



New I-580 carpool lane segment opens

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LIVERMORE — Carpoolers will have a little more space of their own on Interstate 580 when a 2.9-mile high-occupancy vehicle lane opens today in Livermore.

The new eastbound segment — made available for public use through a joint effort by the Alameda County Congestion Management Agency and Caltrans — extends from Airway Boulevard past Portola Road.

"There is a whole series of projects to relieve congestion on the I-580 corridor that are ongoing," said Dave Hyams, congestion management agency spokesman. "This is just one step in the process — but a good one."

Upon completion, the entire HOV lane will extend 11 miles from Hacienda Road in Pleasanton to Greenville Road in Livermore. It will eventually be turned into an express toll lane.

The first lane segment from east of Portola Road to Greenville Road opened in October 2009. Rather than wait until the whole second segment was completed, transportation authorities decided to open the new stretch — about a third of the total remaining length — now.

"We felt it was better that the public be able to use it as opposed to drive by it and just look at it," said Alameda County Supervisor Scott Haggerty, who serves as chairman of the Metropolitan Transportation Commission. "We wanted to get it open to the public just as soon as possible."

If construction continues as expected, the overall HOV project will open this fall, about one year

ahead of schedule, Caltrans spokesman Allyn Amsk.

Built as a four-lane freeway in 1968, I-580 is heavily traversed by commuters and by commercial truckers hauling goods between the San Joaquin Valley and the Port of Oakland.

An estimated 200,000 vehicles use the Tri-Valley corridor daily, making it the second most congested freeway portion in the Bay Area, behind only the I-80 through the Bay Bridge, according to MTC statistics.

In addition to aiding carpoolers, solo drivers may benefit from the new lane when converted to an express lane next year. Single-occupancy vehicles can choose to use the lane by paying a toll that will be deducted from a FasTrack account.

The eastbound I-580 HOV lane project is estimated to cost \$125 million — earlier estimates put the cost at \$153 million — and is partially funded through Proposition 1B, a 2006 voter-approved state transportation bond measure.

Construction on the westbound I-580 HOV lane is slated to begin next year and to be completed in 2012.

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