

SPEND MORE CASH OR WASTE MORE GAS: ARE THEY REALLY THAT DIFFERENT?

A look at the 91 freeway and the cost of express lanes

By Toni Guesnon



Photo taken by Toni Gueson

Every day, commuters use the 91 freeway to make their way into Orange County and the Los Angeles County area. Depending on time and day, which for most of the drivers, is around the morning and evening rush hour, it can take anywhere from one to two hours to get from the 55 freeway in Anaheim over to the 15 freeway in Corona. For some lucky users, this commute is significantly shortened with the 91 ExpressLanes. Two lanes coned off from the rest of the freeway that allows users who are willing to pay a toll every drive to bypass the parking lot we know as the 91 freeway.

Why do some people take the ExpressLanes? To save gas, to get home faster, to have a life outside of their car? With gas prices on the rise, wasting precious fuel sitting idle for 20 miles seems to be absurd. However, the only way around it is to pay a hefty fee. Depending on the not only on the day of the week but the time of day a commuter wishes to access ExpressLanes, tolls can range anywhere from \$1.50- \$25.

According to Carmella Guesnon, an avid ExpressLanes user, "I had to hook up bank account to the Fastrak with a dollar limit and threshold." Though it sounds simple and hassle free, Guesnon explains, "Once you go below your threshold you are automatically charged the limit but the limit is not secured because you there are evaluations of usage and a possible automatic increase in the limit."

Is a person actually saving anything when taking the express lanes, or does going 50 mph rather than 5mph a enough to convince a person to spend money? According to the Press Enterprise, drivers not using the Expresslanes can experience traffic delays on a one mile stretch between the 91/15 interchange anywhere from one to three hours on a Friday afternoon. Guesnon also claims that ,“It can cost someone about \$600 a month if used every day both ways,” claims Guesnon.

In an article, “Why some drives on Corona’s 91 Freeway toll lanes are costing more”, some toll lane users state that the prices are ridiculous while others say that they try to only use the lanes once or twice a week when running late. Officials from county transportations defend the prices claiming that it is a way to keep the lanes from being congested during peak hours.

From personal use, the lanes are more congested when prices are higher. When the price is around \$20 it is usually a thursday afternoon and the freeway will become a parking lot. Many drivers including myself can look at the prices on the billboard and use it as a predictor of how bad traffic in the general lanes will be. Most people will bite the \$15-20 bullet because it seems better than wasting time moving an inch every 5 minutes.

Although the idea of the fast lanes is to create a winning solution for both toll payers and regular lane drivers, both parties still face an exhausting drive every day on the 91. It could be said the actual winner in this situation is the highways. They win everyone's time, money, and gas while the drivers are giving it all up to do it again the next day.

Work Cited

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