



NEWS RELEASE

Contact Dave Hyams, Solem & Associates, 415-296-2021, 415-260-9159 (cell)

Opening Date for Bay Area's First Express Lane Is Set

I-680 Southbound Lane Goes into Operation on September 20

OAKLAND, CA (June 23, 2010) – Northern California's first Express Lane, covering 14 miles of Interstate 680 southbound from Pleasanton to Milpitas, will open Monday September 20 at 5 a.m., officials announced today.

The opening will launch a new era in Bay Area transportation and congestion management: for the first time, solo drivers can choose to use the carpool lane by paying a toll electronically via a FasTrak[®] toll tag. Carpools, transit vehicles, and motorcycles, as well as hybrid vehicles with a valid sticker, will continue to use the lane for free.

“The new Express Lane will be a great step forward for drivers who want a reliable trip without risking a backup,” said Scott Haggerty, chair of the Metropolitan Transportation Commission and of the joint powers authority overseeing the I-680 Express Lane. “Things will soon be easier for everyone driving south over the Sunol Grade because the I-680 project is on schedule to open on September 20.”

The Alameda County Congestion Management Agency (ACCMA) serves as administrator of the I-680 Express Lane for the I-680 Smart Carpool Lane Joint Powers Authority, which has members from Santa Clara County's Valley Transportation Authority, the ACCMA, and the Alameda County Transportation Improvement Authority. At a special briefing on the new lane, ACCMA project officials provided new details about the lane:

- The existing carpool lane will be converted to an Express Lane over the weekend of September 18-19 with new striping that designates specific entry and exit points. Overhead electronic signs will be unveiled, and the FasTrak electronic toll collection system will be switched on. The new Express Lane will be separated from general-purpose lanes by triple solid lines (one white next to a double yellow), except at entry and exit points.
- The lane will operate Mondays to Fridays from 5 a.m. to 8 p.m., replacing the current carpool lane hours. The lane will be “open to all” at night and on weekends.

California Highway Patrol officers will provide enforcement using visual and electronic means.

- Solo drivers who want to use the I-680 Express Lane will need to have a FasTrak toll tag mounted on their windshield. They will be charged a toll each time they choose to use the Express Lane. The operation will be fully electronic, with no tollbooths or tollgates, so customers will not need to slow down or stop to pay.
- Motorists with a FasTrak toll tag can enter the Express Lane at designated places. An overhead electronic sign will display the current toll being assessed. Toll costs will vary based on real-time traffic levels on the Express Lane to ensure that traffic in the lane flows smoothly.

The project's goal is to ensure that traffic is always flowing smoothly in the Express Lane by utilizing "dynamic pricing." Here's how it works: Tolls will be set based on the amount of traffic traveling in the Express Lane and the general purpose lanes at any given time. During peak periods, when there is more traffic in the Express Lane, the toll will be higher to discourage too many additional solo drivers from entering and making the Express Lane congested. During off-peak periods, when fewer vehicles are using the lane, the toll will be lower. By changing the toll in response to the level of demand, the Express Lane traffic will keep flowing smoothly in the Express Lane. At the same time, the increased utilization of the Express Lane will improve the conditions within the general purpose lanes.

"The project is now in the construction phase, but soon we'll begin two months of testing the electronic systems before opening on September 20," said Dennis Fay, executive director of the Alameda County Congestion Management Agency.

Express Lanes have operated in Southern California and elsewhere in the country for many years. After I-680, the next Express Lanes in the Bay Area will be I-580 from Pleasanton to Livermore and the Highway 237 flyover to I-880 in Milpitas.

More information is on the website www.680expresslane.org.