

SmartMove...

SUCCESS STORIES FROM THE TOLLING INDUSTRY

Agency

Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) and the High Performance Transportation Enterprise (HPTE)

Project

Express Lane Development

Purpose

To ease congestion and reduce drive times along major highway corridors.

Vital Stats

- More consistent, faster speeds and reduced travel times across all lanes in corridors with express lanes.
- Significantly faster travel times across all lanes along a major recreational route, the I-70 Mountain Express Lanes, during 32 days of peak-period operation for a novel hybrid express-shoulder lane.
- Reduction in roadway incidents for the winter season along I-70 Mountain Express Lane.

History

Colorado is one of the five fastest-growing states in the United States. Decision-makers understand that congested roadways lead to longer travel times, reduced road quality and safety, and serious impacts for the economy and environment. In a state where gas taxes haven't increased in more than 20 years and transportation funding is declining, Express lanes are seen as an innovative way to deliver needed highway improvements and offer drivers the opportunity to pay for a faster ride when that's what they want.

"Traffic? I'll pass," states the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) Express Lanes website. "Express Lanes offer choice and reduced congestion."

Colorado determined several years ago that it wasn't practical to add new roads or lanes in an effort to combat

congestion. Building on the success of the I-25 HOT lanes, also known as the Downtown Express lanes, opened in 2006, the state has ramped up its Express Lanes program to deliver greater reliability and choice and provide reliable drive times along busy corridors. CDOT Express Lanes can offer roadway users different options, allowing free access for carpoolers and motorcycles or supporting rapid transit, bike lanes and walking paths.

Results

CDOT opened its first express lanes along US 36 in May 2015, and introduced tolls in July. The second phase of that project opened in January 2016, and began tolling on March 30.

The state is also piloting a novel mountain recreational route along Highway I-70, where the shoulder is permitted to open as a peak-period express lane for up to 73 days per year. The I-70 Mountain Express Lane opened and began tolling in December 2015.



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A six-mile northern extension of the I-25 Express lanes opened in April 2016, and construction begins this summer on another six-mile extension of those lanes, now called North I-25 Express Lanes.

Early indications suggest that all drivers in these corridors are benefitting from increased traffic speed and throughput.

CDOT continues to educate drivers on how to use a road that allows them to choose between the express and general purpose lanes, including the mechanics of getting in and out of a lane with no separation barriers. Fortunately, Colorado already has privately-owned toll roads, so potential Express Lanes users are already familiar with the basic notion of paying for toll roads.

The state is also in touch with federal authorities to address administrative issues around the operation of the Mountain Express Lane: For example, if CDOT opens a shoulder lane for a couple of hours to clear spot congestion, those hours

currently count as a full day of use. It's the kind of lesson learned from an innovative experiment that will help this DOT, and other departments and tolling agencies across the country, maximize the benefit of their express lane programs for years to come..

Key Success Factors

“Population numbers in Colorado are rising rapidly,” said David Spector, Director of the High Performance Transportation Enterprise. “We can no longer build our way out of congestion. We have to implement innovative solutions like express lanes.”



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