# UCLA INSTITUTE OF TRANSPORTATION STUDIES

# The Boy Who Cried Wolf?

Media Messaging and Traveler Responses to "Carmageddon" in Los Angeles

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#### INTRODUCTION

Exceptional events are infrequent and severely reduce system capacity. In 2011 and again in 2012, Los Angeles closed the 405 Freeway, one of the most heavily traveled freeways in the US. Public officials widely publicized both closures; some calmly appealed to civic pride, while others threatened nightmarish gridlock, dubbed "Carmageddon" and "Carmageddon II."

So, did people listen to these messages of hope and gloom? Did they change the way they travel?





#### AIM

To understand how people responded to event messaging: did people change their mode, route, or time of travel? Did people respond differently to Carmageddon II compared to Carmageddon I? What are the implications for managing future exceptional events?

#### METHODS

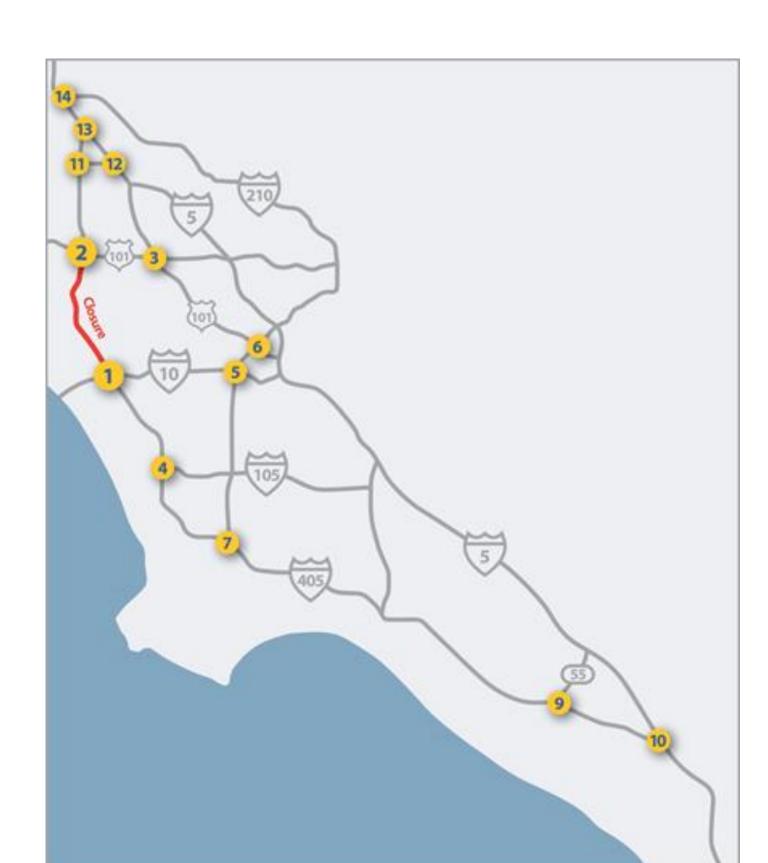
We first **established a baseline of normal travel** by averaging travel on non-holiday weekends that bookended the closure weekends.

We compared the baseline travel to arterial and freeway traffic and transit ridership during Carmageddon I & II.

Caltrans Performance Measurement System (PeMS)

detectors provided highway and arterial traffic counts, while Metrolink and Los Angeles Country Metropolitan

Transportation Authority provided transit ridership data.



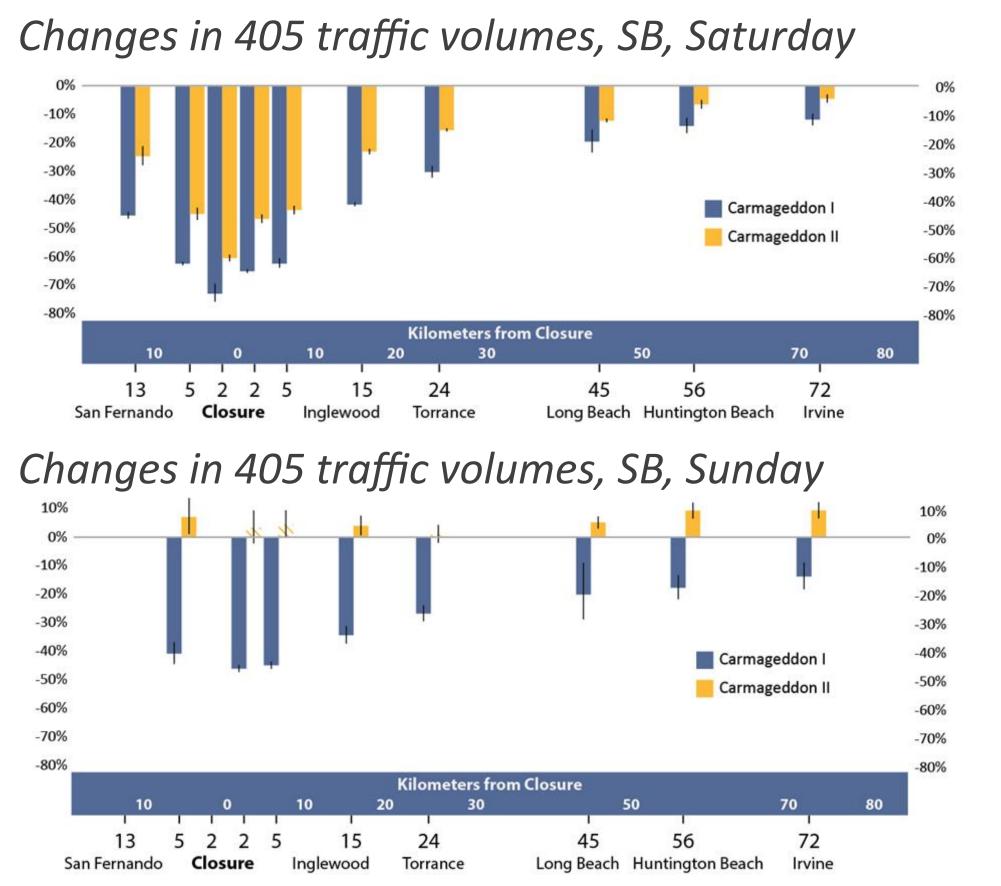
Freeways in Los Angeles & Orange County; 14 analysis points.



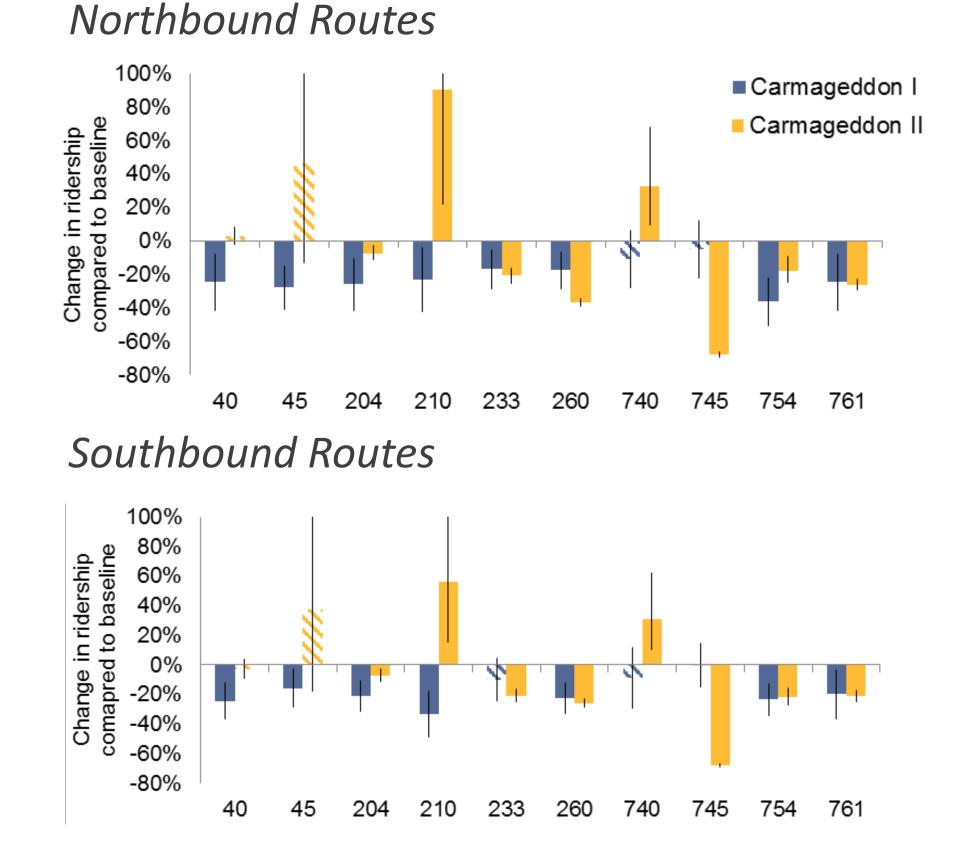
Metro bus routes analyzed.

## RESULTS

Events affected traffic levels far from the closure, particularly for Carmageddon I.

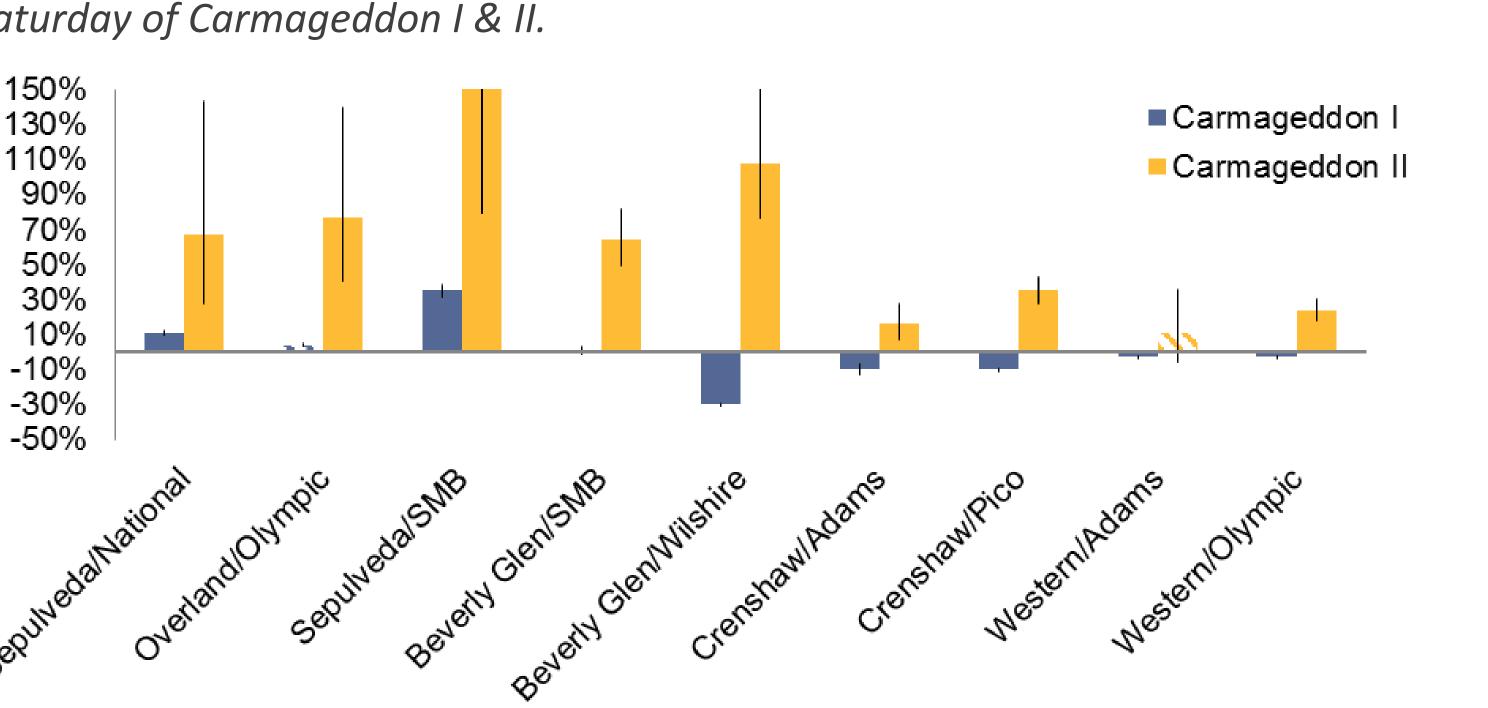


### No evidence of mode shift.



Lower surface street traffic during the first closure, but higher during the second.

Change in traffic volumes on southbound surface streets during the Saturday of Carmageddon I & II.



#### CONCLUSIONS

Travelers absorb information quickly and respond accordingly. As predictions failed to materialize, motorists adjusted behavior in response to real-time information.

Comparing the two events provides evidence that travelers learn from information and experience. Tempered messaging and experience translated into fewer foregone trips during the second event.

Disseminating information proved more effective than providing alternative routes or modes to cope with an exceptional event. However, cities must be wary of crying wolf; people will respond, but they will take future warnings with a grain of salt.





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