

# San Jose Mercury News

September 3, 2010

## Final touches coming to new toll lane on I-680

Commuters down the Sunol Grade on Interstate 680, be prepared. Your freeway is going to look much different in a few days.

Next week crews will begin restriping the southbound carpool lane to prepare for the Sept. 20 opening of the Bay Area's first freeway express lane. On that date, solo drivers will be able to jump into the diamond lane if they are willing to pay a fee, which will average about \$5 to \$6 for the 14-mile trip from Highway 84 to Highway 237.

"It could be a little confusing at first," said Frank Furger of the Alameda County Transportation Commission. "You'll soon have all the lane markings and equipment in for the express lane, but the tolls won't be registering until the 20th."

Workers will install a 2-foot-wide buffer zone, featuring double white solid lines, to separate the carpool lane from the other three lanes. One or two lanes will be closed each night this weekend and next week to get all work done.

By the week after next, most of the new striping should be complete. Motorists will then have three specific entry and exit points, rather than the open access across a dotted line common on other Bay Area freeways.

It is against the law to cross over the double solid line buffer that marks the new carpool lane, even before the official opening.

Entry locations will be in Sunol a mile south of Highway 84, just past Mission Boulevard north and near Auto Mall Parkway.

Exits will be south of Auto Mall Parkway, around Jacklin Road and south of 237.

Traffic planners are certain of this: Some drivers will be unsure how to navigate this new roadway, especially when it looks like work has been completed before the Sept. 20 opening.

Crews will also be testing the electronic toll collection system, which will charge tolls based on traffic conditions. Solo drivers will need a FasTrak transponder to use the lane, and the transponder will beep during the testing period the week of Sept. 12, but no tolls will be collected until Sept. 20.

That does not mean solo drivers can enter the express lane for free during the testing period, when current carpool hours will remain in effect. But if a solo driver legally enters the carpool lane during noncarpool hours and hears the transponder beep or sees a light flash, that's because equipment is being tested.

"It's going to beep, but don't worry about it," Furger said. "You will not be charged until Sept. 20."

When the new lane does open, carpools, transit vehicles and motorcycles, as well as hybrids with valid stickers, will continue to use it for free. To avoid being charged, any such drivers with a FasTrak toll tag should remove it from the windshield and cover it with the Mylar bag provided by FasTrak.

Anticipating likely confusion, officials have set up a frequently asked questions section on a website at [www.680expresslane.org/FAQ\\_&\\_Brochure.asp](http://www.680expresslane.org/FAQ_&_Brochure.asp).

"This is not always going to sit well with some people," Furger said. "But we are trying to let everyone know what is coming up."