Thousands of citations issued to motorists on the 110 as Metro preps for new toll lanes on the 10 Freeway

By Maritza Velazquez, SGVN

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As Los Angeles County prepares to open the 11 miles of toll lanes along the Harbor Freeway, drivers face the possibility of paying up to $445 for riding on the lanes without the required equipment by 2014.

Following the opening of 11 miles of Metro Expresslanes along the Harbor Freeway, Metro officials are preparing for the opening of the toll lanes along a 14-mile stretch of the 10 freeway, beginning in El Monte.

New giant display message boards have been installed on the freeway that present motorists with information relating to the Expresslanes program Tuesday, November 27, 2012. (SGVN/Photo by Walt Mancini)

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"They're giving the public a chance to learn that you have to pay," he said.

So far, the number of motorists participating in the program and purchasing transponders are exceeding Metro's expectations.

The agency anticipated that roughly 35,000 people would purchase transponders by the opening of the 110 Express Lanes Nov. 10, Jager said. However, in just two weeks since their debut, that number has nearly doubled.

About 25,000 transponders were purchased by the Automobile Club of Southern California (AAA) and as of Monday, just 700 remained in the company's warehouse, according to spokeswoman Marie Montgomery.

AAA members receive a 20 percent discount, she said.

Transponders are also available for purchase at Costco, Albertson's and at walk-in centers at 500 W. 190th Street in Gardena, or at the El Monte bus station, 3501 Santa Anita Ave.

A customer service representative that works out of both locations said that although the 10 Freeway Express Lanes aren't open yet, he's seeing people buying transponders in El Monte to avoid long lines in Gardena.

Roughly 30 people inquire about obtaining new transponders every day, while the number of people actually making the purchase is about half that, said Lejerion Carr, as he worked at the El Monte station.

The project is a one-year, $290 million experiment funded primarily through a $210 million grant from the U.S. Department of Transportation to promote and study using pricing to reduce traffic congestion in major U.S. cities.

Transit experts say it will likely translate to relief for the heavily-traveled 10 Freeway corridor, where Metro has constructed an additional lane to accommodate carpoolers and paying solo drivers.

That stretch of freeway is one of the busiest in Southern California, receiving 210,000 to 240,000 vehicles every day in both directions, according to Duarte mayor and Metro board member John Fasana.

Legislation mandates that vehicles on the 10 must carry three people to use the carpool lane during peak times - from 5 a.m. to 9 a.m. and 4 p.m. to 7 p.m. After the opening of the toll lanes, cars with only two people during those periods can pay a fee to use the lanes.

Tolls will range between $.25 and $1.40 per mile, depending on traffic.

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