

SmartMove...

SUCCESS STORIES FROM THE TOLLING INDUSTRY



Agency

Golden Gate Bridge, Highway and Transportation District

Project

All-Electronic Tolling (AET) Conversion of the Golden Gate Bridge

Purpose

To make tolling more efficient and toll operations more cost-effective, while minimizing negative impacts on the last generation of toll collectors.

Vital Stats

- 76-year toll collection history
- Three-year conversion process
- 110,000 cars as a daily average
- 29 full-time, four part-time collectors when conversion was announced

History

The Board of Directors and management team at the Golden Gate Bridge have always taken pride in offering a high-touch customer service experience, and for 76 years, toll collectors were the human face of the operation. The agency frequently heard stories of customers who picked the lane where they could greet their favorite toll collector or long-term staff who had watched their customers' families grow up.

That meant the Golden Gate Bridge, Highway and Transportation District, which operates the Golden Gate Bridge, faced an inevitable but somewhat emotional decision when it was time to introduce All-Electronic Tolling (AET). Faced with significant financial challenges, the agency had adopted a 33-point cost reduction plan, in which conversion to AET held out the prospect of a \$16-million saving over eight years. The agency was

also primed to introduce state-of-the-art AET technology that would improve safety and reduce delays and greenhouse gas emissions at the toll plaza.

With the gradual emergence of tolling technology and continuing operational improvements, the Golden Gate Bridge had already reduced its toll collection work force from 97 full-time collectors in 1937 to 33 full or part-time employees in 2010 through the introduction of FasTrak® in 2000. At the start of the conversion process, management met with the remaining collectors and their union to negotiate a "soft landing" for employees, while ensuring that staffing was available until the last day of manual toll collection in March 2013.

Results

The Golden Gate Bridge's AET conversion fulfilled all three pillars of a truly sustainable project. It met economic objectives by cutting costs, environmental objectives by reducing delays and idling at the toll plaza and social objectives by paying close attention to employees' and customers' needs.

The "soft landing" severance package for toll collectors included career counseling, preferential consideration and training for internal job openings, longevity-based



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severance pay, tuition and outplacement stipends and continuation of medical benefits for six months after termination. The District made the conversion work by communicating early and often, allowing three years for the transition, listening to employees' needs, acknowledging their anxiety and being as flexible as possible in the design of the soft landing offer. At midnight on the last day of manual toll collection, a ceremonial "last cash toll" was collected to acknowledge the members of the Golden Gate family who had carried on a 76-year tradition.

In the first six months after the conversion, FasTrak® transponder use increased from 70 percent to nearly 85 percent of total traffic, thanks in part to an outreach campaign that featured 457 news placements in the first three months of 2013, coupled with an aggressive and engaging marketing campaign. Drivers accepted the conversion so quickly and widely that the Bridge's outsourced customer service center had to increase staff and adjust some of its procedures to meet the surge in demand.

Key Success Factors

"It's really clear to me that conversion to all-electronic toll collection is not a technical issue," said Kary Witt, Manager of the Golden Gate Bridge. "The technology has matured to the point where it's nearly off the shelf, so at this point conversion to AET is a people challenge. That's easy to overlook, but perhaps most important in this day of technology."

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