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Subject: SMDJ article on whether 101 widening has improved or worsened congestion
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Dear SMCTA Board, CAC, and C/CAG Board,

Thank you for your service to the transportation needs of SM County residents.

I wanted to share [the attached article from today's SMDJ](#). It covers the recent C/CAG meeting where multiple Board and community members asked why the JPA was not sharing data on whether the recently completed 101 Widening and Express Lane project in the southern part of the County had achieved its stated goal of reducing congestion. The SMCTA CAC has asked for answers to this question multiple times over the past year but has been told that such a study needs to come at the request of the JPA (despite the CAC acting as a liaison between the public and the SMCTA Board).

In this meeting, Board Members Stacy Jimenez shared her constituents' skepticism that the almost \$600M project had improved congestion for those unable to pay for the Express Lanes:

“The main comment that I get from my residents is, ‘I’m stuck, and it feels like it’s slower now unless I use the express lane,’” said Stacy Jimenez, C/CAG board member and Foster City councilmember.

In addition, C/CAG Board Member and Hillsborough Mayor Christine Krolik urged the JPA to respond to the public's questions on whether congestion had worsened since the widening of 101, despite promises to the contrary.

I hope that going forward the public will have access to congestion data so that it will know whether taxpayer dollars were well spent and whether future widenings will benefit all SM County residents, instead of just those who are able to afford the Express Lanes.

Thanks,

Mike Swire
Appointee, SMCTA Citizen Advisory Committee
Chair, C/CAG Bicycle & Pedestrian Advisory Committee
(writing as an individual)

https://www.smdailyjournal.com/news/local/questions-over-express-lane-congestion-impact/article_1764b2e6-798a-11ef-a132-eb1cef05d0de.html

FEATURED

Questions over express lane congestion impact

Highway 101 express lane use sees increases, but some say traffic is worse for non-toll lane drivers

By Alyse DiNapoli, Daily Journal staff

Sep 23, 2024



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The Highway 101 express lane has generated a modest increase in revenue, but some board members and transit advocates are concerned it's only worsened traffic congestion for those who are unable or unwilling to pay the toll.

The express lane opened toward the beginning of last year and stretches 22 miles from the Santa Clara County line to Interstate 380. The tolls adhere to a variable pricing structure, in which costs fluctuate depending on traffic congestion. Average daily trips have increased from 52,000 to 56,000 between the first and fourth quarter of fiscal year 2023-24 — which ended on June 30.

The majority of trips cost drivers under \$3, according to data presented at a recent City/County Association of Governments of San Mateo County meeting, though it can be over three to four times that cost during peak hours.

While express lane drivers travel 11 miles per hour faster on average than non-toll lanes during peak hours, the lack of data on its overall impact on highway traffic has given some board members pause.

“The main comment that I get from my residents is, ‘I’m stuck, and it feels like it’s slower now unless I use the express lane,’” said Stacy Jimenez, C/CAG board member and Foster City councilmember. —

Mike Swire, member of the Transportation Authority Citizens Advisory Committee, echoed similar sentiments, adding that updates on the effectiveness of express lanes have largely focused on revenue, not whether it's decreasing overall traffic.

“The marketing of the project was that this will improve congestion in San Mateo County. It was not marketed as only improving it for the wealthy people who can afford to pay for the lane,” Swire said. “We are hearing consistently now from the public that there has not been a reduction in traffic ... we've been asking over a year for data that shows congestion before and congestion after.”

About 42% of the trips showed that express lane drivers were carpooling with two or more passengers, though Lacy Vong, policy program manager for the San Mateo County Express Lanes Joint Powers Authority, said the figure is likely inflated due to many individuals misdeclaring the number of people in the car.

But Executive Director Sean Charpentier has said that it takes awhile to see substantial changes in traffic patterns, and comparing commute patterns before, during and after the pandemic are not apples-to-apples comparisons. He added that over time, large employers will provide more shuttles for their workers. And the impacts of the newly-launched express lane bus routes have yet to show up in the data, which lags a few months behind.

The issue has also surfaced during ongoing discussions over a potential expansion of the express lane north of Interstate 380.

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