

What improvements are under consideration for I-75

The Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) plans to construct a third lane in each direction (northbound and southbound) and construct improvements to the interchanges at Daniels Parkway and Immokalee Road. Bids for this work are scheduled for February, 2007 with construction scheduled to begin later in the year. Florida's Turnpike Enterprise, the toll division of the FDOT, is conducting a study to evaluate several alternatives to the widening of I-75, including various combinations of both toll and non-toll lanes. Similarly, the Southwest Florida Expressway Authority is studying the feasibility of advancing the addition of more lanes on I-75 through the use of tolls. These additional lanes are referred to as Express Toll Lanes (ETL).

Why were these studies not done sooner for better planning with FDOT's project?

For the past few years Southwest Florida has been studying different mechanisms that could result in bringing transportation improvements to the region sooner. The State Legislature approved the formation of the Southwest Florida Expressway Authority in 2005, and the Authority held its first meeting in May, 2006. In the meantime, FDOT received all the funding it needed to build lanes 5 and 6 and has proceeded with this project. The Expressway Authority is studying ways to "piggyback" on this project in the most compatible manner possible.

Why are the tolls being considered, don't my gas taxed pay for the roadway improvements?

Tolling is being considered on I-75 for two reasons. First, it serves as an additional funding source to gas tax revenues that have not been keeping pace with inflation and the need for transportation improvements. The ETL project would be funded through a combination of toll revenue and gas tax revenues. Second, tolls would manage traffic levels on the ETLs. Managing the traffic volumes on the ETLs provides a consistent level of service on those lanes and a reliable travel time.

What are Express Toll Lanes and their benefits?

The concept of Express Toll Lanes incorporates a range of approaches that can be applied to both existing and new highway facilities to move auto and bus traffic more efficiently in a transportation corridor.

Express Toll Lanes would give people the choice of paying a toll to avoid congestion by driving in reserved free-flowing lanes on a given trip. Tolls, which would be collected electronically, would vary by time of day and be based on demand - measured by congestion in both the general purpose and Express Toll Lanes.

Much like discount pricing programs offered by utilities, airlines, and transit systems to encourage off-peak use, Express Toll Lanes can be designed and operated to encourage and reward drivers who change the time of their travel from peak to off-peak times when they have the flexibility to do so. Another example familiar to all of us is that of long distance telephone service and cell phones pricing that often is structured to encourage use when overall demand is lower - i.e., nights and weekends.

What is the benefit of tolling lanes on I-75?

Tolling the Express Toll Lanes (ETL) will provide the revenue source that will generate the funding required to build the further expansion of I-75 much sooner than can be relied upon from other funding sources. This is particularly important on this I-75 corridor, where it is apparent that traffic demand far exceeds capacity. The ETLs concept can provide needed highway lane capacity and an alternative to

congestion much sooner than traditional approaches allow. In addition, ETLs would give travelers the choice of paying for something they cannot always count on: a reliable trip when they have to get where they are going on time. Those who could benefit include:

- A parent rushing to pick up a child at daycare
- Transit bus riders going to work
- A contractor or service technician able to make more service calls in a day
- A taxicab or van service driver making trips to and from the airport
- Ambulances and other emergency vehicles rushing to an accident or hospital

Why weren't toll lanes planned from the beginning?

When I-75 was originally constructed, tolls were not used on interstate facilities as a matter of public policy. As demand for new roadways continues to outpace the funding available, changes in Federal legislation have occurred in the policies related to the tolling of interstate highways. Many toll roads are being built around the State of Florida due to lack of adequate funding from other sources. The "user-fee" policy for building roads will only grow in time.

If we build two new lanes now, one in each direction, how long will it be before additional lanes are added?

Although adding a single lane in each direction would provide some congestion relief, current projections indicate that the traffic volumes in the resulting three lanes in each direction would exceed their capacity either immediately or in the near future. Additional lanes could not be added using traditional tax funding sources because no funding has been identified by FDOT before 2030. Additional lanes could be financed with tolls and be constructed when feasible, perhaps as soon as 2015.

Would cash transactions be allowed on the toll lanes? If not, how would the large number of visitors to our area use the express lanes?

No, toll collection would be all electronic, likely using SunPass and LeeWay transponders. Advancements in electronic tolling technologies will allow for more options to use the all-electronic toll collection system. The Florida Department of Transportation is considering a new, lower cost sticker transponder that can be easily purchased and replenished using either cash or credit at major retailers. The Department also has a "Pay by Plate" pilot program underway on the Lee Roy Selmon Crosstown Expressway in Tampa. This program captures a picture of a vehicle's license plate and sends a bill for the tolls to the owner of the car. This type of system is already in use in Canada and Australia, and is planned for other facilities. Additionally, third party vendors have expressed interest in providing a large portion of the rental car fleet in Florida with transponders, the device most commonly used in electronic toll collection. The vendor is responsible for paying the toll and then collecting from the rental car customer. This type of system is already in use in the northeastern U.S.

Won't the Toll Lanes become congested also over time?

By using tolls that vary by time of day, it is possible to control the amount of traffic that uses the toll lane at any given time of the day. This type of toll pricing has proven successful in several projects in the United States, and does work to keep the express lanes flowing smoothly at most times. As traffic increases on I-75, toll rates will be adjusted to continue to keep the express lanes free flowing.