Do Express Toll Lanes Disadvantage Some People?

Common questions about express lanes are whether they are equitable and whether all income groups benefit from using them.

As part of the Kansas Department of Transportation (KDOT) K-10 Corridor Capacity Improvements Project comprehensive study, the Project team is evaluating potential express lanes on the 16.5-mile stretch of eastbound and westbound K-10 from Cedar Creek Parkway to I-435. Express lanes are being considered following successful implementation in other regions where anticipated growth and physical and financial limitations minimize strategies available for managing congestion and producing more-reliable travel times.

A growing body of research on experiences where express lanes have been successfully developed suggests high-income and low-income motorists have similar opinions about them and use them in comparable ways. Findings indicate the value of express lanes may be higher for lower-income groups than for others.

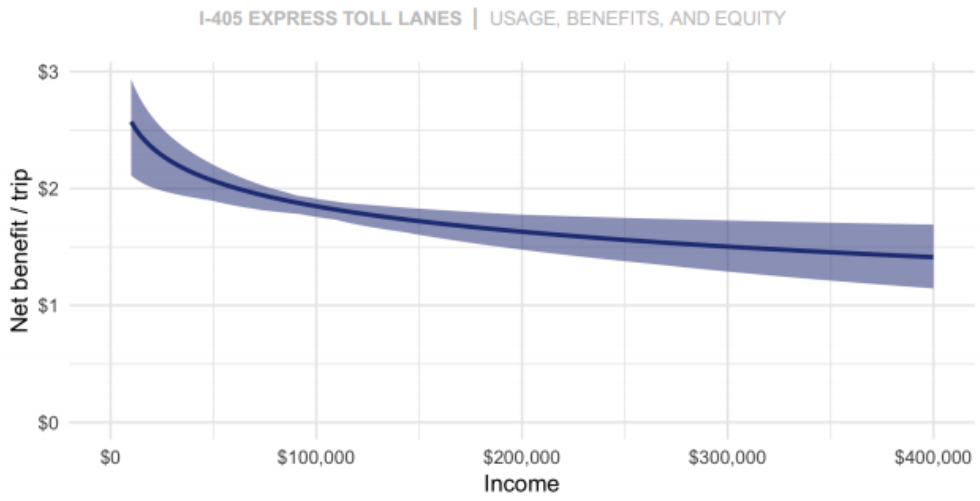
The U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) has found that user schedule flexibility and route availability, rather than income, are more significant factors in determining who uses express lanes. Additionally, users from varied income groups have comparable opinions about express lanes, with all groups appreciating being able to choose whether to use them.

The Georgia Department of Transportation conducted studies between 2016 and 2022 on three metro Atlanta express lanes facilities to determine whether they created unequal burdens for environmental justice groups. Phase I data collections for each facility (I-85 Express Lanes Extension, Northwest Corridor Express Lanes and I-75 South Metro Express Lanes) took place about a year before the express lanes opened. Additional data collection and trend survey analysis took place in years one through three after opening.

For all three express lanes facilities, no attitudes or perceptions were found that demonstrated a potential source of inequity for environmental justice groups, and the opening of the express lanes did not disadvantage EJ group members. Also, each corridor found a reduction in commute times for both drivers and transit vehicles after the express lanes opened.

I-405 Express Toll Lanes Usage, Benefits, and Equity (following graphic), from the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) examines how toll lanes are utilized by higher-income and lower-income households. This WSDOT study assessed user data for the Seattle metro I-405 express lanes and found that lower-income households "*obtained higher net benefits per trip than higher-income groups because they used the facility more strategically*."

I-405 Express Toll Lanes – Usage, Benefits, and Equity



Although experiences of other jurisdictions are helpful, how express lanes may affect Lenexa, Olathe, De Soto, Lawrence and other regional K-10 users is a question that will be specifically answered during the Environmental Assessment (EA) portion of the Project.

Required by the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), an EA is necessary to secure federal clearance and funding for certain public infrastructure improvements that involve federal funding or require federal action.

An Environmental Assessment evaluates the impacts proposed improvements will have on the natural and man-made environment. It is designed to help agencies, elected officials and the public make sound decisions for the Project and its surrounding area, acknowledging that minority and low-income populations are often impacted disproportionally by environmental changes.

In the case of the K-10 Corridor Capacity Improvements Project, the EA will ensure that there are no major environmental impacts associated with the Project, whether express lanes are implemented or not.

Learn More

To learn more about the EA, how express lanes work or the Project overall, visit the K-10 Corridor Capacity Improvements Project website and sign up for email updates as the project progresses.

It is important to evaluate the impact and efficacy of road pricing not in a vacuum, but in comparison to viable alternatives or the status quo. For example, sales taxes and parcel taxes – which we often use to fund transportation – are not only regressive, but also inefficient, since they make it seem like use of the roads is free, and thus induce excess driving. Road pricing charges are paid only by users, rather than the entire public, so they don't impose an unfair burden on non-driver households (which are often low-income people of color).

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