

Stop405tolls.org Petition Background:

When it comes to carpooling on the Eastside of the Greater Seattle area, we are victims of our own success. We were encouraged to carpool and we eagerly received the idea. In fact, over the years the carpool program has become so successful on the Eastside in King County, WA that the single carpool lane was overwhelmed at times. Something had to be done. WSDOT made a good move by adding an additional HOV lane. Such a step, by itself, would have been a great expansion of an already successful program. However, at the same time, 3 changes were made that had a dramatic negative impact:

1. The HOV lanes were eliminated and replaced with Express Toll Lanes (ETL).
2. Access points between the ETL and the general purpose lanes were reduced from unlimited open access to access points only every 3 to 5 miles.
3. Even with the required carpool, "free" usage of these lanes requires the purchase of a FlexPass for \$15 and open an account with an initial balance of \$30.

WSDOT has created a Rube Goldberg solution to a very simple problem. These changes are a radical shift from the very successful carpool lanes used throughout the Puget Sound and across the country. Some of the problems these changes are creating include:

- Vehicles must be 3+ person carpools for free access during commuting hours. Yet a pair of 2-person carpools provides the same gains in trip reduction as one 3-person carpool while the logistics of forming a 3-person carpool are exponentially more difficult than forming a 2-person carpool. This is particularly frustrating for drivers like a Kirkland resident who owns a Smart fortwo micro urban car or the Woodinville resident who owns a two-seat electric mini-car for the express purpose of reducing their impact as much as possible by carpooling in a small footprint vehicle, only to be forced to pay to use the carpool lanes. It is unreasonable to penalize these drivers who have already gone far beyond most to reduce their impact.
- With the 2-person carpool incentive removed, more drivers are commuting solo, adding to the congestion. Also, many of the 2 person carpools that previously used the carpool lane are now using the general purpose lanes to avoid the toll.
- Access points into/out of the ETL are much more limited. Drivers cannot readily move into and out of the ETL, either as they get on/off the highway or when they encounter a traffic backup. They may be forced to use the congested lanes for several miles until they reach an access point or their exit. For example, southbound drivers must exit the toll lanes at just south of Hwy 527 if they plan to get off of I-405 at 124th St. That is 5 miles and it is in the section where there are only 2 GP lanes.
- Due to the limited access points, the ETL are practically useless for drivers with a short commute. It forces them to make most or all of their commute in the GP lanes, making their drive times longer and adding to the congestion in the GP lanes.

- In the event drivers encounter an unexpected slowdown, previously carpool drivers could switch into or out of the carpool lanes without slowing down. Now drivers cannot switch into the faster-moving lanes except at designated access points. They are forced to remain in the slow lanes when they could be using the faster lanes if the double lines did not exist.
- The ETL are not opened up to increase traffic flow when there is a disruption in the GP lanes. For instance, on November 12th, WSDOT closed all but one of the general purpose lanes for construction in Bellevue and Kirkland, causing a 5-mile backup, yet drivers were not permitted to cross into the ETL and the ETL were still being tolled. The ETL lanes were nearly empty.
- Due to the limited access points to/from the ETL and slower speeds of the general purpose lanes, buses cannot use the ETL north of Hwy 522 and had to be permitted to use the right shoulder of the road as a lane of traffic instead of using the ETL. This is an extremely dangerous practice in the event a vehicle moves to the shoulder to stop.
- The access points into/out of the ETL are unmarked and confusing. In some places drivers can enter the ETL, some they can only exit the ETL, and others they can both enter and exit. This has led to a significant increase in accidents, lane change violations, and driver frustration as reported by Washington State Patrol. These unique traffic flows are exceptionally hazardous for visitors who are already in unfamiliar surroundings.
- In the process of adding the second Express Toll Lane, the "collector-distributor lane" was removed from several places including Southbound 405 between 116th St and 85th St and northbound between 70th St and 85th St. This lost lane was very helpful in reducing the traffic pressure through those sections. Now they experience a heavier backup as a result.
- The section of carpool lane from the junction with I-5 to NE 160th St no additional lanes were added. It was just converted from a carpool lane to an Express Toll Lane. While this speeds up the ETL because there are fewer cars in it, it slows down the general purpose lanes and reduces overall traffic flow. Keep in mind this is the same section where drivers must exit the ETL as much as 5 miles before their exit. WSDOT is counting the number of cars using the ETL and GP lanes, not the number of people. So their statistics on drive times does not consider the time of the passengers in carpools.
- All of the attention has been on rush hour, and all the traffic flow improvement metrics have focused on that exclusively. But the problems extend beyond rush. Previously, anyone could use the carpool lanes from 7:00 PM to 5:00 AM. This allowed for smoother flow as the traffic could spread out across all 4 lanes and drivers could easily get around a slow driver. This has a significant impact as a higher percentage of cars on the road during those hours are not carpools. Since solo drivers cannot freely access the ETL, there are only 3 lanes available to them, so nighttime traffic is actually slower.
- The Pay by Mail option is an additional \$2.00. This is exceptionally excessive and unreasonable, especially for people who infrequently use the ETL or are visiting from out of town. In addition, while

those drivers were rarely able to be a carpool, when they were, they used to use the carpool lanes. Today they will never use the ETL, even when they are occasionally a carpool, because they must buy a FlexPass to do so. This pushes more cars into the GP lanes.

- FREE ISN'T REALLY FREE. Being a 2+ or 3+ carpool is not enough to use the ETL for free. A \$15 FlexPass must also be purchased. The FlexPass also requires opening an account with a minimum of \$30 which does not earn interest. If the driver already purchased a GoodToGo pass, it must be removed or the car will still be tolled. The \$15 FlexPass plus the \$30 minimum to open an account means it costs \$45 to get to use the ETL "for free" while the tolling company or WSDOT collects interest on the millions of dollars in account balances.

- The efficiency ratio of cost to value for the tolling system is exceptionally poor. Maintaining the toll system has excessive overhead requiring expensive tolls for drivers just to cover capital and operational costs. These costs include the purchase of the toll sensors, electronic signs, permanent signs, computer systems hardware and software; installation and maintenance costs; personnel to operate and monitor the system, process the billing and provide customer service for billing errors; and additional law enforcement. The most recent unanticipated cost was in response to the power outage on November 17th, 2015. Emergency generators were purchased and installed to power the ETL signs and tolling equipment, an additional excessive and unnecessary cost which will be paid by collecting tolls. All of the costs for collecting the tolls equal at least an estimated 85% of the tolls collected. That means an efficiency rating of under 15%. In other words, for every dollar paid in tolls, less than 15% actually goes back into the budget to pay for transportation projects. For comparison, most charity organizations operate at over 80%.

Adding insult to injury, it is reported that as much as 75% of the toll money collected is paid to the private tolling company based out-of-state. That money does NOT go to funding the highway improvements and it is NOT supporting local business. Of the remaining 25%, an undisclosed amount pays for the state-managed overhead of the system. It is estimated that under 10% of the money collected goes back to fund highway maintenance and improvements. There are more efficient ways of collecting taxes to maximize the value we receive and not spend it paying profits to the toll operators.

The end result of the 405 Express Toll Lanes is more man-hours are spent by commuters than there would be with simply 2 carpool lanes with open access using the previous time-proven configuration. When there was a simple 2+ person carpool lane, an estimated 95% of the vehicles were 2-person carpools. The remaining 5% were buses or 3+ person carpools. Today as much as 60% of the vehicles in the Express Toll Lanes are solo drivers. Ironically, the only group of drivers to benefit from the new Express Toll Lanes is the solo driver who pays the toll. For everyone else, service is degraded in some way.

We are asking for legislators to lead WSDOT to make these changes to the I-405 Express Toll Lanes:

1. Eliminate all tolling and restore I-405 ETL to standard 2+ carpool lanes.
2. Eliminate the double lines and allow drivers the freedom to enter/exit those lanes as they see the

need.

3. Allow all drivers to use the carpool lanes for free during late night hours as it was before.

These changes will result in:

1. Increased participation in carpools
2. Better utilization of all 5 lanes of traffic while still meeting performance goals for the Federal funding
3. Improved overall drive times for everyone at all times, regardless the distance they are traveling, their ability to be a carpool or their ability to pay the toll
4. Increased safety
5. Increased public satisfaction
6. Lower operating costs of the highway
7. Reduced taxation

The overwhelming public response has been negative from the beginning, when WSDOT held meetings for public comment, and continues in comments on their blog, yet they pursued it anyway.

On the positive side, this issue has proven to be one of the most bipartisan supported issues of our time. It has support from representatives of all parties. Citizens talking about it make no party references. In the face of such an impactful problem, it is gratifying to see such unity.

For the full story visit <http://stop405tolls.org>