



U.S. 69

Virtual Focus Groups

Summary Report

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Table of Contents

Overview	3
Pre-Focus Group Questionnaire	5
Topic #1: Usage and General Perceptions of U.S. 69 Corridor	6
Topic #2: Perceptions of Driver Safety in the U.S. 69 Corridor	7
Topic #3: Perceptions of the Traffic Flow in the U.S. 69 Corridor	8
Topic #4: Awareness of and/or Willingness to Believe Information about U.S. 69 Corridor	10
Topic #5: Importance of Improvements to the U.S. 69 Corridor	11
Topic #6: Priorities for Improvements to the U.S. 69 Corridor	12
Topic #7: Acceptable Trade-Offs Regarding Improvements to the U.S. 69 Corridor	13
Topic #8: Reaction to Adding Express Toll Lanes to the U.S. 69 Corridor	15
Topic #9: Support for Express Toll Lanes as the Local Contribution Funding Source to Improvements to the U.S. 69 Corridor	16
Conclusions	20
Supporting Materials	
Results of the Focus Group Participant Survey	Attachment A
PowerPoint Presentation that Summarizes Major Findings for the Focus Groups	Attachment B
Moderator's Script	Attachment C
PowerPoint Presentation that Was Shown to Focus Group Participants	Attachment D

Overview

ETC Institute conducted focus groups with residents of eastern Johnson and Miami Counties to gather input on issues related to improvements that are being considered to U.S. 69 between 103rd and 179th Streets. A total of seven focus groups were conducted between Tuesday, January 19 and Thursday, January 21, 2021. The topics that were discussed at each of the meetings included:

- Usage and general perceptions of U.S. 69
- Perceptions of driver safety in the study area corridor
- Perceptions of traffic flow throughout the corridor
- Awareness of and/or willingness to believe information about U.S. 69
- Importance of improvements to U.S. 69
- Top priorities for improvement to the corridor
- Tradeoffs respondents were willing to accept in relation to cost/construction timelines
- Familiarity with Express Toll Lanes
- Support for using Express Toll Lanes to help fund improvements to U.S. 69

A total of 76 residents participated in seven focus groups conducted as described below:

- **Group 1** was conducted via Zoom from 5:00-6:30 p.m. on January 19, 2021 with a randomly selected group of 11 study area residents.
- **Group 2** was conducted via Zoom from 7:00-8:30 p.m. on January 19, 2021 with a randomly selected group of 11 study area residents.
- **Group 3** was conducted via Zoom from 11:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m. on January 20, 2021 with a randomly selected group of 11 study area residents.
- **Group 4** was conducted via Zoom from 5:00-6:30 p.m. on January 20, 2021 with a randomly selected group of 11 study area residents.
- **Group 5** was conducted via Zoom from 7:00-8:30 p.m. on January 20, 2021 with a randomly selected group of eight study area residents.
- **Group 6** was conducted via Zoom from 5:00-6:30 p.m. on January 21, 2021 with a randomly selected group of 12 study area residents.
- **Group 7** was conducted via Zoom from 7:00-8:30 p.m. on January 21, 2021 with a randomly selected group of 12 study area residents.

Of the 76 participants, 54 were from Overland Park, 10 were from Miami County, and 12 were from other parts of Johnson County. The demographic composition of the focus groups is shown in the tables below.

Gender of Participants

Answer Choices	Responses	
Male	57.89%	44
Female	42.11%	32
Another gender	0.00%	0
Prefer not to disclose	0.00%	0

Age of Participants

Answer Choices	Responses	
18 to 34	11.84%	9
35 to 44	14.47%	11
45 to 54	19.74%	15
55 to 64	23.68%	18
65 to 74	18.42%	14
75 or older	6.58%	5
Prefer not to disclose	5.26%	4

Race/Ethnicity of Participants

Answer Choices	Responses	
Asian	5.26%	4
Black or African American	1.32%	1
Hispanic or Latino	6.58%	5
Multiracial or Multiethnic	2.63%	2
Native American or Alaska Native	0.00%	0
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	0.00%	0
White (not Hispanic)	81.58%	62
Another race or ethnicity	0.00%	0
Prefer not to disclose	2.63%	2

Pre-Focus Group Questionnaire

Prior to the scheduled focus groups, all participants were asked to complete a short online questionnaire introducing the topics to be discussed and soliciting input regarding the most significant issues they had experienced with U.S. 69 between 103rd Street and 179th Street, as well as open-ended questions about improvements to the U.S. 69 corridor the participants believed to be necessary. Some of the open-ended comments from the pre-focus groups survey are listed below:

- “Traffic congestion along the entire study area corridor is a significant problem, especially during morning and evening peak periods.”
- “Stopped traffic and frequent back-ups that occur from excess traffic congestion present safety hazards for drivers.”
- “Additional lanes are needed on U.S. 69. A minimum of three lanes in each direction are needed to alleviate the current traffic flow problem.”
- “Additional lanes and extended/improved ramps are needed in both directions at the interchanges with 135th Street and Blue Valley Parkway.”
- “Interchange entrance and exit ramps are too close together for the amount of traffic they are expected to handle.”
- “Traffic merging onto U.S. 69 causes significant safety issues for drivers attempting to exit.”
- “The proximity of entrance and exit ramps to one another at busier interchanges like Blue Valley Parkway and 135th Street results in slow and stopped traffic which creates safety issues, including frequent accidents.”
- “This whole highway needs to be beautified with improved landscaping.”
- “Lighting should be improved. Insufficient lighting in some areas creates driver safety concerns at night.”
- “The condition of U.S. 69’s road surface should be improved. Stretches of highway along are so damaged that at times I see drivers avoiding using portions of lanes. This causes major safety and traffic flow problems.”

The following pages of this report summarize the feedback from participants during the focus groups.

Topic #1: Usage and General Perceptions of U.S. 69

All focus group participants indicated that they had been using U.S. 69 between 103rd and 175th streets regularly for at least five years. More than half had been driving on U.S. 69 for more than 25 years, and several indicated they had been traveling in study 69 corridor for their, “entire life.” Participants were asked to describe the frequency and reasons they used the U.S. 69 before the COVID-19 Pandemic. Their responses are below.

Frequency of Use:

- **7 or More Times Per Week:** Sixty-six percent (65.8%) of all participants indicated that pre-COVID they used the study area U.S. 69 corridor daily. Several indicated making multiple daily trips, often exceeding 20 trips per week.
- **3-5 Days Per Week:** Almost twenty percent (19.7%) of participants said they used the corridor three to five times per week on average.
- **1-2 Days Per Week:** The remainder of the focus group participants (14.4%) indicated using the corridor approximately once or twice each week.

Common Reasons For Use: Of those participants who offered specific reasons for their use of the study area U.S. 69 corridor, more than two-thirds (69.4%) indicated they used the highway regularly to commute to and from work and/or for business appointments. More than forty-one percent of participants (41.4%) mentioned shopping and errands as being among their primary reasons for using the corridor, while 38.9% cited family/recreation activities as reasons for their usage. Other reasons frequently mentioned were school, medical appointments and trips to the airport. It should be noted that more than one-quarter of participants (27.7%) preferred not to offer a specific reason for use, instead they more broadly indicated that they used the U.S. 69 corridor for “everything.” One person said, “I use the highway every day for everything. Where I live, it’s really the only choice to get anywhere.”

General Perceptions of the U.S. 69 Corridor: Participants were asked, “*How well does U.S. 69 currently meet your needs and expectations?*” Results are shown below.

Answer Choices	Responses	
Completely meets my needs and expectations	17.11%	13
Mostly meets my needs and expectations	57.89%	44
Partly meets my needs and expectations	22.37%	17
Does not meet my needs and expectations at all	1.32%	1
Don't know	1.32%	1

Although 13 participants indicated that the U.S. 69 “completely” met their needs, all but 2 of these people indicated that they had some concerns about traffic congestion during rush hour. The 2 people who did not have any concerns said that they did not use U.S. 69 during rush hour.

Of the 63 participants who indicated that the highways did “completely” meet their needs, the majority (57.1%) indicated that traffic congestion problems had become unmanageable during peak periods (morning and afternoon rush hours). A significant number (22.2%) also cited dangerous driving conditions around busy interchanges like 135th street, Blue Valley Parkway, and I-435. Another 12.7% mentioned concerns about potholes and poor road surfaces, which were contributing to both safety and traffic flow issues.

Many participants, including several of those who said their needs were met completely, indicated that they simply avoided traveling on U.S. 69 between 103rd and 179th Streets during rush hour periods. One participant said, “I never use U.S. 69 when I see heavy traffic, and during rush hour, I use streets like Metcalf and Antioch instead.”

Topic #2: Perceptions of Driver Safety in the U.S. 69 Corridor

Participants were asked, “*How concerned are you about safety when traveling on U.S. 69 between 103rd and 179th Streets?*” The results were as follows:

Answer Choices	Responses	
Very concerned	31.58%	24
Somewhat concerned	48.68%	37
Not concerned	19.74%	15

Driver safety concerns expressed during the focus groups were primarily related to conditions on and around entrance and exit ramps for several of the busiest interchanges along the study area corridor. Among those who were “very concerned” or “somewhat concerned” about safety, the 135th Street interchange and its proximity to the Blue Valley Parkway entrance and exit ramps was most frequently mentioned (39.3%) as a safety concerns. Some of the comments on this issue included:

- “I find the intersection of U.S. 69 and 135th and the people entering from Blue Valley Parkway to be unsafe. No matter which lane you’re in, it’s dangerous. People are darting in and out, going every which way.”
- “People getting off at 135th don’t care what they have to do to get over from the parkway!”

The design of the 135th Street interchange also was mentioned frequently by those expressing safety concerns. The consensus being there was insufficient distance between the Blue Valley Parkway ramps and the exit at 135th in both directions. As one participant put it, “If I designed a project for a client as poorly as the 135th interchange, I would have been fired!”

More than one-quarter of participants (26.2%) also mentioned the intersection of I-435 and U.S. 69 as a significant safety concern, citing traffic backups in both directions as being dangerous to those who come upon them unexpectedly. Comments on this topic included:

- “The backups at 435 are all too congested. Northbound on U.S. 69 if you want to head west on 435 it’s a terrible, dangerous exit. The on ramp to 435 is too short,” said one participant.
- “The access from 103rd to I-435 and U.S. 69 is really confusing and dangerous.”

Participants repeatedly mentioned excessive speed, dangerous lane changes and overall driver aggressiveness resulting from overly congested interchanges as driver safety concerns. As one participant offered, “I have two young drivers in the house, and I will not let them drive on U.S. 69.”

Other safety issues mentioned included road surface conditions, excessive driver speed of those traveling north from Miami County into Johnson County, lack of consistent law enforcement presence during peak periods, and insufficient lighting along the corridor.

Topic #3: Perceptions of the Traffic Flow in the U.S. 69 Corridor

Participants were asked, “*Have you ever used local streets like Metcalf Avenue or Antioch Road to avoid traffic congestion or accidents on U.S. 69?*” Results were as follows:

Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	92.11%	70
No	7.89%	6

The most commonly mentioned streets used to avoid traffic congestion on U.S. 69 were Antioch, (59.5%), Metcalf (37.8%) and Quivira (27.0%). It should be noted that several participants indicated they previously had used Metcalf to avoid U.S. 69, but no longer did so, as Metcalf itself has become increasingly congested in recent years. As one participant put it, “I quit using Metcalf as an alternate to 69 because it gets all balled up, too. There is just no good way to travel north-south anymore.” Other roads that were mentioned included: Switzer, Nall, and Roe.

Participants were asked, *“How concerned are you about traffic flow when traveling on U.S. 69 between 103rd and 179th Streets?”* Results were as follows:

Answer Choices	Responses	
Very concerned	31.58%	24
Somewhat concerned	48.68%	37
Not concerned	19.74%	15

Participants who were somewhat concerned or very concerned about traffic flow were asked what concerned them most. In one form or another, most mentioned their perception that traffic congestion was increasing rapidly in the corridor, and that it would get much worse in the coming years. As one participant said, “The traffic flow in five years will be much worse than it is now.” Another participant said, “When it gets bad, everyone jumps off U.S. 69 and the surface streets get clogged. There’s so much housing development going on to the south that it’s going to get a lot worse if something is not done soon.”

Several participants mentioned increased drive times and the negative impacts that congestion have on business efficiency in the area. One participant said, “There’s a financial cost for any business who uses that corridor routinely. There’s a value to people’s time as they’re sitting there on that parking lot of a highway.” Another added, “I’ve called people for business meetings who say, ‘no, I don’t want to come that far south’ because of traffic on U.S. 69.”

While many participants felt that existing housing development along the highway already had caused traffic congestion to reach an unmanageable level in the corridor, others feared traffic flow issues on U.S. 69 could limit future opportunities for economic growth in the area. As one participant said, “The congestion on U.S. 69 will block development of Johnson County. We can’t grow anymore based on the amount of traffic filtering into a system not built to handle that many vehicles. All the congestion is making U.S 69 relatively useless.”

Almost all of those who said they were not concerned about traffic flow issues indicated they did not use U.S. 69 during peak periods. It was also apparent during the focus groups that participants who used U.S. 69 for work were significantly more concerned about traffic flow than those who did not.

Topic #4: Awareness of and/or Willingness to Believe Information about the U.S. 69 Corridor

In order to gauge reactions to potential messages and information that could be shared with residents in the corridor about the need for improvements to U.S. 69, the focus group moderator made several statements about U.S. 69 and then asked participants if they thought the statements were true. Each of the statements that were read and the reactions of the participants are listed below.

“Would you believe me if I told you that the base pavement for this stretch of U.S. 69 is more than 50 years old?”

Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	48.68%	37
No	46.05%	35
Not Sure	5.26%	4

“Would you believe me if I told you that the section of U.S. 69 between 103rd and 179th Streets is the busiest section of highway in Kansas?”

Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	64.47%	49
No	34.21%	26
Not Sure	1.32%	1

“Would you believe me if I told you the travel times on U.S. 69 between 103rd and 179th Streets are projected to double over the next 20 years?”

Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	90.79%	69
No	7.89%	6
Not Sure	1.32%	1

After the participants had answered the questions, the moderator told the participants that all three statements were true. Most of the focus group participants who did not initially think the statements were true accepted the statements as true once the moderator had said so. The quick

and widespread acceptance of these statements suggests that it should be fairly easy for KDOT to raise awareness among residents that improvements to U.S. 69 are needed.

Topic #5: Importance of Improvements to U.S. the 69 Corridor

Participants had been asked to rate the importance of making improvements to U.S. 69 between 103rd and 179th Streets on the pre-survey that was completed before the focus groups. Participants were asked to rate importance of making improvements to U.S. 69 between 103rd and 179th Streets a second time *after* they had heard the information presented in Topic 4. The table below shows how the information presented in Topic 4 influenced the importance focus group placed on improvements to U.S. 69.

“How important is it to make improvements to U.S. 69 between 103rd and 175th Streets?”

Answer Choices	% Pre-Survey	% After Information in Topic 4 Was Shared
Very Important	40.79%	76.32%
Important	38.16%	19.74%
Somewhat Important	21.05%	3.95%
Not Important	0.00%	0.00%

In light of the statements the moderator shared during Topic 4 and the discussion that preceded Topic 4, the percentage of focus group participants who thought improvements to U.S. 69 were “very important” increased significantly from 40.79% to 76.32%.

Not all of the participants remembered how they had rated the importance of the improvements on the pre-survey, but 15 participants were clearly aware that they were placing more importance on the improvements after receiving new information in Topic 4. Of the 15 people who said they knew they were placing more importance on the improvements after hearing the information in Topic 4, nine (9) indicated that the statement about travel times doubling over the next 20 years was the primary reason they now placed more importance on improvements to U.S. 69. Four (4) said it they changed their rating in response to learning that the pavement more than 50 years old, and 2 people said that it was because they learned that this section of U.S. 69 is the busiest section of highway in Kansas.

Topic #6: Priorities for Improvements to the U.S. 69 Corridor

Based on the open-ended suggestions that were provided on the pre-survey, the moderator was able to categorize the open-ended comments into 15 unique suggestions for improvement to the U.S. 69 between 103rd and 175th Streets. These 15 unique suggestions were presented to each focus group, and the participants were given an opportunity to add suggestions if they felt the 15 items listed did not capture all of their ideas. As a result of this discussion, one more item was added, “Addressing Excessive Speed,” which is the reason there were a total of 16 items on the list of suggested improvements that were rated by focus group participants.

From the list of 16 improvements, focus group participants we asked to pick their top 4 choices. The table below shows the number of focus group participants who selected each item as their top choice and the number who selected each item as one of their top 4 choices.

Improvement	Top Priority	%	Top 4	%
Adding lanes to the highway	38	50.0%	55	72.4%
Improve the Interchange with I-435	11	14.5%	53	69.7%
Improve the interchange with 135th Street	5	6.6%	45	59.2%
Improve the Interchange with Blue Valley Parkway	10	13.2%	39	51.3%
Improve the interchange with 119th Street	0	0.0%	14	18.4%
Improve the interchange with College Blvd/111th Street	0	0.0%	10	13.2%
Add more exits between existing interchanges	0	0.0%	8	10.5%
Add more public transit options	1	1.3%	8	10.5%
Improve the Interchange with 167th Street	1	1.3%	8	10.5%
Improve the Interchange with 151st Street	0	0.0%	6	7.9%
Improving the appearance/attractiveness of the highway	0	0.0%	5	6.6%
Enhancing lighting at interchanges	0	0.0%	4	5.3%
Make it more friendly for bikes to cross	0	0.0%	2	2.6%
Reduce noise from the highway	1	1.3%	2	2.6%
Address Excess Speed (Added in one Focus Group)	0	0.0%	1	1.3%
Make it more friendly for pedestrians to cross	0	0.0%	0	0.0%

“Adding lanes to the highway” was the improvement most often selected. More than 72% of participants selected “adding lanes” as one of their top four choices, and 50% selected “adding lanes” as their top priority for improvement. Making improvements to interchanges, particularly the interchanges with I-435, 135th Street and Blue Valley Parkway we all selected by at least 50% of the respondents as one of their top 4 priorities.

Topic #7: Trade-offs Respondents Would Accept Regarding Improvements to U.S. 69

Participants were then asked a series of six “trade-off” questions touching on what they considered to be an acceptable timeframe for completing improvements to the U.S. 69 corridor and what degree of inconvenience they would be willing to tolerate during the construction process. The results for each of the “trade-off” questions are shown below.

TRADE-OFF #1: *“Would you rather have improvements to U.S. 69 completed in 2-3 years OR have them spread out over 8-10 years?”*

Answer Choices	Responses	
In 2-3 years	81.58%	62
Spread out work over 8-10 years	18.42%	14

TRADE-OFF #2: *“Do you mind having traffic reduced to one lane during construction if it’s cheaper OR do you think at least two lanes in each direction should remain open at all times?”*

Answer Choices	Responses	
One lane is okay	27.63%	21
At least two lanes need to be open in each direction	72.37%	55

TRADE-OFF #3: *“Should KDOT keep all interchanges open in all directions throughout construction OR would it be okay to close some on/off ramps during certain phases of construction if work can be completed faster?”*

Answer Choices	Responses	
All interchanges need to remain open	17.11%	13
It's okay to close some on/off ramps	82.89%	63

TRADE-OFF #4: *“Should KDOT start improvements soon (in the next 2-3 years) OR can the improvements wait for 10-15 years to see what happens to the pavement (or whatever)?”*

Answer Choices	Responses	
Improvements need to start soon	85.53%	65
Improvements can wait	14.47%	11

TRADE-OFF #5: “Should KDOT wait until traffic flow gets worse before adding capacity OR should KDOT add capacity now to handle the projected increases in traffic?”

Answer Choices	Responses	
Capacity should be added before traffic gets worse	97.37%	74
Wait until traffic is bad to add capacity	2.63%	2

TRADE-OFF #6: “Should KDOT make all improvements we discussed earlier (traffic flow, safety, etc.) OR limit the improvements to a few items of greatest importance?”

Answer Choices	Responses	
Make all of the improvements	84.21%	64
Only make the most important ones	15.79%	12

Most participants (81.6%) preferred to have the improvements to U.S. 69 completed within 2-3 years. Many expressed a desire to, “just get the pain over quickly.” Representative comments included: “We don’t want a project that drags on for years. Bite the bullet. Take the pain and move on” and, “Pull the Band-Aid off quick!” Others indicated they believed the improvements already were overdue. “With all the growth to the south, we’re already behind. The sooner we get on it, the better,” one participant said. Another added, “Businesses will go to Missouri or other counties if we wait. We will lose business if we don’t have infrastructure to support them!”

Almost all participants (97.4%) said KDOT should add capacity to U.S. 69 before the traffic gets any worse and most (84.2%) felt it was best to make all needed improvements at the same time, rather than limit the improvements to a few items of the greatest importance.

While most participants preferred getting all U.S. 69 improvement projects started and completed as quickly as possible, they were not as willing to accept a reduced number of traffic lanes during construction. Only 27.6% of participants said they’d be willing to have traffic reduced to one lane in each direction if it meant the improvement project would be cheaper and presumably completed sooner. Most felt traffic was already bad, and they could not imagine how bad traffic would be if it were limited to just one lane during rush hour.

Those who accepted the need for lane closures indicated they believed new lanes could not be added without temporary lane closures given the current configuration of the highway. Those who believed at least two lanes in each direction needed to stay open during construction cited the already-significant traffic congestion issues and potential overflow of traffic onto the surface

streets. “All the neighborhoods would get the overflow if it (U.S. 69) went down to one lane. Antioch and Metcalf would be as congested as the highway.” Others who supported keeping two lanes open thought two lanes were necessary to ensure emergency vehicles could get to people in need.

Participants were more willing to accept temporary closures of some interchanges. More than seventy-two percent (72.4%) indicated they would support some interchanges being closed during construction, as long as it was not too many at a time. “The interchanges are close enough together that you could use another one, as long as they don’t close two in a row,” is how one participant phrased it.

Topic #8: Reaction to Adding Express Toll Lanes to U.S. 69 Corridor

Having discussed what improvements the focus group participants thought were needed to address traffic flow and safety concerns and their preferences for construction, the moderator transitioned the conversation to the topic of how to fund the improvements that were desired by the participants. To gauge raw perceptions about toll, the moderator began the conversation by asking the following question:

“Do you generally like or dislike the idea of using tolls to help fund the cost of adding new lanes to highways?”

Answer Choices	Responses	
Like	21.05%	16
Dislike	78.95%	60

Approximately seventy-nine percent of participants initially expressed that they disliked of use of tolls. Representative comments included:

- “Most cities that have toll lanes say they’re temporary. But every toll that ever gets voted in never goes away”
- “The money gets put somewhere else and the toll stays forever”
- “Are enough people going to use the toll lanes to relieve the traffic flow issues in the other lanes?”
- “Tolls are a terrible idea.”

Participants were then asked how familiar they were with the express toll lane concept based on their experience in other states.

“Have you seen ‘express toll lanes’ in other states?”

Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	93.42%	71
No	6.58%	5

All but 5 of the 76 participants indicated that they were familiar with express toll lanes. To be sure everyone was *really* familiar with express toll lanes, the moderator showed each focus group a short video demonstrating the express toll lane system used in the state of Colorado. After viewing the video, participants were asked, ***“For those of you who said you had seen ‘express toll lanes’ before, are the toll lanes in the video we just watched what you had in mind?”*** The results are below:

Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	86.84%	66
No	13.16%	10

After the video was shown, it was clear that all but 10 of the focus group participants understood what express toll lanes are. This portion of the focus group discussion confirmed that most residents of the study area are truly familiar with express toll lanes. Educating residents about *why* express toll lanes are being considered as a funding source will be much more important than educating residents about *what* they are.

Topic #9: Support for Express Toll Lanes as the Local Contribution Funding Source for Improvements to U.S. 69 Corridor

After viewing the video about express toll lanes to be sure all participants fully understood what they are and how they would be used, the moderator asked the participants: ***“Based on what you saw in the video and the discussion we just had, do you generally LIKE or DISLIKE the idea of including ‘express toll lanes’ in the design of improvements to U.S. 69 to help fund the cost of adding lanes to the highway?”*** The question was asked to see how the information in the video affected support for using express toll lanes. The results are shown below.

Answer Choices	Responses	
Like	35.53%	27
Dislike	64.47%	49

Although the majority of participants (64.5%) still “disliked” the idea of using express toll lanes to fund a portion of the improvements to U.S. 69, the percentage who “liked” the idea of using tolls increased from 21.0% (before the video was shown) to 35.5% (after the video was shown). The 14% increase in the number of focus group participants who liked express toll lanes after the video was shown indicates that education about the reason for using express toll lanes can have a positive impact on support.

At this point, the moderator explained in some detail the concept of a local contribution to help fund a KDOT highway improvements project, and how such a local contribution can increase the priority for a project, which could allow it to do be completed sooner. Participants also were informed that if revenue from express toll lanes was not used to fund the local contribution, other local sources would be needed, such as revenue from local sales taxes, property taxes, etc. Following this discussion, focus group participants were asked, ***“Do you generally LIKE or DISLIKE the idea of using the funds generated from the ‘express toll lanes’ as the local contribution to the project?”*** Results were as follows:

Answer Choices	Responses	
Like	40.79%	31
Dislike	59.21%	45

Once focus group participants understood how a local contribution could expedite the timing of the project, the percentage of participants who showed support for express toll lanes increased. Although a majority of the participants still did not like express toll lanes, the percentage who said they liked them after considering the importance of the local contribution had doubled from 21.0% (when they were first asked) to 40.8%.

Several of the people who did not like toll lanes indicated they did not like them because they did not think people would pay the tolls. Their concern was based on the premise that if nobody pays to use the toll lanes, the additional lanes will not have any impact on traffic congestion and the cost of construction would be a waste of resources.

In response to this concern the moderator asked the participants if they ***“Would consider paying a toll to use express toll lanes on U.S. 69?”*** Results were as follows:

Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	44.74%	34
No	55.26%	42

Participants also were also asked, ***“How does knowing that you will have the option to stay in the general purpose lane and not pay a toll affect your support for using express toll lanes on U.S. 69?”*** Results were as follows:

Answer Choices	Responses	
More supportive of express toll lanes	15.79%	12
Less supportive of express toll lanes	0.00%	0
No change in support of express toll lanes	84.21%	64

Though most participants (84.2%) indicated the optional nature of express toll lanes had no effect on their support of such lanes, several of those who had started liking the idea of an express toll lane seemed to appreciate the fact that they would have a choice as to whether to use the toll lane. One participant said, “I like that its an option for those who want it and need it – you can pay to go fast, but it’s your choice.”

As the focus group discussion drew to a close, the moderator asked participants to weigh all considerations discussed so far and to answer the following two questions in light of what they now thought of an express toll lane option as a potential funding source for improvements to the U.S. 69 study area corridor.

“Now that you have a better understanding of express toll lanes, would you support the inclusion of express toll lanes on U.S. 69 if the tolls were used to cover the local share of the project?” Results were as follows:

Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	51.32%	39
No	48.68%	37

“Would you be more supportive of using express toll lanes if the tolls allowed the project to be completed sooner?” Results were as follows:

Answer Choices	Responses	
Yes	52.63%	40
No	47.37%	36

Though almost half of the participants (48.7%) remained steadfast in their reluctance to support the inclusion of express toll lanes to cover the local contribution element of U.S. 69 improvements, a majority of the participants said yes if the use of tolls from express toll lanes would lead to the completion of the project sooner.

Although focus group participants initially did not like the use of tolls to fund improvements to U.S. 69 between 103rd and 179th Streets, opinions changed when they were given more information. Some of the reasons participants who initially opposed express toll lanes changed their minds included:

- “I don’t like tolls, but we cannot wait 5-10 more years to get this done; I’d support them if they can get things funded now.”
- “I didn’t realize that a local contribution could increase the priority for a project, and I’d rather have people who use it pay for it rather than just the people who live in Overland Park.”
- “The free lanes still give people who don’t want to pay an option, so I can live with it if people aren’t all forced to pay.”

Those who continued to oppose the use of express toll lanes to fund U.S. 69 corridor improvements generally did so for one of three reasons: Either (1) they were simply opposed to the use of tolls in all situations; (2) they believed tolls were always proposed to the public as temporary funding solutions, but inevitably became permanent; or (3) they were reluctant to believe enough drivers would choose to pay a toll, resulting in increased congestion in the free lanes.

Conclusions

The following three statements summarize the major findings from all 7 focus groups:

1. The vast majority of focus group participants indicated that U.S. 69 between 103rd and 179th Streets had concerns about traffic flow and driver safety.
2. Most participants believe improvements to U.S. 69 need to begin within the next 2-3 years and must include adding lanes to the highway in both directions and addressing dangerous congestion issues around the busiest interchanges.
3. While most participants did not initially like the idea of using express toll lanes as a way of funding improvements to U.S. 69, a majority were open to the idea once they fully understood the reasons that express toll lanes were being considered. This finding suggests that widespread support for using express toll lanes as a funding source does not currently exist, but majority support could be built if KDOT and community leaders actively work to educate residents about the reasons express toll lanes are being considered.

After the focus groups were completed, participants were sent a follow-up survey with two final questions that summarized two of the key issues that were discussed during the focus groups to see how participants felt about the issues a couple of days after the meetings. The questions and results are below.

QUESTION #1: "In the end, if express toll lanes were the only viable way to fund the local contribution of the project so the improvements to U.S. 69 could be completed in the next 2-3 years, how would you feel about the decision?"

- 31.6% I would be happy with the decision.
- 19.7% I would not like the decision to add toll lanes, but I'd be glad that the interchange and other improvements would be finished sooner.
- 30.3% I would not like the decision to add toll lanes at first, but I'd probably learn to live with it.
- 9.2% I'd be upset for years about the decision to use express toll lanes and might stop using U.S. 69.

- 9.2% Various other responses

QUESTION #2: If KDOT were to include Express Toll Lanes in the design of improvements to U.S. 69 between 103rd and 179th street, which of the following BEST describes how you think you would use U.S. 69 after the toll lanes were added?

- 18.4% I'd pay to use the Express Toll Lanes most of the time to bypass congestion if the rates were reasonable.
- 23.7% I'd pay to use the Express Toll Lanes some of the time if the rates were reasonable.
- 32.9% I'd only to pay to use the Express Toll Lanes in an emergency.
- 18.4% I'd never pay to use the Express Toll Lanes, but I'd still use U.S. 69.
- 6.6% I'd stop using U.S. 69 and use local streets instead.