

ExpressLanes to open on 110 freeway on Nov. 10

BY STEVE HYMON , SEPTEMBER 18, 2012



([//thesource.metro.net/2012/09/18/expresslanes-to-open-on-110-freeway-on-nov-10/get-fastrak/](http://thesource.metro.net/2012/09/18/expresslanes-to-open-on-110-freeway-on-nov-10/get-fastrak/)) Here's the news release from Metro:

Metro ExpressLanes, an innovative project to reduce traffic congestion, will debut Los Angeles County's first HOT (High Occupancy Toll) lanes on Saturday, Nov. 10 at 12:01 a.m., opening 11 miles of carpool lanes on the 110 Harbor Freeway to solo drivers who pay an electronic toll.

Only solo drivers using the ExpressLanes will be charged a toll. Carpools, vanpools, buses and motorcycles will be able to travel toll-free in the 110 Metro ExpressLanes, which will be located between Adams Boulevard and the 91 freeway. But all motorists will need a FasTrak® account and transponder to travel in the 110 Metro ExpressLanes when tolling begins on November 10.

“The opening of the Metro ExpressLanes demonstration project on the 110 will provide a unique opportunity to explore and evaluate a new transportation option that could potentially create faster commutes, greater capacity and better air quality throughout the region,” said LA County Supervisor and Metro Board Chair Michael D. Antonovich.

Metro ExpressLanes is a one-year demonstration project overseen by Metro, the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) and several other mobility partners to enhance travel options and ease congestion on two of the region’s busiest freeways. The project converts 11 miles of HOV (High Occupancy Vehicle) lanes on the I-110 Harbor Freeway and 14 miles of HOV lanes on the I-10 San Bernardino Freeway (between Alameda Street and the 605) to HOT lanes that allow solo drivers to use the carpool lanes by paying a toll. The I-110 ExpressLanes are the first to open, and the I-10 San Bernardino Freeway ExpressLanes will open early next year.

When solo drivers begin to travel on the 110 ExpressLanes, all commuters will benefit—whether they pay a toll or not—because the ExpressLanes will redistribute traffic across all lanes of the 110 freeway,” said LA County Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas, who also is a Metro Board Member and Chair of the Ad-Hoc Committee on Congestion Pricing. “Shifting solo drivers who are willing to pay tolls into the empty space in the ExpressLanes will speed commuting time and travel for all drivers. Everyone wins when freeway traffic flows more smoothly.”

The tolls will vary depending on traffic. To avoid traffic back-ups, sensors will be used to measure congestion in the Metro ExpressLanes and will increase the toll from 25 cents a mile to a maximum of \$1.40 a mile as more vehicles enter the Metro ExpressLanes. Overhead electronic signs will display the current toll being assessed so solo drivers can make a choice.

“This new congestion pricing approach has worked well in other cities. We believe Metro Expresslanes will be successful in Los Angeles as well as we improve transportation options today and into the future by reinvesting the net toll revenues in transit and carpool improvements in the corridor,” said Caltrans District 7 Director Mike Miles. “The project also provided a big boost to the region’s economy by creating an estimated 2,400 new construction jobs, and it will help the economy even more by increasing mobility.”

To travel in the Metro ExpressLanes, drivers can use their existing FasTrak® transponders or obtain an ExpressLanes FasTrak® transponder. To travel toll-free, carpool and vanpool drivers will need a switchable FasTrak® transponder from Metro to use the ExpressLanes. The switchable transponder allows drivers to indicate the number of occupants in the vehicle (1, 2 or 3+) and can be used on all toll systems in California. To open an account and receive an ExpressLanes switchable transponder:

- Visit www.metroexpresslanes.net
(//www.metroexpresslanes.net)
- Call 511 and say “ExpressLanes”
- Visit walk-in centers at 500 W. 190th Street in Gardena or at the El Monte Station, 3501 Santa Anita Avenue, El Monte
- Mail an application, which is available online, to Metro ExpressLanes, PO Box 3878, Gardena, CA 90247

The costs vary depending on payment methods, but drivers who open their accounts with a credit or debit card will pay \$40 and the transponder deposit will be waived. The \$40 will be applied to any tolls incurred while driving solo on the Metro ExpressLanes. There is a minimum balance threshold of \$10, and a \$3 monthly account fee. The monthly fee is waived after four trips in the Metro

ExpressLanes and/or on transit in the ExpressLanes corridor.

Discounts are available. Members of the Automobile Club of Southern California (AAA) can open a Metro ExpressLanes FasTrak® account at a discounted price of \$32 by visiting www.AAA.com/metroexpresslanes ([//www.AAA.com/metroexpresslanes](http://www.AAA.com/metroexpresslanes)) or visiting their local Auto Club office.

In a first for an ExpressLanes project, low-income commuters can receive a \$25 toll credit when setting up an Equity Plan account, and the transponder deposit will be waived. They must reside in Los Angeles County and have an annual income below \$37,061 for a family of three. There is a limit of one Equity Plan account per household.

“We are urging everyone to get their FasTrak® accounts opened now so they can be part of this historic opening of the first ExpressLanes in Los Angeles County,” said Metro CEO Art Leahy. “This is a great opportunity to be on the leading edge of an innovative new project that will ease traffic congestion, improve air quality and provide new travel options on the 110 on November 10th and on the 10 when the ExpressLanes open there next year.”

Transit riders also will benefit from the ExpressLanes project. It is adding 59 more clean fuel buses and 100

vanpools to the routes. The project also has expanded and updated transit facilities and improved downtown parking.

A first in the nation, the project will link transit usage with toll credits by offering transit riders a \$5 toll credit for every 32 one-way bus trips taken along the route. Another first is a Loyalty Program that will reward carpoolers and vanpoolers for taking Metro ExpressLanes by entering them into drawings for free gas cards each month that they use Metro ExpressLanes.

The Metro ExpressLanes program is a \$290 million project, primarily funded by a \$210 million congestion reduction demonstration grant from the U.S. Department of Transportation.

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 24 replies >

The \$3/mo maintenance fee attached to the devices is a real disappointment.

I'm an occasional user of the 110 and I would happily pay to use the HOV lane but I'm not going to pay to have the privilege to pay.

This is the 21st Century, the cost of someone having a transponder is practically nil. I don't see why this fee is appropriate.

Zak Berrie: You're not alone in your thinking or your example. There's absolutely no way that a \$3 per month "convenience charge" can be justified. It's just a way to rip off the consumer. Moreover, the \$3 charge wasn't mentioned when this project was initially presented; it only came out months later when it was too late to call a halt. Typical of Metro.

The \$3 monthly maintenance fee for FasTrak, \$2 every three years for TAP cards that expires and lose all your funds for government to keep, they're all the same thing: hidden taxes disguised as "fees."

Bob

"It's just a way to rip off the consumer."

ExpressLanes is a big brother project; there are no consumers, just taxpayers.

There's a difference between a for profit company ripping off consumers to big brother government stealing more money away from taxpayers. The latter is far worse.

I have had a transponder from BayAreaFastrak for about 5 years and they only charge what I use on tolls. There is no monthly charge but I can't use it on the 110 Expresslanes when I carpool because it doesn't have a switch to 2 or 3+ riders. Bummer! This \$3.00 convenience fee tilts the project towards being more successful monetarily. There is the income from solo drivers, a monthly convenience fee from all, and interest from the \$40 that is paid in advance from each transponder. That should speed up the return on investment.

Shame on you, Metro, this is worse than the ever expiring TAPs. The Bay Area FasTrak maintenance fee = \$0. You can go a whole year without using the system, and then they send you a letter asking if you want to close the account.

FastTrak should come with a Tap card too. That would give motorist even more options....

The \$3 monthly account fee if I don;t use it enough is absolutely terrible. A MONTHLY fee for what?..To "maintain" your info in a database? What a scam! I used to use the carpool lanes once or twice a month to the airport and now I can't. To pay just to have an account with the privilege to pay? This should have been brought out earlier. I support Metro and public transit in general but this is just

gouging carpoolers that currently use the lanes for free.

THE MONTHLY FEE HAS TO GO!!!

I don't hold with it.

It's better than the equine scat with the 91, and the even worse equine scat with the toll portion of the 73, but I still don't hold with it.

Toll roads and toll lanes are shameless elitism. Plain and simple.

Better to dig up all the toll lanes, and lay trolley tracks.

This argument is irrelevant because the ExpressLanes are NOT AT ALL MEANT TO CONVENIENCE THE DRIVERS.

In fact, drivers are evil.

No, this project is meant to bring in money to buy new buses and rehabilitate stations for the silver line.

Hi Readers;

I know some of you have questions or concerns about the \$3 maintenance fee that some users will have to pay on their ExpressLanes account.

Here a few points that I think are worth considering, based on information from Metro officials:

- The fee will only be paid by those who use ExpressLanes three or fewer times each month. Those who use the ExpressLanes four or more times each month — including transit trips during peak periods on Foothill Transit, Gardena Transit, Torrance Transit and Metro — do

not have to pay the fee. To enroll in the program, transit riders must provide their TAP ID number on their FasTrak account. A transit rider does not need to carry their FasTrak transponder with them on the bus — just use a TAP card and the information is sent to your FasTrak account.

- The monthly fee is waived for those who sign up for the Equity Plan for low-income commuters — i.e. residents of Los Angeles County with an annual household income for a family of three at or below \$37,060.

To apply for the Equity Plan [download the application](http://www.metroexpresslanes.net/en/about/application_LLC_agreement.pdf) ([//www.metroexpresslanes.net/en/about/application_LLC_agreement.pdf](http://www.metroexpresslanes.net/en/about/application_LLC_agreement.pdf)) and provide proof of eligibility and submit by mail or visit one of our [walk-in center locations](http://www.metroexpresslanes.net/en/about/csc.shtml) ([//www.metroexpresslanes.net/en/about/csc.shtml](http://www.metroexpresslanes.net/en/about/csc.shtml)).

- Readers are correct that the Bay Area does not charge an account fee for FasTrak. The Bay Area has used FasTrak for many years to charge tolls for bridges and the one HOT lane in the region on the 680 freeway. They are the only toll agency in the State that does not charge an account fee. Things are different in Southern California. The HOT lanes that exist in Orange and San Diego counties do charge an account fee. The fees serve a variety of purposes: they provide an incentive for more people to use the lanes more — i.e. to take transit or carpool. They also help cover the overhead associated with the lanes, which includes billing, enforcement and providing transit. It's unlikely that any of the counties would be willing to subsidize the increase in overhead costs, especially if it meant having to maintain accounts of those from other counties looking to avoid the fee.

Hope that information helps,

Steve Hymon

Editor, The Source

“The fees serve a variety of purposes: they provide an incentive for more people to use the lanes more — i.e. to take transit or carpool. They also help cover the overhead associated with the lanes, which includes billing, enforcement and providing transit. It’s unlikely that any of the counties would be willing to subsidize the increase in overhead costs, especially if it meant having to maintain accounts of those from other counties looking to avoid the fee.”

So what’s the difference between this and a tax? Nothing is free in this world, but it’s not our fault that state and local government officials can’t balance the budget. That does NOT give the excuse for them or Metro to concoct “fees” as a way to disguise a tax.

I know you’re just trying to do your job and your job involves being paid as the lead blogger for Metro, but you need to be outraged about this yourself.

The problem with this is that there was absolutely no input from voters to implement this. We did not agree to any sort of maintenance fee. You yourself should be outraged with this proposal as a taxpayer yourself.

Are you saying government has the right to make more fees as they see fit without any input from its citizens? Isn’t exactly that the reason why what we fought against the

British? Our founding fathers must be rolling over in their graves!

How would you like it if one day they started to tack on “air breathing fee” just for living in Los Angeles with absolutely no voter input?

“But, it’s not a tax, it’s a fee.” Same thing, no taxation (or fee) without representation!

The account maintenance fee is nothing but a double tax measure. It’s time for everyone to step their foot down. Government should not be allowed to pass taxes or fees or whatever they want to call it without direct voter input.

Otherwise, we’ll be no better than Texas where they place \$22 in “fees” just to vote.

<http://www.latimes.com/news/opinion/commentary/la-oe-ackerman-texas-poll-tax-20120715,0,6684651.story>

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Frank M: Sorry, but in this case we’re consumers, not taxpayers because we’re choosing whether or not to use the FastTrak lanes. Of course, since we paid for the freeway lanes and, through our federal taxes, we’re also paying for the FastTrak “experimental” lanes, one could argue that in that sense we’re taxpayers. My biggest gripe is that if you want to use the lanes as they were originally intended (i.e., HOV lanes), you have to use a transponder — no toll gates, no automatic baskets for coins, etc. And if we use the lanes very infrequently — even if we do so with multiple riders in the car (as I will) — we get dinged \$3 a month.

Steve H: “The fee will only be paid by those who use

ExpressLanes three or fewer times each month. Of course, that's the main point of each of these comments. For people who regularly use the FastTrak lanes, it's not a problem; for those (like me) who use it infrequently and do so only when we have two or more people in the car, it's a ripoff. It's the same problem with those who use MetroRail only occasionally — even once. They still have to pay a fee for a card in addition to the fare.

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[...] Express Lanes Open on November 10 (The Source) [...]

Steve, I'm a lifelong Californian and had the pleasure of living in Northern California, the San Joaquin Valley, and the Southland. Our 58 counties, 35 air districts, and 18 MPOs are all unique laboratories of problem solving and governance. However, I often find that when I try to bring one good idea from one part of the state to another, I tend to run into "Things are different in xxxxx California," a refrain you unfortunately fell back on to justify maintenance fees (even though OCTA, who runs the 91, has an option to avoid them via an upfront fee)

I'll argue that things are not different in Southern California. You both have multi-county jurisdictions (9 county MTC to 6 county SCAG), you have plentiful toll corridors, you have multiple toll authorities (3 in the Bay if you count SFO, 4 for you if you count San Diego) and you have a state mandate that all the systems work together (Senate Bill 1523 passed in 1990). Southwest runs 100+ flights a day between the

Basin and the Bay and HSR is supposed to further integrate our economies. We all deal with CEQA, we all share the water, we all share the electricity grid, and we all deal with the crummy state budgeting process and outcomes. Things are not different in Southern California, and if the Bay can find a way to factor the cost of account maintenance into the cost of the toll, I'm confident the Southland can do the same thing.

In addition, SB 1523 created a uniform standard for transponders in our state. The fact that I cannot carpool in the 110 lanes with a Bay Area, San Diego or OC transponder (no mylar bag declaration or separate lane) does not keep with the spirit of SB 1523 and forces potential carpoolers from other parts of the region and state (including Orange/Riverside/San Diego County patrons) to either pay full price, not utilize the lanes, or have two accounts: one for their home market and one for Metro.

I would encourage staff from Metro, TCA, OCTA and San Diego to go on a study trip to the foreign land of "Northern California" to find out how they manage to have transponders without maintenance fees, so that even the occasional visitors to the Bay out in Sacramento, Stockton, and points beyond choose to get FasTrak and not clog up their roads with traffic. Your potential customers in Bakersfield, Palmdale, Redlands, Santa Barbara and Fresno thank you in advance.

Finally, you guys have one of the best marketing teams in transportation: you should run these operation decisions by them first instead of having them sell unfriendly policies after-the-fact. Something that seems less painful, such as an upfront purchase of the transponder, or a minimum

account balance, or something compatible with the statewide system, would have come out of the vetting process and earned goodwill for the agency.

Hey Paul —

First, thanks for your comments. I totally understand where you and others are coming from when it comes to the maintenance fee. I'm doing my best to explain where Metro is coming from with the fee and I think it remains to be seen if or how the fee impacts use of the ExpressLanes.

I think you raise a very interesting point about having policies vetted by the marketing team. I can think of pros and cons with this. There are certainly instances when the bureaucracy cannot grasp how an issue may be seen by the public. However, there are other times when I'm not sure I want marketing in charge of policy. The best analogy I can think of is campaign politics — in which it seems as if the consultants and ad men are driving the messaging instead of the candidates.

My two cents. Again, thanks much for taking the time to read the blog and write up your points — good stuff and helpful as Metro staff reads the blog, too.

Steve Hymon
Editor, The Source

Paul,

The “LA exceptionalism” plagues everywhere here.

Distance based fare pricing and private-public ownership of mass transit is the norm elsewhere in the world, but “things are different in LA.” When you try to get an explanation, the excuses make no sense at all. Then they dismiss the rebuttals because they can’t come back with a straightforward answer to claim their irrational decisions.

Fully refundable cards with no expiration dates are the norm elsewhere in CA but “things are different in LA.” When you try to get an explanation, again, the excuses make no sense at all. Then they dismiss the rebuttals because they can’t come back with a straightforward answer to claim their irrational decisions.

TAP is used in LA, but cannot be used on the SMBBB because “things are different at other municipal transit agencies.” When you try to get an explanation, again, the excuses make no sense at all. Then they dismiss the rebuttals because they can’t come back with a straightforward answer to claim their irrational decisions.

That’s how bureaucracy works in LA. “If it feels good do it” triumphs over rational common sense. When common sense questions are made, it gets brushed aside for the next generation to figure out on their own at their tax dollars.

Overall, LA really hasn’t learned nothing. No matter how forward-thinking we like to believe ourselves to be, deep down, we still say “LA does things better.” Just like how we got rid of the PE railcars and got duped by National City Lines when we said “LA does things better with the automobile culture,” we only realize the mistake when it’s too late.

If it feels good, do it. That's exactly how we threw away our once proud PE railcars in exchange for this car-culture mess we have today.

"If it feels good, do it." That's exactly how we're screwing up mass transit today.

i need application form for express lanes 110 hwy

Please see:

<https://www.metroexpresslanes.net/en/home/index.shtml> ([//www.metroexpresslanes.net/en/home/index.shtml](https://www.metroexpresslanes.net/en/home/index.shtml))

Steve Hymon
Editor, The Source

This is the very first time I've heard that carpoolers will need a transponder! How does that work? How are you going to know not to charge me a fee when I've got a carpool?

I just saw that the Governor signed AB2405, which grants electric vehicle (and some plug in hybrids) owners free access to HOT lanes. But it looks like the 110 and 10 Expresslanes are exempt from this until March 1, 2014. It looks like, at least for the time being, that EV owners will not get free HOT access driving solo. Is this correct?

Here is the text:

The bill would exclude a toll imposed for passage on a toll road or toll highway, that is not an HOT lane, a toll imposed for crossing a state-owned bridge, or, until March 1, 2014, a

ton imposed for passage in HOT lanes designated for State Highway Route 10 or 110, from this exemption. The bill would provide that these changes shall be known as the Choose Clean Cars Act of 2012.

Hi Robert;

That is correct — there is an exemption for the HOT Lanes. As I said in the headlines, providing free access to single motorists defeats the very purpose of HOT lanes as well as carpool lanes by taking space from carpoolers and single motorists paying tolls that support transit.

Steve Hymon
Editor, The Source

\$3.00 per month just to have the account? We pay for road upkeep with gas taxes. Enforcement pays for itself by fines. No matter what anyone says, it's income in the form of fees, nothing more or less. Government doesn't really care about traffic, just an excuse.

How stupid is this. Basically everyone in the city needs to have a transponder. What a drag if you just use the 110 a couple of times a year. You can have several in your car but you still have to use regular lanes instead of carpool because you don't have the time to get the transponder. Just dumb. Make it easy and let the multiple passenger cars drive as normal instead of this crap.

It's another rip off. Anytime you hear Mark Getridof Thomas is involved you can bet it is a money grabbing event. This is

not what the tax payers payed for years ago. The traffic is the least of the reason why this greedy plan is only a plot for the rich. The lanes are for carpoolers and adding one person riders for pay is and only is the worst thing to cause traffic jams in the lanes. Some people feel because they can afford to pay, they should be allowed to travel in the lanes designated for 2 or more and not for single occupant travelers at no cost.