10 and 110 freeway pay lanes: A tale of two commuters

Motorists who pay the fees travel much faster than those who stick with general purpose lanes

By Steve Scauzillo, Staff Writer
@Stevecaz on Twitter

Published: 07/26/2013 07:56:34 PM PDT
Updated: 07/26/2013 08:00:40 PM PDT

A new preliminary report from Metro details usage of the new Metro Express Lanes along the 10 and 110 freeways.

During the typical weekday morning rush hour, the 10 and 110 freeways depict a tale of two commuters. The one willing to fork over $11 travels round-trip on a pay lane at near maximum speed. The other pays nothing, except for the time spent sitting in traffic.

"This is a new order," said Bart Reed, executive director of The Transit Coalition, a Southern California nonprofit transit advocacy group. "People are making personal choices on how they view life, how they spend money."

A new report on the 110 and 10 Express Lanes backs up that kind of libertarian philosophy that places a dollar value on everyday choices — now including driving to work. Reed said the pay lanes experiment on the two Southland freeways is a logical extension of the principal of value choices, just like when a diner chooses a fine restaurant over fast food, or a customer buys a luxury car over a compact.

Read the report: ExpressLanes’ performance on 10 and 110 freeways | Metro.net

Since Nov. 10 on the 110 Freeway and Feb. 23 on the 10 Freeway, motorists can sign up to ride the car-pool-turned-express lanes by going to metro.net and opening a $40 account for pay lane rides and a transponder. Once attached to the car, drivers can switch it from 1, 2, or 3 to indicate a car-pool or a solo driver. Car-pools of two are free all the time on the 110 but must pay during peak hours on the 10 Freeway, where a free ride requires three persons. Two-person car-pools ride free on the 10 during off-peak weekday hours and weekends. All motorists must buy a Metro transponder in order to ride the Express Lanes.

A new report from Metro calculated ridership on the 110 Freeway pay lanes at 57,256 trips per day, higher than the 50,000 trips before the conversion. On the 10 Freeway Express Lanes, between the 605 Freeway and Alameda Street, ridership is about 24,613 or 88
double white lines or unsafe lane changes. So far, Metro has collected $6,966,484 in fees. The majority of citations issued by the CHP were for crossing the Line bus, increasing ridership on both bus lines that use the 10 Freeway Express Lanes.

"It is not just about the solo driver," Wiggins said. "This has allowed us to work together with Foothill Transit," she freeways.

Transponder accounts within the county come from motorists in the following cities, listed highest to lowest: Los Angeles (25,326), Torrance (6,873), Redondo Beach (4,331), Long Beach (4,071), Pasadena (3,741), Manhattan Beach (3,668), West Covina (3,152), Glendale (2,774), Gardena (2,278), Rancho Palos Verdes (2,501), San Pedro (2,364), Carson (2,074), Hawthorne (1,934), Covina (1,890), and Hermosa Beach (1,637).

A majority of accounts were taken out by middle class and upper middle class households: 19.9 percent earning $35,000 to $49,999, 36 percent from $50,000 to $74,999, 21 percent from $75,000 to $99,999 and 12 percent from $100,000 to $149,000. The smallest percentage of accounts (2.4 percent) went to those earning $150,000; next $35,000 to $49,999; 36 percent from $50,000 to $74,999; 21 percent from $75,000 to $99,999 and 12 percent from $100,000 to $149,000. The smallest percentage of accounts (2.4 percent) went to those earning $150,000; next smallest were those earning less than $35,000 at 8.5 percent.

Second, Metro used a $210.6 million grant from the federal government to build the lanes and also to beef up transit lines serving both freeways. From April 2012 to April 2013, ridership on Metro's Gardena 1x line increased by 122 percent and on Foothill Transit's Silver Streak by 38 percent. Also, 58 new vanpools formed on both transit lines serving both freeways. "It is not just about the solo driver," Wiggins said. "This has allowed us to work together with Foothill Transit," she said. Metro and Foothill Transit made the Metro Tap card applicable on the Silver Streak, as well as Metro's Silver Line bus, increasing ridership on both bus lines that use the 10 Freeway Express Lanes.

So far, Metro has collected $6,966,484 in fees. The majority of citations issued by the CHP were for crossing the double white lines or unsafe lane changes.