

Do Express Toll Lanes Disadvantage Some People?

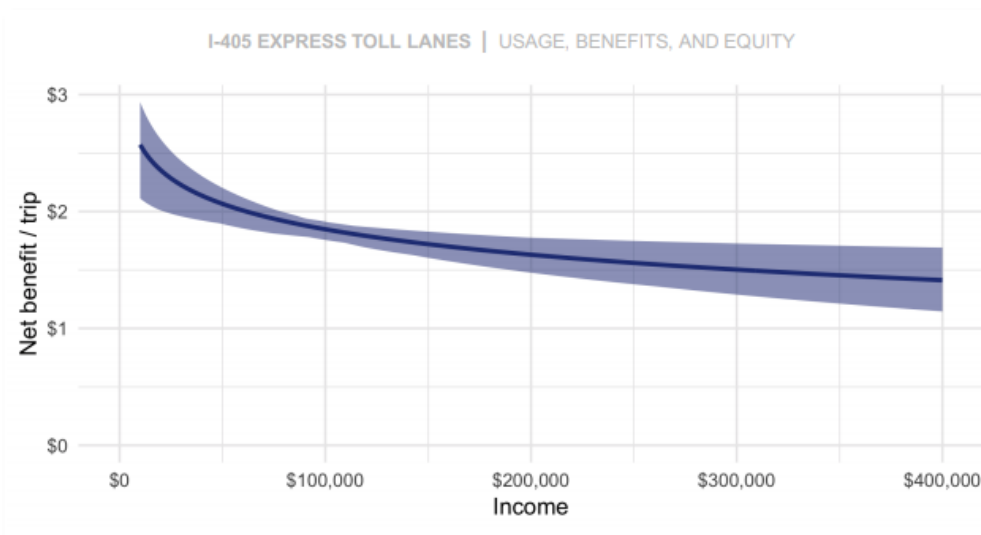
A common question about express toll lanes (ETLs) is whether their use may put lower-income drivers at a disadvantage compared to higher-income drivers in terms of when and how often to use them.

Answering this question is an important part of the U. S. 69 Modernization and Expansion Project (69Express), which is looking at, among other things, potentially constructing ETLs between 179th Street and 103rd Street. ETLs are being considered because they have been successful in other communities like Overland Park where anticipated growth and physical and financial limitations minimize available strategies for managing congestion and producing more reliable travel times.

A growing body of research based on the experiences in those communities where ETLs have been used successfully suggests that ETL use and opinions about them are not dissimilar between high-income and low-income users and that the value of ETLs may be higher for lower-income groups than for others.

The U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) has found that [user schedule flexibility and route availability play a larger role in who uses ETLs, rather than income](#). Additionally, different income groups had comparable opinions about ETLs, with all groups appreciating having the ability to choose whether or not to use ETLs. ETLs have also been implemented in larger cities like Los Angeles, where the [city conducted a low-income assessment to see how ETLs affect communities](#). It found there were concerns about toll lane pricing before the lanes were implemented, but that worries about lane pricing significantly decreased after the lanes were installed and drivers gained experience with them.

The [Washington State Department of Transportation \(WSDOT\)](#), for example, has reported on how toll lanes are utilized by higher-income and lower-income households. According to [I-405 Express Toll Lanes Usage, Benefits, and Equity](#) (following figure), lower-income households “obtained higher net benefits per trip than higher income groups because they used the facility more strategically.”



Although the experiences of other jurisdictions is helpful, how ETLs may affect Overland Park and other regional users of U.S. 69 is a question that will be specifically answered during the 69Express project during the Environmental Assessment (EA) portion of the project.

An Environmental Assessment evaluates the impacts proposed improvements will have on the natural and man-made environment. It is designed to help agencies, elected officials and the public make sound decisions for the Project and its surrounding area.

In the case of U.S. 69, if there are no major environmental impacts associated with the Project, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) will issue a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI). If environmental concerns are found in the study area, additional assessment will be required to determine how to mitigate the issues.

It is important to evaluate the impact and efficacy of road pricing not in a vacuum, but in comparison to viable alternatives or the status quo. For example, sales taxes and parcel taxes—which we often use to fund transportation—are not only regressive, but also inefficient, since they make it seem like use of the roads is free, and thus induce excess driving. Road pricing charges are paid only by users, rather than the entire public, so they don't impose an unfair burden on non-driver households (which are often low-income people of color).

[TransForm - Pricing Roads, Advancing Equity](#)

An EA is one type of environmental document necessary to secure federal clearance and funding for transportation improvements. It is required by the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) for certain projects that involve federal funding or require federal action.

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Learn More

To learn more about how ETLs work or the EA – or about the project overall – please visit the [69Express project website](#) and [sign up for updates about the project](#) as it progresses. You can post comments or pose questions about the project at [the website feedback page](#) as well.