



NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

BAY AREA'S FIRST EXPRESS LANE SET TO OPEN SEPTEMBER 20

\$195 million project cost 30 percent less than budget

Alameda County – Caltrans, the Alameda County Congestion Management Agency (ACCMA), and the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) announced today that on September 20 the Bay Area's first express lane will open, allowing solo drivers to use a 14-mile stretch of southbound Interstate 680 between Pleasanton and Milpitas, if they pay a toll electronically. Carpools, transit vehicles, motorcycles, and hybrid vehicles with a valid sticker will continue to use the express lane for free.

The express lane project was completed for \$195 million - 30 percent below the original estimate. Caltrans, the MTC, and the Federal Highway Administration were partners in the project, which received \$109 million from Proposition 1B, a \$19.9 billion transportation bond approved by voters in 2006.

“As the voters intended, Proposition 1B is paying for vital transportation projects that relieve traffic congestion, improve air quality, and provide a shot in the arm to California's economy,” said Governor Schwarzenegger. “With this freeway project, the people of the Bay Area can see their tax dollars at work.”

Located on I-680 between State Route 84 in Pleasanton and State Route 237 in Milpitas, the project widened the freeway, installed electronic toll equipment, created safe entrance and exit points for express lane users, constructed auxiliary lanes, and repaved all the southbound lanes.

“This project shows that we can make progress even in a challenging economy. The I-680 express lane is a cost-effective way to reduce traffic congestion and generate revenue for Bay Area transportation improvements,” said Caltrans Director Cindy McKim.

Toll revenue from the express lane will pay for operating and maintaining the lane, for transit service on I-680, and to build future carpool or express lanes on I-680.

- More -



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Tolls will be based on the level of traffic on the highway. During peak periods, when there is more traffic in the express lane, the toll will be higher to discourage additional solo drivers from entering and using the express lane. During off-peak periods, when fewer vehicles are using the express lane, the toll will be lower. An overhead electronic sign will display the current toll being assessed.

“As the express lane network continues to grow, Bay Area motorists will become more acquainted with the benefits these lanes provide,” said Bijan Sartipi, Caltrans District 4 Director. “This new alternative for commuters was only realized through the excellent partnership between Caltrans, MTC, Federal Highway Administration and the regional congestion management agencies.”

“The opening of the I-680 Express Lane will launch a new era in Bay Area transportation and congestion management,” said Scott Haggerty, Chair of the MTC and of the joint powers authority overseeing the I-680 Express Lane. “For the first time, solo drivers have the choice of paying a toll electronically via a FasTrak toll tag to use the carpool lane. We’ve been waiting a long time for this.”

The express lane will operate Monday through Friday from 5 a.m. to 8 p.m., replacing the current carpool lane hours. All motorists will be able to use the express lane outside of these hours.

“It’s truly historic. The new express lane means drivers can count on a reliable trip without congestion,” said Mark Green, Chair of ACCMA. “I’ll be here at 5 a.m. on Monday when the first cars enter the lane -- I’m excited to drive south over the Sunol Grade without a backup.”

Motorists with a FasTrak toll tag can enter the express lane at designated places and will be charged each time. The operation will be fully electronic, with no tollbooths or tollgates, so drivers will not need to slow down or stop to pay.

“Express lanes are an important element for smoother transportation in the Bay Area in the future, and that future begins here on Interstate 680,” said MTC Executive Director Steve Heminger. “We anticipate hundreds of miles of express lanes throughout the Bay Area over the next 25 years.”

For more information about the I-680 express lane and future Bay Area express lane projects, please visit: www.680expresslane.org.

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