



## Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

### HOT Lanes and Tolling

#### What are HOT lanes?

HOT lanes are tolled lanes that operate alongside existing highway lanes to provide users with a faster and more reliable travel option. The Capital Beltway HOT Lanes Project is building two new HOT lanes in each direction of I-495 (the Capital Beltway) from the Springfield Interchange to just north of the Dulles Toll Road (14 miles).

#### Will all vehicles have to pay a toll to travel on the Capital Beltway HOT Lanes?

Buses, carpools (HOV-3+), motorcycles and emergency vehicles will be able to access the Capital Beltway HOT lanes for free while drivers with fewer than three occupants can choose to pay a toll to use the HOT lanes.

#### What will the toll rate be?

Tolls for the HOT lanes will change based on real-time traffic conditions to manage the number of toll-paying customers entering the HOT lanes and keep them congestion free. This variable toll price strategy will make sure the lanes are always free flowing. Sensors along the road will continuously monitor traffic levels and speed.

When traffic increases, tolls will go up. When traffic decreases, tolls will go down. Because the tolls are based on real-time traffic conditions, it's impossible for us to predict exactly what the tolls will be at any given time. We expect they will range from as low as 10 cents a mile in light traffic conditions to around a dollar a mile in some high-demand sections of the Beltway at peak times. The average trip cost is estimated to be between \$5 and \$6.

Experience on existing HOT lanes across the country has been that toll-paying customers do not choose to use HOT lanes every day – most customers use them a couple of times a week when they need a faster or more reliable travel time.

#### Is there a cap on toll rates?

There will be no toll cap, as tolls must be able to increase to the level necessary to manage real-time traffic demand and keep the lanes congestion free. VDOT remains the owner and will oversee the toll road at all times.

#### Won't HOT lanes just benefit the rich?

Research on existing HOT lanes users in other parts of the country reveals that people of all incomes choose to pay tolls when they need a faster, more reliable travel time, such as when they need to pick up a child from daycare or make an important business meeting on time.

A study of the SR-91 Express Lanes in California revealed that only 25 percent of motorists who choose HOT lanes fall within the highest income level.

Further, tolls generated on the HOT lanes will underpin critically needed transportation improvements in the Capital Beltway Corridor, including added capacity and a first-time introduction of HOV and reliable transit options to the Beltway and Tysons Corner.

#### How will I pay the tolls?

The HOT lanes will be fully electronic toll lanes. Customers will pay tolls with E-ZPass - eliminating the need to stop or slow down for traditional toll booths.

#### How will I know ahead of time what the toll will be so I can decide whether to use the lanes?

Electronic signs will provide motorists with the latest toll rates. Motorists will see at least two electronic message signs well before they enter the HOT lanes so they will have plenty of time to choose whether to use HOT lanes or travel on the regular lanes for free.

Our team is working with experts, conducting an in-depth driver behavioral study, to determine the most effective methods of displaying the toll information and pricing via roadway signage. Information also will be

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available on the Web and through other technology-based channels.

### **Will the tolls change while I am in the lane?**

Electronic signs will communicate the latest toll rates for drivers. Drivers will lock in their price to their destination when they enter the lanes, and will be charged per distance traveled. In the event of a major incident, signs on the HOT lanes will communicate any necessary information to inform drivers and manage traffic.

### **How can you guarantee to maintain free-flowing conditions in the HOT lanes?**

The HOT lanes will use dynamic or congestion pricing to manage the number of toll-paying customers in the HOT lanes and keep them free-flowing. On average, we expect vehicles to be traveling 55 miles per hour, even during peak travel times. The HOT lanes operator has a business incentive to keep traffic moving, as travelers will not pay a toll unless they can depend on a faster and more reliable travel time.

HOT lanes that use dynamic toll prices in other U.S. cities have proven to provide faster, more reliable travel times. For example, travelers save about 20 minutes per trip on HOT lanes on I-10 in Houston; in Southern California, SR-91 customers estimated they shaved nearly 30 minutes off their morning and afternoon commutes; in Minneapolis, those using the express lanes generally experience a 20 mph increase in their speed; and average speed during AM peak on the Katy Freeway in Houston, Texas was 25 mph on the general purpose lanes and 59 mph on the HOT lanes.

Aggressive incident management tactics, such as closed-circuit video cameras and traffic sensors that identify incidents on the HOT lanes within a few minutes, and dedicated incident response crews, as well as strict enforcement of HOV access and tolling in the HOT lanes also will be critical to maintaining free-flowing travel conditions in the HOT lanes.

### **Will the lanes be tolled 24 hours-a-day for non-HOV motorists?**

Tolls always will be in effect for non-HOV motorists on the HOT lanes. Toll prices will vary depending on traffic levels and will be higher during congested periods and lower during less-congested periods. Motorists always will have a choice to pay to use HOT lanes or use the regular lanes for free. HOV drivers can enjoy free travel on the lanes all the time.

### **Will hybrids be allowed to travel free in the lanes?**

Per Virginia law, hybrid drivers will not travel free in the lanes. Like all drivers, hybrid drivers may choose to pay a toll to access the free-flowing HOT lanes or use the regular lanes for free.

### **Will commercial trucks be allowed to use the HOT lanes?**

Mid-sized trucks such as local delivery trucks may pay a toll to use the HOT lanes. Large, 18-wheel trucks will not be allowed to access the HOT lanes.

### **Will motorcycles ride the HOT lanes for free as they do the HOV lanes?**

Yes. Motorcycles will be permitted to use the HOT lanes free of charge.