



Charlotte Regional Express Lanes

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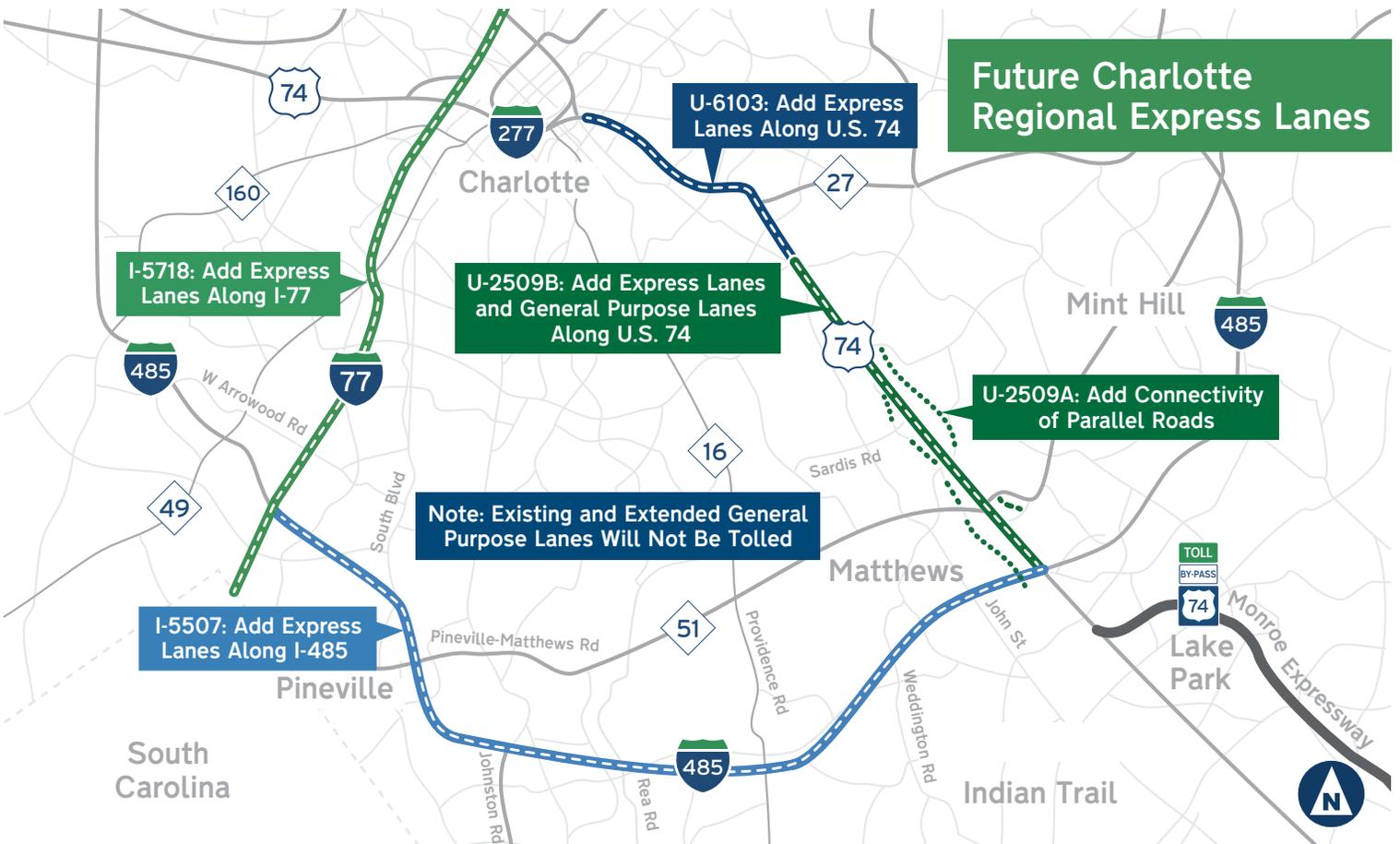
Over the past 25 years, the Charlotte area population has increased by 100 percent (from 688,000 to 1.4 million) with another 500,000 expected to move here over the next 20 years. In 2018 alone, capital investment reached over \$1.5 billion. One result of this growth is increased traffic congestion.

In order to help address this issue, in 2007, the Charlotte Department of Transportation partnered with the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT), South Carolina Department of Transportation (SCDOT), Charlotte Regional Transportation Planning Organization (CRTPO), and other local and regional agencies to initiate the Fast Lanes Study.

The Fast Lanes Study examined existing and planned major highways throughout a 10-county area and iden-

tified corridors that could benefit the most from implementing express lanes to help manage congestion during peak travel periods. The initial findings supported additional study of I-485 and U.S. 74.

After further evaluation, express lanes projects on I-485, U.S. 74 and I-77 South were added to CRTPO's 2040 Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP), which was adopted in April 2014. In June 2015, NCDOT released the 2016-2025 State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP), identifying funding for these express lanes projects and creating the first express lanes network in the state. This led the North Carolina Turnpike Authority (NCTA) to initiate implementation of these projects.



Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What are express lanes?

A: Express lanes are toll lanes built within an existing highway corridor. They provide additional capacity to accommodate more traffic and offer drivers the option of more reliable travel times. Unlike traditional toll roads, drivers can choose to pay the toll and use the express lanes or continue to drive in the existing non-tolled general purpose lanes.

Q: Why express lanes?

A: In growing urban areas such as Charlotte, additional non-tolled general purpose lanes are shown to only temporarily relieve congestion, especially during rush hour traffic. As growth continues, more vehicles fill up the same major commuting routes, which leads to congestion. Variable toll pricing ensures that express lanes are not overwhelmed, so traffic flows freely. When time matters most, express lanes are available to get drivers to their destinations at more reliable, predictable times.

Q: How much will I pay to use the express lanes?

A: The cost of using the express lanes is variable, meaning it will change depending on the demand for the express lanes at a given time of day. If more drivers want to use the lanes, the toll will be higher. If fewer drivers want to use the lanes, the toll will be lower. Toll rates will be posted on highly visible signage so drivers can decide if the toll is worth paying before entering the lanes. Once in the lanes, drivers pay the toll amount posted when they entered the express lanes for the duration of that segment of their trip, even if the toll changes while in the lanes.

Q: How is the price determined?

A: The tolls will be based on how many drivers choose to avoid the congestion in general purpose lanes at any given time. When the number of vehicles in the express lanes is low, the toll is lower. As the number of vehicles in the express lanes increases, the toll rises to prevent the lanes from being overwhelmed with congestion. The toll rate fluctuates throughout the day to provide travel time reliability for drivers who choose to use them.



Q: Who can use the express lanes for free?

A: Transit vehicles, emergency responders, motorcycles and qualified high occupancy vehicles will be able to use the lanes for free.

Q: How can I access the express lanes?

A: Drivers will be able to access the express lanes using multiple access points and direct connectors. Access points are locations where vehicles can enter and exit the express lanes through openings in

the separation between the general purpose lanes and express lanes. They will be designed to allow adequate time for vehicles to safely maneuver in and out of the express lanes. Direct connectors are exit and entrance ramps directly connecting express lanes and cross streets.



Q: Do I have to use express lanes?

A: No, the express lanes are an option for drivers who want a more reliable travel time. Drivers can decide if the time they will save traveling in the express lanes is worth the toll they will pay to use them. Drivers will still have the option to remain in the existing non-tolled general purpose lanes.

Q: How do I pay tolls?

A: The express lanes feature All-Electronic Tolling, or AET, meaning tolls are captured electronically at highway speeds so you never have to stop to pay a toll. If you decide to take advantage of the travel time reliability that express lanes offer, you have several options to pay:

- The first option is to sign up for a NC Quick Pass transponder (www.ncquickpass.com). The use of NC Quick Pass allows for a discounted rate on North Carolina toll roads and automatically deducts the toll from your prepaid account. NC Quick Pass also sells a transponder that works with toll facilities in Florida (SunPass), Georgia (Peach Pass) and all states that use E-ZPass.
- A second option is Bill by Mail, which allows drivers without an NC Quick Pass to use the express lanes. Overhead toll equipment will capture a picture of the vehicle's license plate, and an invoice will be mailed to the registered owner's address on file with the NC Department of Motor Vehicles. After the first mailed invoice, customers can opt-in to receive future invoices by email through the Bill by Email option.
- Drivers can also pay in person at a customer service center.

Q: Who will own, develop, manage and operate the I-485 and U.S. 74 express lanes?

A: The State of North Carolina will own the I-485 and U.S. 74 express lanes. NCTA and NCDOT are in charge of the planning, construction, operation and maintenance of the express lanes. Toll accounts are administered by the NC Quick Pass Program.