

# TOLLED EXPRESS LANES // Frequently Asked Questions



## FAST FORWARD

RIVERSIDE COUNTY TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

# FAQ



### 1. Why will tolled express lanes be added to the 91 in Riverside County?

Traffic congestion on eastbound 91 between Anaheim and Corona during afternoon commute hours is among the worst in the nation, and our population continues to grow. The Riverside County Transportation Commission (RCTC) is adding both regular lanes and tolled express lanes to the 91 to reduce congestion and delays, enhance emergency response, improve access to businesses, and provide a higher quality of life for the region. The express lanes offer a choice for faster, reliable travel within the corridor.

### 2. With all the traffic on the 91, wouldn't it be better to add four lanes that anyone can use?

Traffic demand is so high on the 91 that it would take 11 regular lanes in each direction to relieve congestion during peak hours. Adding two regular lanes each way will not ease the stop-and-go traffic we experience daily. Studies show that in congested periods, express lanes actually move more traffic than twice the number of regular lanes. The new express lanes will give you a choice and reduce your time on the road.

### 3. Will the express lanes replace the current carpool lanes?

Yes. The carpool lanes in this area are not operating as designed and are nearly as congested as regular lanes during peak times. With the new express lanes, vehicles with three or more occupants and a transponder can use the express lanes for free, except when traveling east, Monday through Friday from 4 pm to 6 pm, when the express lanes are half-price for carpoolers. This is the same "Three Ride Free" policy as the Orange County 91 Express Lanes.

### 4. How do express lanes work?

Express lanes relieve traffic by charging a toll to use these lanes. The Riverside County express lanes will help maintain free-flow operations using variable pricing – pricing that changes based on the demand for these lanes – operating under the principle of supply and demand. The tolls will vary based on actual traffic congestion on the roadway, with higher tolls charged during times of higher travel demand and lower tolls charged during periods of lower travel demand. The Orange County 91 Express Lanes operate using this same approach. In general, traffic volumes are monitored for a 12-week period, and consistent occurrences of high or low peak hour traffic volumes are identified. Based on the actual traffic volumes observed, toll rates are raised or lowered. Each time you use the express lanes, your account will be charged. The express lanes will not have cash toll booths; a transponder will be required.

### 5. We already pay gasoline taxes and have a local sales tax for transportation. Why tolls?

In the past, gas taxes were enough to fund our state's transportation needs. Over time, though, the value of gas taxes has eroded, with neither federal nor state taxes tied to inflation. In addition, with more fuel efficient vehicles on the road, drivers are paying less in gas taxes. Another problem is that the demand on our highways continues to climb. The California Legislative Analyst's Office reports that the number of miles we travel each year has grown by 31 percent since 1992. Overall, gas tax revenue doesn't cover even basic highway maintenance, much less infrastructure improvements. Our local Measure A half-cent sales tax is not enough to meet the increasing demands placed on our transportation network. Tolls will provide the additional funds we need to build the 91 Project.

Many states rely on tolls to help build and maintain their transportation systems. Tolls are seen as one of the fairest types of funding, since they are tied directly to use of the lanes, and drivers have a choice of using regular lanes if they would rather not pay tolls. Without this toll revenue, the 91 Project likely would not be built for another 30 years, since tax dollars won't cover the cost.

The express lanes will be fully funded by tolls from drivers. This revenue will pay for not only the new express lanes, but also part of the costs of the new regular lanes and improvements to bridges, ramps, local streets and six interchanges within the project area.

#### **6. Don't express lanes help just wealthy drivers who can afford to use them?**

No. The Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA) has learned through its customer surveys that people of all income levels use these lanes and like having a choice. Most drivers use their transponder just once or twice per week – when they need it most. For example, a late fee for child care may be more than the cost of using express lanes, so you may choose to use these lanes if you are running late to pick up your children. In addition, express lanes help public buses reach more destinations on time, which helps everyone who uses public transit.

#### **7. Are the 91 Express Lanes in Orange County fully used now?**

Yes. The 91 Express Lanes in Orange County are operating at the levels for which they are designed. They carry twice as many vehicles per lane as regular lanes during peak periods, and speeds are three to four times faster. Express lanes are intended to be free from congestion. If these lanes were crowded, then there would be no incentive to pay a toll to use them.

#### **8. How will the toll revenue be used?**

Revenue will be used to operate and maintain the express lanes and repay construction costs. Any remaining revenue will help pay for the new regular lanes and other 91 Project features, such as new bridges, ramps, interchanges and local street improvements. By law, revenues generated by the toll lanes must stay on the 91 corridor.

#### **9. How much time can I save by using the new express lanes?**

During the heaviest commute times, you can expect to save up to 78 minutes per round trip. Using the express lanes for eight miles between the Orange County/Riverside County line and I-15 is expected to take 7 to 10 minutes each way in the express lanes.

#### **10. Where will the express lanes start and stop? Will there be a direct connection to Interstate 15?**

Two express lanes will be built in each direction on the 91 between the Orange County/Riverside County line and I-15 in Corona. There will be a direct connection between these lanes and a new express lane to be built on I-15 south of the 91 to north of Ontario Avenue.

You will be able to enter and exit the express lanes at three locations:

- On the 91 west of Green River Road
- On the 91 at the 15 interchange
- On the 15 north of Ontario Avenue

#### **11. What's a transponder and how do I get one? How much does it cost?**

A transponder is a pocket-sized radio transmitter that allows electronic collection of tolls. The transponder is mounted inside your windshield and keeps a record of your use of tolled facilities for billing purposes. You must have a transponder to use the 91 Express Lanes; there will be no cash toll booths. You can open an account and receive a transponder several ways:

- Online at [www.91expresslanes.com](http://www.91expresslanes.com)
- By phone at 951-278-9191 or 800-600-9191
- By U.S. mail at 91 Express Lanes, P.O. Box 9191, Corona, CA 92878
- In person at the Corona Customer Service Center, 2275 Sampson Avenue, Suite 100 in Corona or at the OCTA Store, 550 S. Main Street in Orange.

Various monthly plans are available, depending upon how often you use the express lanes. Typically there are fees associated with purchasing and maintaining an account, even if you do not use your transponder that month. For details, refer to the website or telephone numbers above.

#### **12. There are a lot of toll roads in California. Do I need a different transponder for each system? What if I already own a transponder?**

A number of agencies operate tolled roadways across California. You may use the same transponder statewide. If you already own a transponder for use in California, you will be able to use it on the new Riverside County express lanes.

#### **13. What is the average cost to use the express lanes?**

The new express lanes in Riverside County will use a pricing structure similar to the 91 Express Lanes in Orange County, with lower rates during non-peak traffic hours and higher rates during peak traffic hours. Currently, tolls vary from \$1.35 to \$9.55 for the 10-mile stretch of the Orange County express lanes, depending upon the time of day, day of the week and direction you are traveling. For a look at toll rates used on the 91 Express Lanes in Orange County, go to: [www.91expresslanes.com/schedules.asp](http://www.91expresslanes.com/schedules.asp).

#### **14. When will the Riverside County express lanes open?**

Construction began in 2014 and new lanes are expected to open in 2017. To keep track of construction progress and to receive notification of the opening date, register to receive updates through the website, [sr91project.info](http://sr91project.info), call the helpline, 877-770-9191, or email [sr91project@rctc.org](mailto:sr91project@rctc.org).