

Company CEO says I-77 toll lanes will help congestion

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CHARLOTTE, N.C. - Channel 9 exclusively spoke with I-77 Mobility Partners CEO Javier Tamargo to address concerns community groups and leaders raised vocally about a controversial project to put toll lanes on Interstate 77 from uptown to Mooresville.

For months, the project has sparked protests and numerous meetings from groups like the anti-toll Widen I-77 group currently pursuing litigation against the project.

[VIDEO CLIP: Cintra on public outcry](#)

Tamargo wanted to talk to Channel 9 to get a message out that Cintra is part of the community and is working to relieve congestion on I-77. He admitted in his one-on-one interview with reporter Jenna Deery that the managed-lane concept is complicated, but he said he believed once people understand, they won't be afraid of it.

[VIDEO CLIP: Cintra on pricing](#)

Tamargo moved to Charlotte in October to oversee the plan of Spain-based toll lane operator Cintra to put in the toll lanes under the locally-based subsidiary, I-77 Mobility Partners.

He has led other Cintra projects in Canada and the North Tarrant Express project in Fort Worth, Texas, which opened seven months ago.

"We have more people traveling that corridor and traveling at a higher speed meaning less congestion so I think that is what a project like this can bring," Tamargo said.

The I-77 toll lane project has brought a lot of noise from community groups and leaders concerned about the company's success rate after some projects failed in other parts of the country.

"Cintra has more successes than failures and in those it has been Cintra and the investor, not the public or the state," Tamargo said. "We have a balanced portfolio of projects. Some projects are doing really good. Some projects aren't doing so well but the service to our customers is equal in all of our projects."

Cintra is in the business to collect revenue and in this case, it's all about tolls. Questions have been raised about pricing especially after early estimates showed drivers could pay up to \$21 round trip during peak travel times. However, Tamargo said drivers can expect to pay similar prices to other projects he has managed which set tolls at 20 cents to 45 cents a mile or \$5 to \$12 round trip, depending on demand.

"We will determine for each time of the day a certain rate and then we will see how people react to that. I will tweak those numbers so we can keep free flowing in the managed lanes and attract as many customers as we can," Tamargo said.

He said the company isn't here to cheat drivers, but to offer an option that will guarantee faster travel times on a painfully congested corridor.

He said his job for the next 6 months will be getting people to believe that.

"We really want this project to be successful and to be successful we have to have people using the project and relieving the congestion in the corridor," he said.

A group of business leaders and project opponents from the Widen I-77 group declined an offer to allow Cintra at their meeting about the project Thursday night, but Tamargo said he's willing to meet with anyone willing to listen.

I-77 Mobility Partners is planning a series of community meetings before construction starts this summer.

Tamargo said Cintra has a track record of completing toll lane projects ahead of schedule.

If the company doesn't meet the completion deadline, the company will face penalties.

A groundbreaking date hasn't been set yet but the project is supposed to be completed in 2018.