Metro: Toll lanes to begin on 10 Freeway on Feb. 23

By Steve Scauzillo, Staff Writer twitter.com/stevscaz San Gabriel Valley Tribune

In less than a month, solo riders will be allowed to ride the carpool lanes 24 hours a day on the 10 Freeway between the 605 Freeway and Alameda Street for a toll.

Metro has announced the express lanes program will begin Feb. 23 along an 14-mile stretch of the 10 Freeway between El Monte and Los Angeles.

"We are excited to announce the opening date and want to encourage San Gabriel Valley commuters to get their FasTrak transponders now so they will be ready to enjoy all the benefits of the ExpressLanes when the lanes open on the 10 freeway in February," said Duarte Council member and Metro Board Member John Fasana in a written statement.

Fees for noncarpoolers will be assessed between 25 cents and $1.40 a mile, depending on the volume of traffic, according to Metro. The average toll is expected to be around $6, Metro said. Motorists riding the regular lanes are not charged.

The addition of solo riders is part of a $290 million Metro experimental program that was inaugurated Nov. 10 on 11 miles of the 110 Freeway south of Los Angeles to Artesia. The stated goal is to add riders to the carpool lanes and reduce congestion on the regular lanes.

Since then, Metro and Caltrans have expanded the hybrid carpool lanes on the 10 from one to two lanes in each direction and have added computerized message signs and electronic detection devices. Motorists will hear beeps in their cars as Metro tests the system before it begins.

"Express lanes are the next logical progression in reducing congestion as the state moves from freeway building to intensive operations management," said Caltrans District 7 Director Mike Miles in a written statement.

Every driver who rides the express lanes must first open an account for $40 with Metro and receive a transponder to place on their dashboard. The transponder can be set for one, two or three riders. Overhead detectors send a signal to the transponder and if the driver is in violation, a camera takes a picture of the license plate and a ticket is mailed to the home of the vehicle owner. When following the rules, solo and two-person drivers during peak hours will be assessed a toll that gets deducted from their account.

On the 10 Freeway, carpools are three or more people traveling during rush hours, from 5 a.m. to 9 a.m. and 4 p.m. to 7 p.m. Monday to Friday, with holidays excluded. Three-person carpoolers are not charged. Tolls are less during off-peak times.

So far, Metro has issued more than 80,000 FasTrak ExpressLanes transponders.

Motorists can go to www.metroexpresslanes.net to open an account, or to walk-in centers at 500 W. 190th St. in Gardena and the El Monte Station, 3501 Santa Anita Ave., El Monte.

The Automobile Club of America, Costco and Albertsons offer discounts. Families with an annual income of $37,061 or less can receive a reduced $25 toll credit.

The stretch of the 10 Freeway is one of the busiest in Southern California, receiving 210,000 to 240,000 vehicles every day in both directions, according to Fasana.

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