

CHARLOTTE-AREA EXPRESS LANES BOOSTING RELIABILITY

New data shows I-77 Express has helped reduce travel times for all drivers on I-77 between Uptown Charlotte and Mooresville, despite a big increase in traffic.

In the fourth quarter of 2021, I-77 Express generated 8.6 million traffic transactions, compared to 5.2 million during the same quarter in 2020, an increase of nearly 40%. Even so, data from I-77 Mobility Partners indicates drivers were rarely slowed by congestion.

"We're extremely pleased with what we're seeing," said Jose Espinosa, CEO of I-77 Mobility Partners, which constructed and manages I-77 Express. "If people are able to travel to their destinations at much more reliable speeds, I-77 Express is doing exactly what it was designed to do."

THE ADVANTAGE OF P3S

A first of its kind for North Carolina, I-77 Express is a public-private partnership between I-77 Mobility Partners and the North Carolina Department of Transportation that developed an innovative solution to a critical transportation corridor that was often plagued by congestion. After responding to a competitive state-led procurement process, I-77 Mobility Partners secured more than half a billion dollars in private financing, allowing the NCDOT to make major improvements to 26.2 miles of I-77 roughly 20 years ahead of schedule. The partnership also safeguarded taxpayers by shifting traditional construction and operations risks to the private sector.

As always, drivers still have the option of traveling the entire corridor at no cost on the general purpose lanes. Or they may choose to enter the express lanes on any of the 20 segments that best suit



their needs. The key to the reliability of I-77 Express is dynamic pricing, which is designed to keep traffic flowing on the express lanes at a minimum average speed of 48 miles per hour.

DRAMATIC IMPROVEMENT IN SPEEDS

A good indication of how well it's working is the Travel Time Index, or TTI. Essentially, the TTI is a ratio of how long it takes to travel a certain distance during a peak period – the travel time – to how long it should take under ideal circumstances – the free-flow speed. The ideal TTI is 1.00. That means a driver traveling one mile at the posted speed limit of 60 miles per hour, for example, was able to travel the distance in one minute.

In 2015, prior to the start of construction on I-77 Express, the TTI along the corridor during peak periods was above 2.00. Last year, that number in the general purpose lanes fell to a high of 1.19. In the express lanes, the TTI was a constant 1.00 – a 100% improvement.

Bailey Racer, a realtor with the John Bolos Group at Keller Williams Southpark, often relies on I-77 Express. "As a realtor with listings throughout Mecklenburg County – time is money. Whether I'm meeting a client in downtown Davidson or showing a house in Charlotte, it's important that I get to my clients promptly. With I-77 Express, I'm able to choose where and when I want to avoid hectic traffic tie-ups and all the stress of driving on the interstate."

GROWING RECOGNITION OF BENEFITS

On average, 300 thousand drivers use I-77 Express every month. As the economy continues to recover from the pandemic and more workers return to the office, that number is expected to grow. But CEO Espinosa doesn't believe this will adversely affect travel times. "I-77 Express is a safe, convenient and reliable transportation option," he said. "Predictability results in faster speeds and shorter travel times – ultimately greater throughput for all drivers on the corridor."

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