

# GET ON YOUR WAY



## Frequently Asked Questions

### Why were the I-15 Express Lanes built?

The I-15 Express Lanes were designed to offer choices and to provide high occupancy vehicles (HOVs) like carpools and vanpools, zero-emission vehicles with an approved Clean Air Vehicle Sticker issued by the California DMV, motorcycles, MTS *Rapid*, and *FasTrak* customers with a smoother, quicker, and more reliable trip along the I-15 corridor. The Express Lanes provide congestion relief and help ease demand on the general purpose lanes. A moveable barrier separates the northbound and southbound Express Lanes, which enables operators to increase or decrease the number of lanes in each direction to manage congestion.

### Who can use the I-15 Express Lanes?

Carpools, vanpools, transit vehicles, clean air vehicles, and motorcycles can use the Express Lanes for free – all day, every day. No transponder is necessary. Solo drivers can get *FasTrak* online or at Costco to use the lanes for a fee, determined by a distance-based dynamic pricing system.

### How can I get more information about transportation alternatives like carpools, vanpools, and transit?

The SANDAG iCommute program provides carpool resources, a subsidized vanpool program with ride matching assistance, and transit solutions. To learn more, visit [511sd.com/iCommute](http://511sd.com/iCommute), email [iCommute@sandag.org](mailto:iCommute@sandag.org), or call 511 and say “iCommute.”

### Can I reach the same destinations from the Express Lanes and general purpose lanes?

Yes, the Express Lanes provide flexibility for you to reach your destination, and help keep your travel time reliable. Five Direct Access Ramps (DARs) make it easy to enter or exit the Express Lanes directly from local streets, without crossing multiple freeway lanes. There are more than 16 other access points where you can get in or out of the Express Lanes.

## I-15 Express Lanes Signage

### Why are new signs being installed on the I-15 Express Lanes?

Research determined that posted information about toll rates and who can use the lanes isn't easily understood on the existing I-15 Express Lanes signage. With input from focus groups, new signs were designed to more clearly display who can use the Express Lanes, estimated travel times, and the current *FasTrak* toll rates.

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## Will the toll rates change when the new signs are installed?

No. The *FasTrak* toll rates will continue to be calculated using the same formula, based on the level of traffic in the Express Lanes. No changes are expected due to the installation of new signs.

## Will there be any changes to who can use the I-15 Express Lanes?

No changes will be made to rules regarding who can use the Express Lanes. Carpools, vanpools, transit services, permitted clean air vehicles, and motorcycles will still be able to use the lanes for free all day, every day, without a transponder. Solo drivers with *FasTrak* will still be able to pay a toll to use the Express Lanes.

## How long will it take to install the new signs?

The entire project, including installation, programming, and testing, is planned to occur between February and June 2018. Signs will be installed in the northbound lanes first, beginning at the south end of the Express Lanes and moving north. Signs will be installed in the southbound lanes next, beginning at the north end of the Express Lanes and moving south. Signs near transit centers and leading to Direct Access Ramps will be installed last, with the final signs anticipated to be installed in late March.

## Will there be any traffic impacts while the signs are being installed?

To minimize impacts to traffic, new signs will be installed at night, between 9 p.m. and 5 a.m. During those work windows, drivers can expect lane closures in the Express Lanes and general purpose lanes, in the area in which the new sign(s) are being installed on that particular night. Traffic impacts will be minimized to the extent possible. Regular *FasTrak* toll rates will apply during sign installation work windows.

## What do the new signs look like?

The new signs are similar to existing signs, with several key improvements. The minimum toll rate will no longer be displayed. Instead, the new signs will list toll rates and estimated travel times to upcoming freeway connectors (e.g., SR 163, SR 56, or SR 78). In addition, in place of the diamond HOV symbol, most signs will say "HOV 2+ free" to help clarify that high occupancy vehicles, or carpools, can use the Express Lanes for free.



## Why does "HOV ONLY" sometimes appear on the overhead message signs?

"HOV ONLY" is displayed on the overhead signs when the Express Lanes are reaching full capacity. Solo drivers with *FasTrak* accounts should not enter the Express Lanes when "HOV ONLY" is displayed. If you enter the lanes after the "HOV ONLY" message is displayed, you will be charged the maximum toll amount, currently \$8, and assessed a fine equal to the maximum toll amount. If you are already in the Express Lanes before the "HOV ONLY" message is displayed, you may stay in the Express Lanes for the remainder of your trip.

## Who can use the Express Lanes when the overhead signs say "HOV ONLY?"

Any vehicle traveling with at least two people qualifies as a high occupancy vehicle, or HOV. These vehicles, along with permitted clean air vehicles and motorcycles with any number of passengers, can use the Express Lanes when the overhead signs say "HOV ONLY" – for free without a transponder."

## ***I-15 Express Lanes Barrier***

### **Why is the I-15 Express Lanes barrier moved?**

The I-15 Express Lanes barrier is moved to relieve corridor congestion, to collect traffic data for analysis, and for maintenance. The traffic data collected on the I-15 Express Lanes and general purpose lanes is continually analyzed to determine the best operational strategy for the corridor. The barrier also is regularly moved for maintenance to ensure the system is kept operational as well as free from debris and trash. In order to properly maintain the system, the barrier must be moved at least once each week.

### **When is the barrier moved?**

The barrier is moved Monday through Thursday mornings (typically 3:30-5:30 a.m.) to make three southbound Express Lanes available to relieve congestion for rush hour commuters. After the morning commute, the barrier is moved back to its standard configuration with two southbound and two northbound lanes (typically 10:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.). It takes approximately two hours to move the entire 16 miles of moveable barrier.

### **Who decides when to move the barrier and how often is this decision evaluated?**

The I-15 Corridor Management Team - composed of Caltrans, San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG), and San Diego Metropolitan Transit System (MTS) staff - meets quarterly to discuss strategies to improve overall travel along the corridor. This team determines when to move the barrier or consider other possible operational improvements, based on on-going evaluation and analysis of transportation data. The level of effort and committed participation by this team is unprecedented and is the first known corridor management team in the nation.

### **How was the barrier move schedule determined?**

Between July 2015 and November 2016, the barrier was moved on Thursdays to accommodate three southbound lanes in the morning and three northbound lanes in the evening. The barrier was moved on Thursdays because data showed the heaviest traffic volumes. Data collected when traffic is heaviest provides the most opportunity to determine how to best manage the various modes of transportation when the highway is congested.

Data gathered by the I-15 Corridor Management Team showed an overall operational improvement during the morning commute when the lanes were configured with three southbound and one northbound lane; however, data did not show an overall benefit for the afternoon commute when the configuration was reversed. As a result, the Thursday afternoon barrier move was discontinued in November 2016 and the morning barrier move was planned to be extended to Monday through Thursday morning beginning in early 2017. Traffic on Fridays does not follow the same pattern as other weekdays, so the barrier is not moved on Friday.

### **Is northbound morning traffic impacted when the barrier is moved?**

Traffic data collected since July 2015, when the barrier started being moved on Thursday mornings, does not show a negative impact to northbound morning traffic when the lanes are configured with three southbound and one northbound lane. The data shows that average traffic speeds in the one northbound lane are maintained at 65 mph or above. The Corridor Management Team will continue to evaluate traffic patterns on an ongoing basis.

## Is it okay to drive in the Express Lanes when the barrier is being moved?

Yes, you can drive in the Express Lanes as normal when the barrier transfer machine is in motion. Caltrans displays a message on overhead signs to alert drivers that the machine is in motion.

## Why don't you have more southbound lanes when there is a major event at the stadium?

A traffic analysis done for a previous event showed that the southbound backups that occur during major events at the stadium are not lessened by having more southbound I-15 Express Lanes available.

The event backup generally occurs between Friars Road and State Route 52 and, on occasion, as far north as Mira Mesa Boulevard. When the general purpose lanes south of the Express Lanes are heavily congested, the traffic coming from the north is slowed significantly regardless of whether one, two, or three Express Lanes feed into the backed up general purpose lanes. Therefore, the normal Express Lanes configuration is maintained on major event days.

## ***FasTrak Tolling***

### Where can I get a *FasTrak* transponder?

There are three ways to get a *FasTrak* transponder:

- 1) Sign up online at [511sd.com/FasTrak](http://511sd.com/FasTrak).
- 2) Visit [participating Costco](#) locations and get \$40 in tolls for \$34.99.
- 3) Visit the Customer Service Center at 1129 La Media Road, San Diego 92154.

### How does the *FasTrak* electronic toll collection system work?

A *FasTrak* transponder is a small radio device that is mounted on the windshield inside the vehicle. It identifies the customer's prepaid toll account. Overhead antennas in the I-15 Express Lanes read the transponder and deduct the correct toll electronically from the customer's prepaid *FasTrak* account. Customers traveling in the Express Lanes with one or more passengers should place the transponder inside the provided Mylar bag to travel without toll charges for that trip.

### How much does it cost to use the I-15 Express Lanes?

For solo drivers, the toll ranges between 50 cents and \$8, depending on congestion at the time the lanes are entered and the total distance traveled. Every three minutes, the system recalculates the per-mile toll rate based on the level of traffic in the Express Lanes, ensuring traffic flows freely.

The toll rate you see on the signs located just before each entrance to the Express Lanes shows one or more possible fares for trips to upcoming freeway interchanges, such as SR 56. The toll rate also is available on the traffic map at [511sd.com/traffic](http://511sd.com/traffic).

The toll is calculated based on when you enter the Express Lanes; changes during your trip do not impact your toll. The correct toll is automatically deducted from your *FasTrak* account.

### **How are funds collected by *FasTrak* tolls used?**

*FasTrak* toll revenue is used to operate and maintain the Express Lanes and fund congestion relief projects along the corridor, including subsidizing *Rapid* transit services. Funds also are used to operate the movable barrier in the center of the Express Lanes to improve traffic flow during peak travel periods and to relieve congestion caused by traffic incidents.

### **How are toll rates affected when the Express Lanes barrier moves?**

When the barrier in the center of the Express Lanes is moved to accommodate three lanes in one direction and one lane in the other direction, extra capacity is created in one direction and capacity is reduced in the other direction. Because of changes in capacity, toll rates may be lower in the three-lane direction and higher in the one-lane direction.

### **How are the minimum and maximum toll rates determined?**

Toll rates are determined based on congestion at the time the lanes are entered. Every three minutes, the system recalculates the per-mile toll rate based on the level of traffic in the Express Lanes. Tolls on the I-15 Express Lanes vary between 50 cents and \$8, depending on distance traveled and traffic in the lanes. The 50 cents minimum and \$8 maximum tolls are set by the SANDAG Board of Directors, and cannot change without prior approval from the Board.

## ***MTS Rapid***

### **How does *Rapid* work on the I-15 Express Lanes?**

MTS currently operates four *Rapid* routes that use the I-15 Express Lanes to carry riders between North County University Town Center, Sorrento Mesa, and Downtown. These routes feature comfortable new vehicles, frequent and reliable service, and improved station amenities. Visit [RapidMTS.com](http://RapidMTS.com) to learn more about these services.

Transit stations and Park & Ride lots are located along the I-15 corridor and are connected to the Express Lanes via Direct Access Ramps (DARs). These DARs allow *Rapid* vehicles and other Express Lanes users to bypass general lanes and directly enter the Express Lanes.

### **Is *Rapid* service impacted when the Express Lanes barrier moves?**

*Rapid* routes operate normally and adhere to their regular schedule when the Express Lanes barrier is moved.

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