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Funding for the Congestion Reduction Demonstration Project is being provided by a special \$210 million grant from the U.S. Department of Transportation, announced by Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa at a news conference held Feb. 27, 2008, adjacent to a freeway onramp. Pictured here are then-U.S. Transportation Secretary Mary Peters, California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, Mayor Villaraigosa, California Transportation Secretary Dale Bonner and Metro Board Member Pam O'Connor. *(Photo by Jose Ubaldo)*

Metro Board Approves Toll Rates for Freeway Express Lanes as Part of Congestion Reduction Demonstration Project

By Rick Jager

A Metro News Release report

(July 23, 2009) The Metro Board of Directors approved toll rates to be used on portions of the I-10/I-110 ExpressLanes following a series of public hearings that gathered public input on the tolling pricing proposal to be implemented as part of the agency's Congestion Reduction Demonstration Project (ExpressLanes) that will debut late next year.

The new adopted toll rates will range from 25 cents to \$1.40 a mile for solo drivers using the ExpressLanes. Tolls will go into effect with the opening of the ExpressLanes in December 2010. Staff estimates that the average trip on the I-10 ExpressLanes will be nine miles with an average toll of \$6 depending on demand and the average trip on the I-110 ExpressLanes is five miles for an average toll of \$5.

The annual revenue estimated from the tolls is approximately \$21 million. The net toll revenues will be reinvested in the corridor where they are generated for transit and carpool lane improvements. Adoption of the toll rates and toll policy will now move forward as part of the draft environmental document which is expected to be circulated this fall.

In partnership with Caltrans, Metro is embarking on a 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 high-occupancy toll lanes.

No toll for transit users

Present day carpoolers, vanpoolers, motorcycles, 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 will 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.

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.

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

Rewards program may offer toll credit

Staff also is considering implementing an ExpressLanes Rewards Program to provide a toll credit or transit credit of \$5 to frequent transit riders on the I-10 and I-110 ExpressLanes. To earn the \$5 credit, transit riders would have to ride 16 round-trips during the peak period over a 30 day period. Transit riders would choose to apply the credit to their toll account or transit fare. The \$5 credit would expire after 60 days. Frequent transit riders could earn up to \$60 toll/transit credit over the one-year demonstration period.

The rewards program would apply to all Los Angeles County transit bus lines operating during the peak periods on the ExpressLanes including Torrance Transit, Gardena Municipal Bus Lines, Foothill Transit, LADOT and Metro. ExpressLanes toll revenues would reimburse operators and Metro operations for the \$5 transit credit.

A wide range of low-income mitigation measures will be surveyed, including enhanced transit investments, various types of credit schemes including transponders pre-loaded with toll credits for low income commuters and other strategies. The assessment will be completed in the fall and reported to the Metro Board for review and approval.