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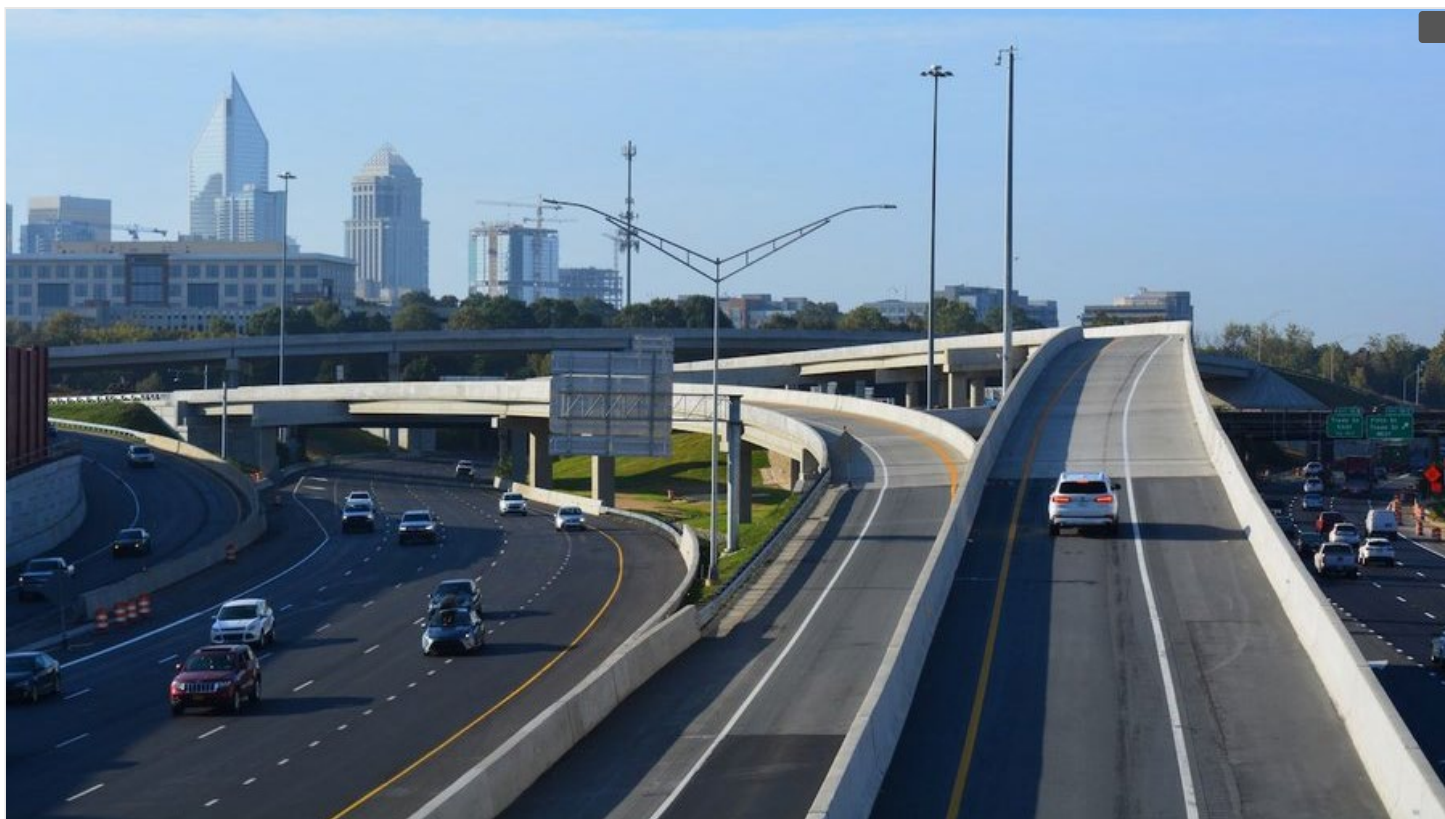
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Transportation •

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Here's how I-77 Express is doing in Charlotte three years in



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.

By I-77 Mobility Partners
Nov 16, 2022

By the time I-77 Express celebrated the third anniversary of its opening on Nov. 16, more than 3 million distinct vehicles had traveled on the express lanes. That's a remarkable achievement, considering the lanes opened just months before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic when traffic levels across the state, nation and world dropped dramatically.

"We're very pleased with how area residents have embraced I-77 Express," said Jose Espinosa, the CEO of I-77 Mobility Partners. "On average, 300,000 drivers are using the express lanes every month. And the number is growing. Right now, we are seeing more than 1 million trips on a monthly basis on the express lanes."

An innovative solution

A first of its kind for North Carolina, I-77 Express is a public-private partnership between the North Carolina Department of Transportation and I-77 Mobility Partners 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 \$500,000,000 in private financing – money that did not come from taxpayers' pockets – allowing the NCDOT to make major improvements to 26.2 miles of I-77 roughly 20 years of ahead of schedule. The partnership also safeguarded taxpayers by shifting traditional construction and operations risks to the private sector. The key to the reliability of I-77 Express is dynamic pricing, which is designed to keep traffic flowing in the express lanes at a minimum average speed of 48 mph. But dynamic pricing is also having a dramatic impact on the travel speeds in the free, general purpose lanes.

Universal benefits

Prior to the start of construction in 2015, drivers needed about 45 minutes during the morning or evening rush hour to travel from Charlotte to Mooresville. In the general purpose lanes, the same trip now takes about 30 minutes. That's a 33% increase in speed. And that's despite a 15% bump in the overall traffic volume in the I-77 Express corridor. "We are very proud of the fact that the express lanes help all drivers," said Espinosa. "That's the advantage of this innovative

managed-lane system. Every driver who decides to take advantage of the express lanes is freeing up space in the general purpose lanes.”

High marks

Espinosa is also proud of the improved safety of the I-77 Express corridor, as well as his team’s dedication to the well-being of all drivers. Today the accident rate per 100 million vehicle miles traveled is down more than 90% from the years prior to the start of construction. In a recent survey by Innovative Research Group, a majority of express lane drivers rated the safety of the lanes as excellent or very good – an improvement of 7% from last year. They also gave high marks to the fact the lanes provide time savings and reliable travel times. The overall favorability of the I-77 Express corridor climbed to an all-time high of 67%, while an overwhelming 76% of express lane drivers rated their experience on the express lanes as positive.

A bright future

As I-77 Express begins its fourth year of operations, I-77 Mobility Partners is creating what could become the most technologically advanced section of highway in North Carolina. In addition to purchasing more than 30 cameras that use artificial intelligence to spot potential safety hazards, the company is looking into installing a series of sensors in the roadway that will allow vehicles to communicate with each other to avoid dangers and help with the flow of traffic.

“It’s very exciting. By innovating and investing in the future of transportation with our partners and local subcontractors, we are attempting to get people and goods where they need to go in a safer, more reliable manner,” said Espinosa. “I really do believe the best is yet to come.”

For more information on I-77 Express and how to save up to 35% on tolls by using an NC Quick Pass transponder, go to www.i77express.com.

I-77 Mobility Partners LLC financed, developed, designed, constructed, operates and maintains the 26-mile I-77 Express corridor as part of the first-ever public-private partnership with the North Carolina Department of Transportation. NCDOT retains ownership of the roadway and helps ensure I-77 Mobility Partners adheres to the standards of their contractual partnership.

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