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Caltrans District Director and Metro Board Member Doug Failing leads media briefing on status of congestion reduction demonstration project. Channels 2/9, 4, 7, 11/13, KNX/KFWB radio, the Los Angeles Times, the San Gabriel Valley Tribune, Pasadena Star News, Whittier Daily News-LA Opinion and the Chinese Daily News attended. From left, Directors John Fasana, Mark Ridley-Thomas, Doug Failing, Rita Robinson, Congestion Reduction Demo Initiative Executive Officer Stephanie Wiggins, and Caltrans Deputy District Director Frank Quon.

Photo by Luis Inzunza

Metro, Caltrans update media on Congestion Reduction Demonstration Project

- Public Hearings scheduled on proposed tolling prices for Freeway ExpressLanes

By RICK JAGER

(June 9, 2009) Metro and Caltrans officials held a media briefing Friday, June 5, on the status of the one-year demonstration program that will convert existing carpool lanes on the I-10 (El Monte Busway) and the I-110 (Harbor Freeway Transitway) freeways to toll lanes.

With a video traffic screen as a backdrop, officials outlined the program and announced a series of public hearings scheduled in June to gather public input on a range of tolling pricing proposals.

No toll for those who rideshare

Present day carpoolers, vanpoolers and public transit users will not be charged a toll to use the lanes.

Solo drivers, who currently are not allowed to use the lanes, will be allowed to use the ExpressLanes by paying a toll. No tolls would be charged in mixed-flow traffic lanes.

Funding for this demonstration project is being provided by a special \$210

million grant from the U.S. Department of Transportation. A majority of the funding will be used to enhance public transit options along the two corridors by providing an additional 57 transit buses and to increase the number of vanpool and carpool participants.

Increase capacity for crowded freeways

The purpose of the demonstration is to squeeze more capacity out of crowded freeways in a region where building new freeways is almost impossible because land is not available and there is a lack of funding for new construction.

The project will provide the opportunity for individuals to choose better transportation alternatives and provides a choice for solo drivers to shift to more convenient express transit options that will serve the corridor route.

A presentation on the demonstration project as well as various toll pricing scenarios, goals and performance measures will be presented to the public at the hearings. Proposed tolls could range from 25 cents to \$1.40 a mile for solo drivers using the ExpressLanes.

Toll-pricing variables

The toll price will be variable depending on traffic flow. The goal is to ensure vehicles in the ExpressLanes travel between 45 and 50 miles per hour. It would be cheaper to access the ExpressLanes during non-peak hours, or opt for public transit, carpools and vanpools and pay no tolls.

Monies generated by the tolls will be used to pay for the operation of the tolling system as well as be reinvested back into the corridors served by improving public transportation options.

Metro will hold a series of community public hearings this month to gather public input on a range of tolling pricing proposals that would be implemented in December 2010 as part of the agency's Congestion Reduction Demonstration Project (ExpressLanes) on portions of the I-10 and I-110 freeways.

Following the public hearings, a staff recommendation on toll pricing will be made to Metro's Board of Directors for their consideration at their July 23, 2009 meeting.

Schedule of public hearings

The following are the dates and locations of upcoming public hearings on toll pricing:

- Saturday, June 13, 2009, 10 a.m. – Noon, Metro Board Room 3rd Fl., One Gateway Plaza, Los Angeles,
- Monday, June 15, 2009, 6 p.m. – 8 p.m., Carson Community Center, Adult Activity Room, 801 E. Carson St., Carson
- Wednesday, June 17, 2009, 6 p.m. – 8 p.m., Metro San Gabriel Valley Service Sector, Council Chambers, 3449 Santa Anita Ave. 3rd Fl., El Monte
- Saturday, June 20, 2009, 10 a.m. – Noon, West Covina Civic Center, Community Room, 1444 W. Garvey Ave., West Covina
- Monday, June 22, 2009, 6 p.m. – 8 p.m., Civic Center Library,

Meeting Room, 3301 Torrance Blvd., Torrance

Those unable to attend the public hearings can submit written testimony to Stephanie Wiggins, Metro Executive Officer, One Gateway Plaza – Mail Stop 99-25-5, Los Angeles, CA 90012 or fax their comments to (213) 922-7464. Additional information is also available at www.metro.net/expresslanes.

All written comments need to be submitted no later than July 14, 2009.

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