

# **I-405 Improvement Project and 405 Express Lanes Frequently Asked Questions**

The questions and answers below provide current information on the project to improve Interstate 405 (I-405) in Orange County from State Route 73 to Interstate 605. As the project develops, information will be available on the Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA) website: [www.octa.net/405improvement](http://www.octa.net/405improvement).

## **1. Why are improvements needed on I-405?**

The I-405 freeway experiences heavy traffic congestion and conditions are expected to worsen. Built in the 1960s, the freeway carries between 257,000 and 370,000 vehicles per day depending on location. Near the L.A. County line, the I-405 is the most heavily traveled freeway in the nation and both the regular lanes and carpool lanes are congested daily during rush hour and on weekends.

Traffic along the corridor is expected to grow approximately 35 percent by 2040. Additional lanes and other improvements are needed to improve traffic flow, accommodate growing traffic demand, relieve congestion, and improve overall mobility. The I-405 Improvement Project is critical in order to accommodate expected employment, population and housing growth in not only Orange County but throughout Southern California.

## **2. What is planned for the I-405 Improvement Project?**

The project will improve 16 miles of I-405 between the SR-73 freeway in Costa Mesa and I-605 near the L.A. County line. The project includes adding one regular lane in each direction from Euclid Street to I-605 and making improvements to freeway entrances, exits and bridges. It also will construct the 405 Express Lanes, two lanes in each direction from SR-73 to I-605. The new express lanes – incorporating the existing carpool lanes and connectors that opened in 2014 – will give solo drivers the choice to speed up their commute for a toll, and carpoolers may ride free or at a discounted rate pending the results of the project traffic and revenue study.

## **3. What are the goals of the 405 Express Lanes?**

The OCTA board of directors, which is leading the freeway improvement project, voted to adopt a number of goals that would guide the development and implementation of the 405 Express Lanes. The goals focus on providing express lanes customers with a reliable commute while maximizing the number of cars that can utilize the lanes at free-flow speeds, and encouraging ridesharing and transit use. The complete list of board-adopted 405 Express Lanes goals:

- Provide express lanes customers with a safe, reliable, predictable commute.
- Optimize throughput at free-flow speeds.
- Increase average vehicle occupancy.

- Balance capacity and demand to serve customers who pay tolls as well as people who rideshare or use transit.
- Generate sufficient revenue to sustain the financial viability of the express lanes.
- Ensure all covenants in the financing documents are met.
- Ensure any potential net excess toll revenues are used for Interstate 405 corridor improvements.

#### **4. Under which toll pricing model will the 405 Express Lanes operate?**

The OCTA board voted to implement congestion management pricing on the 405 Express Lanes. This type of pricing was pioneered on the 91 Express Lanes, also operated by OCTA.

Congestion management pricing is designed to optimize express lanes traffic at free-flow speeds. To accomplish this OCTA monitors hourly traffic volumes. Tolls are increased when traffic volumes consistently reach a trigger point where traffic flow can become unstable. If traffic drops below the optimal traffic volume, tolls are lowered to encourage usage.

The tolls can vary by hour, day of the week and direction of travel. Traffic volumes are continuously monitored and if warranted, tolls are adjusted quarterly. This approach balances traffic engineering with good public policy and gives customers an opportunity to know the toll price before they make their trip.

#### **5. How will the tolls be set on the 405 Express Lanes portion of the project?**

OCTA is in the final stages of completing its investment grade Traffic and Revenue Study to help determine the toll structure for the 405 Express Lanes. The study takes into account existing traffic, projected traffic, employment, population and households to develop various tolling scenarios.

Throughout this process, OCTA has been clear that the desire was to have two-plus carpools use the express lanes for free or at a reduced cost, pending the outcome of the Traffic and Revenue study.

The indications from the study are that if two-plus carpools are free during rush hours, there are concerns about how they would function operationally, and result in peak-period tolls of up to \$15.46 in today's dollars. This means that customers may not be assured of a free-flowing, fast and reliable commute.

There are three other scenarios being studied. For the length of the 14-mile express lanes, preliminary analysis suggests that in today's dollars, tolls could range from an average of approximately \$9 in the peak to \$2 off-peak. Lower tolls are offered for shorter distance trips that enter or exit the express lanes at intermediate access points.

These scenarios, which offer different tolling options for two-plus and three-plus carpools, have been narrowed down for the OCTA board to consider. A decision on the toll policy, as well as the project financing plan, is expected to be made in the coming weeks by the OCTA board of directors.

**6. Are FasTrak transponders required to use the 405 Express Lanes?**

The 405 Express Lanes will utilize electronic tolling to keep traffic flowing and there will be no cash payments or toll booths. Because of this, transponders will be required for customers to use the express lanes when they open. OCTA will continue to explore technology that may in the future allow drivers to use the express lanes without a transponder.

**7. What is the overall benefit to the project to include the 405 Express Lanes?**

Those who choose to pay a toll improve traffic for everyone by freeing up space in the regular lanes, including the additional lane in each direction that is being added as part of the project. Also, if there are excess toll revenues beyond operational, maintenance and financing costs, that provides funding for additional improvements in the corridor. As an example, to date the 91 Express Lanes has provided more than \$15 million for improvements to the freeway and for public transit in the 91 corridor.

Adding Express Lanes, in addition to the new regular lanes, benefits all people who use the I-405. Rush-hour commutes in the regular lanes on I-405 are expected to improve by almost 30 minutes versus only building one regular lane in each direction. The bottom line is you don't have to pay one penny more and you'll be home to your family a half-hour sooner.

**8. What is the schedule moving forward?**

The OCTA board of directors is expected to vote on a toll policy and financing plan by the end of May. Throughout the summer, OCTA will secure the project financing and enter into an operating toll agreement with Caltrans. A contract to design and build the project is expected to be awarded in late 2016. Construction is slated to get underway in 2017 and take approximately five years.