the deal was "not irrevocable." The LA City Council, prodded by Councilman Zev Yaroslavsky, pushed for the city attorney to determine if adequate environmental review of the San Diego Freeway plan had been done, and – if not – to file a lawsuit challenging the plan. (July 13, 1976) In effect, the Santa Monica Freeway experience was now spilling over into opposition to a very different project. By late July, the San Diego project – which had been scheduled to open a segment in September 1976 – was delayed until at least January 1, 1977. (July 23, 1976)

And court hearings on the federal lawsuit against the Santa Monica lanes soon got underway. (July 1, 1976) A smog expert testified at the trial that it was unclear whether the lanes helped or hurt air pollution, given available data. (July 7, 1976) Questions were raised about whether adequate environmental review had been bypassed. (July 8, 1976) A traffic engineer testified that half of accidents on the Santa Monica Freeway during Diamond Lane hours were in the second lane, i.e., the lane from which cars would enter and exit the preferential lane. (July 17, 1976) The implication was that Diamond Lanes caused car wrecks.

In one of his analyses for the *LA Times*, reporter Hebert described morale problems among engineers at Caltrans, quoting anonymous staff members. The lanes might have been a good

⁴²Senate resolution number 62.

⁴³Letter to Darryl R. White, Secretary of the Senate, dated July 14, 1976.

idea beforehand, but in practice they were undermining public confidence in the department, one was quoted to have said. Caltrans was itself reporting receipt of negative letters and phone calls from the public. Gianturco was quoted as saying that public officials should “do what *they think* is in the public interest,” (Italics added) with the implication that they should go ahead with plans the public mistakenly rejects. An anonymous Caltrans engineer confided that “most of us wish we were back building freeways.” (July 20, 1976)

On July 25th, a *Times* editorial noted Jerry Brown might want to take time off from his (first) campaign for the presidency and deal with the Santa Monica Freeway Diamond Lanes problem. One word from the governor, the *Times* noted, and the project could be killed, and should be killed. The *Times* cast more doubt on Caltrans data and pointed to an LA County study indicating that Santa Monica Freeway traffic had simply been diverted to local streets. Three days later, the Culver City city council addressed a demand to Gianturco for an end to the Santa Monica Freeway lanes and a ban on such lanes on other area freeways. (July 28, 1976)

Gianturco, however, did have a response to combat the negative spillover from the Santa Monica Freeway project to others. There had been plans to open the El Monte busway to carpools. She proposed accelerating the start-up date of the conversion, i.e., to convert it to a diamond lane by adding carpools to the buses. (August 8, 1976) In effect, she was offering a diamond lane to the public that added something to car-carrying capacity. As will be seen below, the offering was insufficient to blunt negative public attitudes.

A citizens' group tried to post anti-Diamond Lane signs along the Santa Monica Freeway but was prevented by the California Highway Patrol from doing so in late July. (July 30, 1976) In early August, the LA city council passed a resolution 10-4 calling for an immediate end to the Diamond Lanes. Gianturco labeled the council's resolution as “very irresponsible.” (August 4, 1976) A state assembly committee split 7-7 over a resolution that would require Caltrans to obtain legislative approval for any new Diamond Lanes. (August 5, 1976) As the federal trial continued, Caltrans admitted to having made statistical errors in the early days of the project. It said later data were correct but the admission further undermined Caltrans' credibility, both with the public and the court. (August 7, 1976)

The End (Kind of)

“The freeway should return to the state it was in in early March.”

U.S. District Court Judge Matt Byrne⁴⁴

The Diamond Lane project occurred in an era in which there were big California controversies that suddenly disappeared. Busing for racial balance was a major controversy in Los Angeles

⁴⁴Quoted in Ray Hebert, “Diamond Lane Suspended,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 9, 1976, p. A1.

and roiled local politics. But then a court decision suddenly halted busing in 1981. Property tax bills kept rising and created a homeowners' tax revolt until Proposition 13 came along in 1978. Suddenly, the bills were cut and capped by initiative. And on August 8, 1976, the Santa Monica Freeway Diamond Lanes suddenly died after a federal district court decision that followed an eleven-day trial. Of course, sudden changes often have an aftermath, and the Diamond Lanes were no exception.

The crux of the court decision on the lanes was that Caltrans should have conducted an environmental review prior to opening the Diamond Lanes. Although Caltrans argued that such a review wasn't needed, the judge in the case rejected that position. While the judge ruled that the conservative Pacific Legal Foundation that had filed the lawsuit had no direct standing in the case on its own, he ruled that it *could* represent LA City Councilman Zev Yaroslavsky who did have standing. Technically, the end of the lanes awaited a formal signing of the order – a matter of a few days. But as soon as news of the decision was public, single-occupant cars started using the Diamond Lanes and the CHP said it wouldn't ticket the ineligible cars. (August 9, 1976; August 10, 1976) The Diamond Lanes effectively evaporated.

Caltrans responded to the court decision by indicating that it might appeal. But whatever the legal merits, the politics of having to revive a dead program meant that in fact there would be no zombie Diamond Lanes on the Santa Monica Freeway. The dead would stay dead. In any case, under the court order, the Diamond Lanes could not come back until required reviews under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and the federal Environmental Policy Act were completed. The diamond on-ramps – preferential access for multiple-passenger cars – were allowed to continue to operate and have done so ever since.⁴⁵

As it happened, the sudden death of the Diamond Lanes occurred while Gianturco was vacationing in Maine and was not immediately available for comment. (August 10, 1976) Several days later, she was quoted as saying Caltrans was "leaning towards" an appeal because Diamond Lanes were "worth fighting for." But a lawyer representing Caltrans indicated that seeking a stay of the district court's order while an appeal went forward was not practical – drivers would simply not obey. (August 13, 1976) And actually doing the environmental reviews required by the decision would take a year. The issue moved from the formal court to the court of public opinion in which Yaroslavsky and Gianturco debated on TV. After the TV taping, the two continued to exchange words, and Yaroslavsky accused Caltrans of "treating people like guinea pigs." (August 14, 1976)

⁴⁵For some time thereafter, ineligible motorists using the on-ramps who were ticketed were apparently able to have the tickets dismissed in court on the grounds that they were confused over which diamonds were voided and which remained in effect. See Robert Rawitch, "Driver Trumps CHP Over Diamond Ticket," *Los Angeles Times*, April 28, 1978, p. F1.

There was a push for “amnesty” for those ticketed for improper use of the Diamond Lanes. And in fact, the protesters ticketed in the earlier demonstration in which a hearse-led caravan moved into the lanes had their citations dismissed. (October 5, 1976) The signage related to the Diamond Lanes was removed by Caltrans to comply with the court order within a few days after the decision. But the diamonds that had been painted on the paving of the lanes were left to fade. (August 17, 1976)

From Santa Monica to San Diego

“It seemed to me that there – in the (San Diego) lane – was some concrete paid for by the people. So I just told them to open it. Instead of cutting a ribbon, I cut some red tape.”

Governor Jerry Brown⁴⁶

The real question – although perhaps not apparent to Gianturco at the time – was whether the adverse ruling on the Santa Monica Diamond Lanes (where lanes had been taken away) would affect situations such as the San Diego Freeway project (in which additional lanes were in the process of construction). And, again, the ultimate outcome might be more than a matter of just legalities; politics would play a role, too, in light of the Santa Monica Freeway fiasco. *Times* reporter Hebert indicated that, whatever Gianturco might have thought, unnamed planners at Caltrans understood that what had occurred on the Santa Monica Freeway would create bad vibes for projects such as on the San Diego Freeway. (August 15, 1976)

By October 1976, motorists on the San Diego Freeway could see the newly-constructed northbound lane through the Sepulveda Pass standing unused. Despite the lane’s availability, a debate ensued within Caltrans as to whether to open the lane as a Diamond Lane or just as an additional regular lane. LA City Councilman Zev Yaroslavsky charged that Caltrans was supposed to be consulting about the fate of the San Diego lanes with the community but had delayed planned meetings. He threatened another lawsuit. LA City Traffic Engineer S.S. Taylor – who had actively opposed the Santa Monica Freeway Diamond Lanes – also opposed using the new lanes on the San Diego Freeway as Diamond Lanes, as did County Supervisor Kenneth Hahn. (October 13, 1976; November 7, 1976)

Gianturco insisted on filing an appeal of the Santa Monica Freeway decision, so there could be no doubt where she stood on the San Diego issue. (October 20, 1976) Moreover, she argued that the San Diego lanes could not be legally opened except as Diamond Lanes. (November 18, 1976) In December, the LA City Council pushed for state legislation to force the San Diego lanes to open to all traffic. (December 15, 1976). And it hinted at litigation. The City Council pointed to the opening of some new lanes on the Hollywood Freeway as a precedent, but Caltrans argued that the Hollywood lanes were never intended as a Diamond Lane project. (December

⁴⁶Quoted in Ray Hebert, “No Time Wasted in Using Diamond Lane,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 1, 1977, p. 3.

18, 1976) Subsequently, the Southern California Council of Governments (SCAG) endorsed the City Council's position. (January 7, 1976)

Just as the Santa Monica Diamond Lane project was suddenly terminated by an external decision, so – too – did the San Diego controversy come to an abrupt end. But in the San Diego Freeway case, it wasn't a court that made the decision. In late January 1977, Governor Jerry Brown ordered the available San Diego lane opened to all traffic. Brown had toured the lane with Gianturco and then issued the order. (January 31, 1977)

Gianturco made the best of the situation by putting a personal greeting on a traffic sign that had been posted in connection with the opening: "Left lane now open. Adriana." The sign included a smiley face. (February 1, 1977) It's hard to imagine that, after being undercut by the governor who had appointed her and had brought her into the job on the day the Santa Monica Diamond Lanes opened, she could have been feeling very smiley. Gray Davis, then the governor's executive secretary, said there was no intention to fire Gianturco, despite calls from some members of the legislature to do so. And Brown claimed she had agreed with his decision to open the lane.⁴⁷ (February 3, 1977) But given the circumstances, what other choice did she have?

Looking Backwards

"After the Santa Monica experience, I would be very reluctant to take a lane away. That kind of decision cannot be made in Sacramento. We have the responsibility for operating the freeway system, but it's the local people who have to live with it."

Caltrans Director Adriana Gianturco⁴⁸

When we look back at the Diamond Lane episode, what lessons can be drawn? There is the obvious one that taking something away is likely to engender strong resistance, whereas adding something – even if it embodies a new concept – will be welcomed or, at least, will meet less resistance. And since the 1976 experience with the Santa Monica Freeway Diamond Lanes, preferential lanes and toll lanes have been of the added variety. The lane take-away experience on the Santa Monica Freeway is not something public officials would ever want to repeat.

But the Diamond Lanes episode has lessons for governance that go beyond traffic management. Jerry Brown in his first iteration as governor liked to be perceived as "different" from other politicians. And part of that difference was exhibited in appointments of non-traditional officials. It's true that offbeat appointments can bring new perspectives. In the Gianturco case, she represented the view that the era of freeway expansion was fading. She believed that one solution to the issue of transportation, in the face of a growing California population, was to

⁴⁷Davis was elected governor in 1998. He was recalled and replaced by Arnold Schwarzenegger in 2003.

⁴⁸Ray Hebert, "Ms. Gianturco: She's Still the Driver at Caltrans," *Los Angeles Times*, March 4, 1976, p. 1.

explore ways to use the existing freeway infrastructure more efficiently. A possible solution was to encourage more use of public transportation and of carpooling.

Certainly, Governor Brown believed in such approaches. And he saw in Gianturco someone who had similar views to his own. Despite his desire to be different, by the time Brown was in his first term as governor, he had significant knowledge of politics and the way government worked. After all, he had been brought up in a very political household. And before becoming governor, Brown had been elected California secretary of state. Before being secretary of state, he held local elected office on the LA Community College Board. Gianturco, in contrast, didn't arrive with the skill set of an elected official or even of a high-profile appointed official.

As director of Caltrans, as Brown surely must have known, Gianturco would be facing a freeway/engineering culture that would resist new priorities. Furthermore, Brown on one occasion noted that appointing women into traditionally male management position would itself lead to frictions. "Whatever men may say, it's very hard for them to take orders from a woman." he said.⁴⁹ Given that belief, Brown must have known that simply appointing Gianturco, and especially appointing her just in time to oversee a controversial new program, would mean she would face an especially challenging assignment.

Given Brown's evident conviction that she was the right person for the job despite the challenge and inexperience, he needed to give her substantial support. Simply not firing her when legislators demanded it, was not adequate. Gianturco served until Brown's second term came to an end. Yet Brown's support was evident only once during the entire Diamond Lanes episode, when he persuaded a legislator to water down a resolution – which had no legal effect – calling for the end of the lanes. And he let Gianturco go on with resistance to opening the unused San Diego lane for months before stepping in and, in effect, overriding her decision.

The failure of support was evident in a later episode when a new Transportation Commission was created to replace the old Highway Commission. Gianturco diligently set about interviewing potential commissioners for the governor to appoint. But Brown went off on his own, not consulting Gianturco, and selected what he considered to be interesting candidates. One of his original nominees was pop singer Helen Reddy, although he had to back off when the choice was ridiculed.⁵⁰ Two years after leaving office, Gianturco complained of the lack of support that Governor Brown had given her: "*Jerry Brown's style as an administrator was to*

⁴⁹Quoted in Richard Bergholz, "Brown Honored for Willingness to Appoint Women," *Los Angeles Times*, August 28, 1979, p. OC_A10.

⁵⁰Gianturco oral history, *op. cit.*, pp. 256-258. Reddy was later appointed to another commission.

pretty much leave department heads alone, which gave you a lot of freedom; it also meant that when the going got tough, you were out there on your own."⁵¹

The net result of Brown's aloofness from his choice to head Caltrans was to set back expansion of the use of Diamond Lanes – a concept which he presumably had favored. And it also led to the branding of Gianturco as an anti-freeway zealot, making her job more difficult from that point on. For the remainder of her tenure as director of Caltrans, the image haunted her. Republicans took advantage of that perception whenever some freeway issue arose. San Diego Mayor Pete Wilson, for example, cited Gianturco's Diamond Lane episode in his (then) unsuccessful campaign for the Republican nomination for governor in 1978.⁵² She was "doing (Brown's) bidding," according to Wilson.

Of course, it's hard to know whether more support from Brown would have made a major difference. Gianturco's conflicts with local and state political figures were not confined to Republicans. She managed to upset Democrats – such as Yaroslavsky and Braude – as well. When (Democratic) LA Mayor Tom Bradley campaigned (unsuccessfully) for governor to replace Brown after his second term, he made a public commitment to "completion of our entire network of freeways."⁵³ Bradley hoped thereby to differentiate himself from what the voters perceived as the Brown-Gianturco anti-freeway approach.

Given the fact that Gianturco continued to evidence a tin ear when it came to the politics of her office, one can wonder whether Brown's decision to keep her in office for the remainder of his first iteration as governor, i.e., until his second term ended in January 1983, was a wise choice. When the mayor of Covina had trouble arranging an appointment with Gianturco to discuss construction of a freeway sound wall, she (the mayor) wrote to Governor Brown whose staff had to make sure the requested meeting occurred. An underling of Gianturco's had earlier informed the mayor that "the director does not feel a meeting to discuss this matter would be productive."⁵⁴ Obviously, an important component of the job of the Caltrans director was to say "no" to many pet projects of local officials. But there are ways to say "no" that can minimize friction. Taking a meeting with a local official who requests one is not a major burden. But rejecting such a meeting, in contrast, sends a message of arrogance.

And there was a tendency for trivia surrounding Gianturco's internal activity to surface, a symptom of organizational dissatisfaction. A leaked memo from Gianturco to staff complaining

⁵¹Kim Murphy, "7 Years in the Fast Lane: Gianturco Recounts Slings and Arrows," *Los Angeles Times*, April 25, 1985, p. OC_A1.

⁵²Quoted in Kenneth Reich, "Wilson Blames Freeway Lag on Brown," *Los Angeles Times*, April 8, 1978, p. A20. Wilson defeated Brown for the U.S. Senate in 1982. He ultimately became governor in 1990, serving two terms.

⁵³Quoted in Jeffrey Perlman, "Bradley Pledges Commitment to Build Freeways," *Los Angeles Times*, November 17, 1981, p. B3.

⁵⁴"Letter to Brown Wins Hearing on Sound Buffer," *Los Angeles Times*, February 27, 1977, p. SG7.

of the use of the word "data" as a singular became a matter of mirth. One letter to the editor in the *Times* said if the use of "data" was to be criticized, why not the use of "thru" rather than "through" on freeway signs?⁵⁵ (April 23, 1977) And with regard to signage, she decreed that all new freeway signs should have kilometer distances as well as miles.⁵⁶ In her 1994 oral history, Gianturco defended her grammatical concerns.⁵⁷ But the cause behind the fact that staff members were evidently leaking her memos seemed to escape her. Yet embarrassing leaks often occur because folks in the organization are unhappy with the leadership.

In an interview in the *Times* in July 1977, Gianturco still seemed surprised that elected officials, who had known about planning for the Diamond Lanes during the planning stage, had turned around and voiced opposition once the public began to complain.⁵⁸ But was that behavior really surprising? Would elected officials be expected to ignore angry constituents just because those officials had previously not anticipated the anger? During one of the several efforts to have Brown remove Gianturco, Brown let it be known that he considered her "to be one of his most innovative directors."⁵⁹

But was being innovative the sole criterion for office? Gianturco seemed especially prone to friction with legislators. It showed up in periodic efforts in the legislature to cut her salary. Key legislators held up Brown's appointment of a new Business and Transportation Agency head in 1981, hoping to pressure Brown to fire Gianturco or to pressure her.⁶⁰ On one occasion, they attempted to subpoena the governor, hoping to have her fired.⁶¹ (Brown ignored it.) Her own interpretation of such events was that legislators found it easy to blame her when local projects they favored were not okayed. "I am a convenient target," she said.⁶²

Even the *LA Times*, whose editorials had skewered the Santa Monica Diamond Lanes, conceded that there was something to that view.⁶³ And there obviously was. But there were blind spots and interpersonal issues that hindered Gianturco. She was owed more mentorship from the governor than she got. But she also exhibited a slower learning curve on the job than one might have hoped for, even given the lack of effective gubernatorial support.

⁵⁵ See the letters in the April 23, 1977 edition.

⁵⁶ "Caltrans to Post Metric English Distance Signs," *Oakland Post*, April 16, 1978, p. 5.

⁵⁷ Gianturco oral history, *op. cit.*, pp. 323-326. In Latin, the singular of data is "datum." But in common practice nowadays, "data" is often used as a singular in English. People often say "the data *is* available" rather than "the data *are* available." Gianturco wanted staff to say "data *are*." At present, grammarians seem to accept "data *is*," although such usage may have been less acceptable during the period Gianturco was in office.

⁵⁸ "What Lies Beyond the Diamond Lanes," *Los Angeles Times*, July 17, 1976, p. L6.

⁵⁹ Bert Mann, "Brown Says He Won't Fire Gianturco," *Los Angeles Times*, December 15, 1977, p. SG1. The nominee was Lynn Schenk. Schenk later became a top aid to Governor Gray Davis. She is at this writing a member of the Board of the California High Speed Rail Authority.

⁶⁰ Claudia Luther and Tracy Wood, "Are Gianturco's Days Numbered," *Los Angeles Times*, April 8, 1981, p. B3, B24.

⁶¹ Carl Ingram, "Brown Ignores Subpoena From Panel on Gianturco," *Los Angeles Times*, February 10, 1982.

⁶² Quoted in George Frank, "Gianturco Says She's Needed as Target," *Los Angeles Times*, June 23, 1979, p. SD_A13.

⁶³ Editorial: "Gianturco Vs. the Vigilantes," *Los Angeles Times*, January 17, 1982, p. D4.

Aftermath

"She believed that the tooth fairy would come along and pay for a transit system, no matter what happened in terms of ridership."

Governor Deukmejian's Caltrans Director Leo Trombatore (successor to Gianturco)⁶⁴

As noted, Democratic candidate for governor in the 1982 election Tom Bradley sought to distance himself from what were perceived as the anti-freeway views of Brown-Gianturco. Not surprisingly, when Bradley narrowly lost to Republican George Deukmejian, the emphasis at Caltrans switched back to freeways, at least in principle. The new Caltrans director, Leo Trombatore, was a highway engineer – and a male – in keeping with pre-Gianturco traditional transportation governance. Presumably, his appointment was meant to signal a change in transportation policy toward what it once had been.

Trombatore had worked under Gianturco during her administration. But in her oral history interview in 1994, she complained that he had done "nothing but badmouth" her and her approach to transportation after he became director under Deukmejian.⁶⁵ In fact there was more limited funding available for freeway expansion in the Deukmejian era than in the past, even with the shift toward a freeway emphasis. When Jerry Brown made a political reappearance in the late 1980s as chair of the state Democratic Party, he noted that "Adriana Gianturco in her worst year built more highways than George Deukmejian in his best year."⁶⁶

Her oral history in the mid-1990s brought out some additional insights. She apparently had resisted the idea of bringing in her own people and relied on the existing management hierarchy – a hierarchy which wasn't necessarily receptive to her ideas.⁶⁷ While the fact that she was suddenly put on the job at the start of the Diamond Lane crisis would have hindered quickly developing her own staff, her later resistance to bringing in new key staff is puzzling. Had Governor Brown been more of a mentor, he might have advised her to act differently. Brown certainly saw the value in making appointments of people receptive to his agenda.

Her oral history also revealed the level of stress Gianturco felt from the criticism she received once her reputation as anti-freeway became cemented in the public mind – in many ways because of the Diamond Lane episode. She reported breaking down in tears at a meeting with the editorial board of the *Sacramento Bee* over what she viewed as an unfair news story that

⁶⁴ Quoted in Evan Maxwell and Ronald L. Soble, "Freeways: Slowing Down vs. Gridlock," *Los Angeles Times*, March 20, 1983, p. OC_A1.

⁶⁵ Gianturco oral history, *op. cit.*, p. 481.

⁶⁶ Quoted in Doug Willis, "Brown Tells GOP to Stop Blaming Him for Crime Problem," *Los Angeles Times*, March 4, 1989, p. 4. Brown later dropped out of political view again, resurfacing in the late 1990s as mayor of Oakland.

⁶⁷ Gianturco oral history, *op. cit.*, p. 410.

she was blocking a freeway in the Fresno area, thereby leading to more automotive fatalities. Apparently, she received death threats as a result of that article.⁶⁸

Gianturco criticized the priorities of the Deukmejian administration not long after she left office, so the fact that Trombatore, her successor, was antagonistic should not have been a surprise to her (although it apparently was).⁶⁹ But she largely disappeared from public view after her stint with Jerry Brown, although whenever Diamond Lane proposals came up, her name was resurrected. She remained in Sacramento but seems to have played no part in the administration of Jerry Brown during his second iteration as governor. Her last public sighting was as a plaintiff in a court case aimed at blocking construction of a new sports stadium in Sacramento during 2014-2015.

Gianturco's legal effort at blocking the stadium was unsuccessful. But there is some irony in that the anti-stadium court case was centered on the proposition that the environmental review for the project had been inadequate. Unfortunately for Gianturco, the courts involved disagreed with her contention. In the 1976 case of the Santa Monica Diamond Lanes, where Gianturco was the defendant, the charge was also made by the plaintiffs of an inadequate environmental review. But back then the court agreed with that position and the project was killed.

⁶⁸Gianturco oral history, *op. cit.*, pp. 376-378.

⁶⁹Adriana Gianturco, "Look at What They're NOT Doing With Our Gas Taxes," *Los Angeles Times*, May 17, 1983, p. C5.

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