



I-580 and I-680 Express Lanes Frequently Asked Questions – July 2011

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▶ **What are the Alameda County Express Lanes?**

As part of a long-term plan to improve traffic flow on Interstates 680 and 580, the Alameda County Congestion Management Agency is converting some existing carpool lanes to Express Lanes—sometimes called High Occupancy Toll (HOT) Lanes. Carpools (HOV 2+) will continue to use the lanes for free, while solo drivers use the lanes for a toll that varies depending on the level of congestion in the Express Lanes. The variable fee makes excess capacity available to paying

motorists while guaranteeing a reasonable travel time for all users of the lanes.

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▶ **Where is the Alameda County Express Lane project?**

The I-680 Express Lane project is located on a 14-mile stretch of southbound I-680 between Highway 84 in Pleasanton on the north and Highway 237 in Milpitas on the south. Approximately 80 percent of the project is located in Alameda County, with the remainder in Santa Clara County.

The I-580 Express Lane project is located on a 12-mile stretch of I-580 from just west of the Hacienda Drive Interchange in Pleasanton to just east of the Greenville Road Undercrossing in Livermore.

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▶ **How do the Express Lanes work?**

The new Express Lanes operate as follows:

- Solo drivers who want a more reliable trip on southbound I-680 and eastbound I-580 need to obtain and mount a FasTrak® toll tag on their windshield. They are charged a toll each time they choose to use the Express Lanes. Carpool vehicles with two or more people, motorcycles and transit buses continue to use the lanes for free.
- The southbound I-680 carpool lane has been converted to an Express Lane with new striping, specific entry and exit points, overhead electronic signs and a FasTrak® electronic toll collection (ETC) system. The new Express Lane is separated from general-purpose lanes by double solid lines, except at entry and exit points.
- The operation is fully electronic. There are no tollbooths or traffic gates, so customers do not need to slow down or stop to make a toll payment.
- Motorists with a FasTrak® toll tag can enter the Express Lanes at designated places. An overhead electronic sign displays the current toll being assessed. Toll costs vary based on real-time traffic levels on the Express Lanes to ensure that traffic in the lanes flows smoothly.

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▶ **What happens to drivers who had been using the carpool lanes?**

Carpool vehicles (HOV 2+), motorcycles and transit buses continue to be able to use the Express Lanes for free.

Since carpools and eligible hybrids can use the lanes for free, if you have a FasTrak® toll tag, you need to remove the toll tag from your windshield and cover it with the Mylar® bag that was provided to you by FasTrak® so you're not charged for that particular trip. It's important to make



sure that after your carpool trip you properly re-install your toll tag onto your windshield. If you have lost your Mylar bag, please call the FasTrak Customer Service Center at 877-229-8655 (877-BAY-TOLL), and they will mail you a replacement bag.

Note: This is slightly different on Bay Area bridges, where carpool vehicles must pay a bridge toll. So when you are crossing a toll bridge, you must keep your toll tag on your windshield.

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▶ **What will I need to do if I want to use the Alameda County Express Lanes?**

To use the I-680 or I-580 Express Lanes as a solo driver, you need a prepaid FasTrak® account and a FasTrak® toll tag. Then, as you approach one of the entrances to the Express Lane, you check the posted toll for your destination and determine if you want to use the lane for that price on this trip. If you are in a carpool vehicle or on a motorcycle, you will simply enter the Express Lane at one of the designated entrances without paying a toll.

To open a FasTrak® account, sign up online at <http://www.bayareafastrak.org>. A list of select Walgreen's, Safeway and Costco locations can also be found at the FasTrak® website. You can also contact the FasTrak® Customer Service Center by calling 1-877-BAY-TOLL (1-877-229-8655).

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▶ **How are tolls set on the Express Lanes?**

The project's goal is to ensure that traffic is always flowing smoothly in the Express Lanes by utilizing "dynamic pricing." Here's how it works: Tolls are set based on the amount of traffic traveling in the Express Lanes at any given time. During peak periods, when there is more traffic in the Express Lanes, the toll is higher to discourage new solo drivers from entering and making the lanes congested. During off-peak periods, when fewer vehicles are using the lanes, the toll is lower – with a minimum toll of 30 cents. By changing the toll in response to the level of demand, the Express Lanes traffic keeps flowing smoothly. Dynamic pricing has been used successfully on the San Diego Express Lanes for several years and is now being used on the MnPASS lanes in Minneapolis, MN, as well as in various other places around the country.

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▶ **How are the tolls calculated at any particular time?**

The toll rate is based upon the changing level of traffic on the Express Lanes and the general purpose lanes. Sensors in the road monitor traffic levels, and toll prices are set to maintain free flow in the Express Lanes at all times. An electronic sign located before the entrance to the Express Lanes gives customers advance notice of the current toll as they approach the lanes.

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▶ **Where is the toll rate posted?**

Electronic signs with the posted toll rate are located in advance of every I-580 and I-680 Express Lane entrance. Drivers are charged the amount of the toll at the time they enter the Express Lane, even if the toll amount changes while they are in the lane.

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▶ **What if I use the lanes without a current FasTrak® account?**

A solo driver without a valid FasTrak® toll tag will be in violation of state law and subject to a fine.

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▶ **What are the hours of operation?**

The I-680 Express Lane operational hours are 5 a.m. to 8 p.m. Monday through Friday. A carpool or other HOV-eligible vehicle can use the lane for free at any time. During Express Lane hours, solo drivers can choose to use the Express Lane by paying a toll electronically via their FasTrak® toll tag. At all times, drivers must obey the universal driving rule to not cross solid lines, making access limited to designated entrance/exit locations.

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▶ **What if I have FasTrak®, but on this trip I have passengers—do I still pay?**

Since carpools can use the lanes for free, you will need to remove the toll tag from your windshield and cover it with the Mylar® bag that was provided to you by FasTrak® so you're not charged for that particular trip. It's important to make sure that after your carpool trip you properly re-install your toll tag onto your windshield. If you need a new Mylar bag, please call the FasTrak® Customer Service Center at 1-877-BAY-TOLL (1-877-229-8655).

Note: This is slightly different on Bay Area bridges, where carpool vehicles must pay a bridge toll. So when you are crossing a toll bridge, you must keep your toll tag on your windshield.

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▶ **What if I have FasTrak® and I'm driving solo in a hybrid vehicle – do I still pay?**

Since July 1, 2011, solo drivers in hybrid vehicles must have FasTrak and pay the toll to use the Express Lanes.



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▶ **Can trucks, motorcycles or cars with trailers use the Express Lanes?**

Light-duty (two-axle) trucks with two occupants can use the lanes for free. Light-duty trucks with one occupant and a valid FasTrak® toll tag can use the lanes for a fee. Larger trucks or cars towing a trailer (three or more axles) may not use the lanes. Motorcycles, like carpoolers, can always use the lanes for free.

Note: This is slightly different than on Bay Area bridges, where motorcycles and carpoolers must pay a bridge toll effective July 1, 2010.

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▶ **When did the Express Lanes open?**

The I-680 Express Lane opened in September 2010; the I-580 Express Lanes are expected to open in 2013.

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▶ **Will there be other Express Lanes in the Bay Area?**

The Metropolitan Transportation Commission has proposed a 400-mile network of Express Lanes throughout the Bay Area. The lanes would be implemented over the next decade by converting existing carpool lanes or building Express Lanes where carpool lanes do not exist, in order to relieve congestion. The I-680 and I-580 Express Lanes projects are the first for Northern California.

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▶ **Where does the toll money go?**

Toll revenue will pay for operating and maintaining the toll facilities, for other carpool facilities in the corridor including the northbound carpool lane on I-680 and westbound carpool lane on I-580, as well as transit service in the I-680 and I-580 corridors.

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▶ **How do Express Lane drivers move out of the way of emergency vehicles?**

When an emergency vehicle, such as an ambulance, fire truck or law enforcement vehicle approaches with emergency lights or sirens on, Express Lane drivers must move to the right out of

the lane to let the emergency vehicle pass unimpeded. Drivers can then return to the Express Lane. There is no violation for drivers who cross the double solid lines that separate the Express Lane in response to an emergency vehicle.

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▶ **Now that carpoolers are paying tolls on Bay Area bridges, does that affect Express Lanes?**

Even though carpoolers now pay a toll on Bay Area bridges, carools and other HOV-eligible vehicles will continue to use the Alameda County Express Lanes for free.

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▶ **Who's in charge?**

The Alameda County Transportation Commission (ACTC) oversees the I-580 Express Lanes, and the I-680 Express Lane Joint Powers Authority oversees the I-680 Express Lane. It has members from Santa Clara County's Valley Transportation Authority, the ACTC, and Alameda County. Alameda County Express Lanes serves as administrator of the I-680 Express Lane.

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▶ **How did the Express Lanes project come about?**

California AB 2032, passed and signed into law in 2004, authorized the Sunol Smart Carpool Lane Joint Powers Authority to implement the Express Lanes.

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▶ **When I drive the full length of the Express Lane, my toll tag beeps three different times. The sign indicated a \$1.50 toll when I entered at Highway 84. Do I get charged \$1.50 each time for a total of \$4.50?**

You are only charged the amount that you see when you enter the lane. The other "beeps" you hear are because the electronic reader reads all toll tags at the second and third entry points to make sure it captures the drivers who entered at those points, but the system is set up to override those later reads for drivers who started at Highway 84 -- the first read is the only one that counts. If the sign at Highway 84 says \$1.50 for the entire length, that is the toll you pay.

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▶ **Why do I need to put my FasTrak toll tag in a Mylar bag when I'm carpooling?**



The electronic toll collection system doesn't know if you're a carpooler or not, so it reads the toll tags in all vehicles as they enter the Express Lane. Thus it will read a carpool vehicle unless the toll tag is in the Mylar bag. If you need a replacement bag, just phone the FasTrak Customer Service Center at 877-229-8655 (877-BAY-TOLL), and they will mail it to you.

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▶ **What is FasTrak®?**

FasTrak® is a registered trademark and is the standard for electronic toll collection in the state of California. Interoperable on all toll roads and bridges statewide, FasTrak® allows solo drivers to pay a fee on the Alameda County Express Lanes through electronic tolling. To participate, solo drivers must have a prepaid FasTrak® account and toll tag properly mounted on their vehicle's windshield when they use the Express Lanes. Carpools, vanpools, motorcycles and permitted clean air vehicles (e.g., eligible solo hybrids) can use the Express Lanes for free. However, on the Bay Area toll bridges, all vehicles are charged a toll.

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▶ **How does the FasTrak® system work in the Express Lanes?**

To use the Alameda County Express Lanes, you must have a FasTrak® toll tag. A small device, the toll tag, is mounted inside the vehicle on the windshield and identifies the customer's prepaid toll account. Overhead antennas in the Express Lanes read the toll tag and deduct the correct toll electronically from the customer's FasTrak® prepaid account. For carpoolers using the Express Lanes, there is no deduction. Effective July 1, 2010, there is a deduction for carpoolers using the Bay Area toll bridges.

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▶ **How do I sign up for FasTrak®?**

Getting FasTrak® is easy—simply go to a select Costco, Safeway or Walgreens location to pick up a retail toll tag, or sign up online at www.bayareafastrak.org. A list of select retail locations can be found at the FasTrak® website. You can also contact the FasTrak Customer Service Center by calling 1-877-BAY-TOLL (1-877-229-8655). You may sign up for a FasTrak® account using a major credit card, cash or check.

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▶ **How do I mount the toll tag in my vehicle?**

The toll tag should be mounted inside the car squarely on the top-middle section of the windshield, directly behind the rearview mirror. It should be no more than one inch from the windshield's top



edge. If your vehicle does not permit the placement of the toll tag in that location, mount the toll tag in the lower-left or right corner of the windshield no more than one inch from the lower and outer edges.

According to Section 23302(b) of the California Vehicle Code, you are responsible for mounting your toll tag properly. Sections 26708(b)(11) and 26708(b)(3) of the Vehicle Code describe the only acceptable locations for mounting your toll tag. Please note that, if mounted incorrectly, the toll tag may not work and you could be subject to citation.

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▶ **Is there a fee to obtain a toll tag?**

There is no fee for the first three toll tags, when a credit card replenishment account is established. If you have more than three toll tags, a \$20 deposit is required for each toll tag over three. The deposit is refunded to you if you return the toll tags in good working condition.

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▶ **How is my prepaid balance maintained?**

If you select the credit card replenishment option, your credit card will be charged an initial prepaid balance of \$25 per toll tag. In addition, your account will be automatically replenished with \$25 or an amount equal to your average monthly usage, whichever is greater. Your account will be replenished each time your toll account balance falls below \$15 or an amount equal to two weeks' average toll usage, whichever is greater.

If you select the cash or check replenishment option, you agree to make a prepayment of \$50 per toll tag to establish an account. In addition, you agree to make a minimum cash or check payment of \$40 each time your toll account balance falls below your replenishment threshold (which is \$30 or an amount equal to two weeks' average toll usage, whichever is greater). You agree that such payment will be received by the Customer Service Center prior to your account reaching a zero balance.

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▶ **Can my FasTrak® toll tag be moved between vehicles?**

Yes. You must provide FasTrak® with the license plate number, state, make and model of all vehicles in which you will be using the toll tag. If any of these vehicles change, you must contact the FasTrak® Customer Service Center to update your vehicle information by calling 1-877-BAY-TOLL (1-877-229-8655), or log into your FasTrak® account at www.bayareafastrak.org. We recommend that you obtain a FasTrak® toll tag for each vehicle that you drive regularly, to avoid potential problems (i.e., losing the toll tag or wearing out the adhesive strips).

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▶ **What happens if my toll tag is lost or stolen?**

If a toll tag is lost or stolen, please call the FasTrak® Customer Service Center immediately at 1-877-229-8655, or log into your account at www.bayareafastrak.org and mark your toll tag as lost or stolen. You remain liable for all tolls charged to your toll tag until you have notified the Customer Service Center that your toll tag has been lost or stolen. In addition, you will be charged \$20 for each toll tag entrusted to your possession that has been stolen, unless an official police report is provided.

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