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Entrance to new I-95 express lanes in Miami-Dade County



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Improved Predictability Through Congestion Pricing

By Natalia L. McGuckian, P.E., Project Manager

Congestion and increased delays has long been a part of the everyday travel experience along Interstate 95 (I-95) between Broward and Miami-Dade Counties in Florida. Given the expected rise in traffic volumes, the limited opportunity for roadway expansion, and the current economy, the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) District Six has been challenged with providing a cost-effective solution to help mitigate congestion along the Interstate. To that end, FDOT initiated I-95 Express, which introduced “Congestion Pricing” to the corridor through a variable-priced toll that varies depending on the congestion level along I-95. The first phase of the project (Phase 1A) introduced this congestion pricing on northbound I-95 for approximate six miles. The goal of I-95 Express is to provide more reliable travel within Miami-Dade County and between Miami-Dade and Broward Counties, while improving safety along the corridor.

The I-95 Express project restriped I-95 to reduce the inside shoulder width and travel lane widths to accommodate an additional travel lane. The two inside lanes, which include the former High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) lane and the newly added lane, were separated by a barrier from the local traffic lanes and converted to toll lanes. The toll rates, which would increase or decrease based on traffic density, would be displayed on Dynamic Message Signs (DMS) at the entry points.

While some opponents of the project criticize the conversion of the HOV lanes to toll lanes, FDOT’s position is that the HOV lanes no longer provide reliable travel due to heavy congestion along all lanes of the

corridor. Further, as an incentive to reduce the number of vehicles using the roadway and encourage the use of more environmentally-friendly vehicles, FDOT is offering toll-free options for registered carpools (3+ persons), vanpools, public school buses, motorcycles and hybrid vehicles. Toll-free options are also available for transit buses, which is expected to enhance transit service by providing more predictable travel times and, hence, increased transit ridership and decreased individual vehicle use.

In an effort to significantly reduce travel times and improve safety along the corridor, entry and exit points to and from the I-95 Express lanes are expected to be limited. In addition, ramp metering signals will also be provided to control the disruption caused by ramp traffic merging onto I-95. This has sparked criticism from drivers utilizing major travel routes to connect to I-95 who, given the proposed access connections, will not be permitted to use the I-95 Express facility.

While much debate continues regarding different aspects of I-95 Express, preliminary results of Phase 1A of the project, which opened in December 2008, indicate an increase in throughput volumes and higher operating speeds along the entire corridor.



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