



Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Operations and Enforcement

How will the operator distinguish between HOVs and toll-paying customers?

Detailed planning is still underway, but current plans require all users on the HOT lanes to have an E-ZPass or a new, switchable transponder. The switchable transponder will be just like an E-ZPass transponder, but will provide a convenient way to switch between HOV and toll-paying modes with the addition of a switch. If the transponder is switched to HOV mode and the vehicle is carrying three or more passengers, the driver will not be charged a toll. If the tag is switched to toll mode, the tag will operate just like a traditional E-ZPass transponder and can be used to pay tolls on any other road that accepts E-ZPass.

Are all users of the HOT lanes required to have a transponder?

Yes. All vehicles traveling on the HOT lanes will be required to have a transponder. Only those vehicles that want to have the option of switching between traveling as an HOV or toll-paying customer need to have a new, switchable transponder. Customers who expect to always travel the lanes as a toll-paying customer may use a traditional E-ZPass transponder.

Will there be a customer fee for obtaining the new, switchable transponder?

Detailed planning for the switchable transponder is still underway, but customer costs likely will involve a nominal down payment or deposit, similar to obtaining a traditional E-ZPass transponder today. Our team is dedicated to ensuring that the switchable transponders are convenient to access and cost effective. Motorists who choose to obtain a switchable transponder will benefit as it will allow them the flexibility to travel the lanes as either HOV or a toll-paying customer.

What would happen if a driver used the HOT lanes without an E-ZPass by mistake?

Our priority is to ensure clear signage and a robust public education campaign so drivers know the rules of the road and how to use HOT lanes. Our business is customer-oriented and we are committed to ensuring that using the lanes is safe and convenient for everyone. There may be times, however, when drivers will use the HOT lanes without an E-ZPass by mistake.

If a driver uses the HOT lanes without an E-ZPass, it is likely that a letter will be sent to the driver explaining the correct way to use the HOT lanes and requesting payment of the toll and an administration fee. If the driver does not respond, the issue could escalate resulting in the driver receiving a summons ranging from \$50 to \$1,000, in addition to being charged the cost of the toll and an administrative fee.

How are out-of-towners going to understand that they need an E-ZPass to access the HOT lanes?

Our priority is to ensure clear signage so all drivers know the rules of the road and how to use the HOT lanes. Fortunately, more than 10 million people traveling along the East Coast already have an E-ZPass, so it will be convenient for them to use the HOT lanes. Our team also is exploring other customer-friendly strategies, such as a toll-free number, so that long-distance travelers can obtain information on how to use the HOT lanes. These tactics will be complemented by an aggressive public education campaign, with a particular focus on long-distance travelers. We will partner with such transportation organizations as AAA-National to make sure that our information reaches drivers traveling up and down the East Coast.

Our research tells us that 90 percent of HOT lanes users will be local drivers traveling during peak travel times.

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How will access and tolling in the lanes be enforced?

Enforcement of HOV access and tolling in the HOT lanes will be critical to keeping the lanes free-flowing at all times. Protecting customer privacy will be paramount in the deployment of all enforcement strategies.

First and foremost, all HOT lanes users will be required to have an E-ZPass or switchable tag transponder. A transponder reader will check for the presence of a transponder and if there is no transponder detected, the driver will be ticketed the cost of the toll and an administrative fee through the same kind of license plate detection/photo enforcement used on Virginia toll roads today.

Secondly, state police that are fully funded by Transurban (the operator) will be stationed in the HOT lanes corridor checking for HOV violators. By using visual assessment and equipment that will alert them of vehicles that are claiming to be HOV on their switchable tag transponder, but are not carrying the necessary 3+ occupants, law enforcement officers will be the first defense against HOV violators.

Finally, advanced occupancy detection technology that is able to count the number of people in a vehicle may be used to aid law enforcement officers in their HOV enforcement by notifying them of potential violators. This targeted enforcement approach is expected to significantly reduce the current 20 percent HOV violation rate.

What is the occupancy detection technology and has it been used on other highway projects?

Planning efforts for the occupancy detection technology are underway. Our research indicates that near infrared technology is the most promising technology for occupancy counting, as it is able to sense the presence of a human being. The particular device we are anticipating using has been tested in the U.K. and is being seriously considered by other highway projects in the United States. This technology is similar to that which is used at many retail or grocery stores to automatically open doors. We are confident that this technology will be effective in aiding law enforcement officers, who will have ultimate determination of HOT lane violators. Protecting customer privacy will be paramount in the deployment of all enforcement strategies.