

## Implementation of I-64 Express Lanes



On April 12, 2017, Virginia's Secretary of Transportation announced Virginia would convert 8.4 miles of Interstate 64 in Norfolk, designated as HOV Lanes, to Express Lanes. The purpose of the conversion was to reduce traffic congestion in the corridor and make travel time more reliable. HOV Lanes had to be converted, the necessary software/tolling gantry ordered, erected and installed, and a public relations campaign effectively executed prior to the lanes opening in nine months.

The concept of Express Lanes was new to most Hampton Roads motorists so VDOT's Communications Office had a monumental task ahead. The challenge: to educate the public about how Express Lanes operate, and inform motorists about E-ZPass and E-ZPass Flex transponders which would now be required for travel in the lanes during operating hours.

VDOT immediately tapped a research firm to conduct three focus groups, comprised of consumer commuters, civilians working on the naval base, and military personnel working on base. The aim: to better understand current awareness, familiarity and perceptions related to the project. VDOT also needed to gather input on how best to communicate with the public about the project, including key messaging, and to explore respondents' expected use of E-Z Pass and E-ZPass Flex to access the interstate.

An overwhelming response of the focus group was suspicion of VDOT's tolling motive and respondents who were unfamiliar with how I-64 Express Lanes would operate. Group members also said if given a "choice" to use the lanes (because General Purpose Lanes would still be a free option), and if the lanes were not presented as a toll, but rather an opportunity to get to and from work faster, they would be inclined to use the lanes. The concept of "choice" resonated with focus group participants and VDOT had the opportunity to shape the overall story.

As we mapped our plans for public relations and outreach campaigns, a theme quickly emerged *from our research*: "*Express Lanes-More **CHOICES** for Travelers.*" With a well-executed public outreach program targeting key stakeholders, and a paid and earned media strategy, VDOT felt people would be informed of their travel choices, and a majority of motorists in the Express Lanes on the first operating day would be equipped with a transponder.

In June, VDOT Communications and VDOT leadership implemented the first phase of an extensive public outreach campaign. A PowerPoint presentation was developed and informational brochures distributed at five different city council meetings, numerous civic leagues, to the Hampton Roads Chamber of Commerce, Downtown Norfolk Council, NATO personnel, to area transit and elected leaders, Hampton Roads Media Council, and at a Central Business District event. Critically important, VDOT had the cooperation of the US Navy. VDOT Communications Specialists established informational tabling events at multiple large naval base and ombudsman gatherings, and spoke to active duty military personnel

both on and off base. The widely-circulated military newspaper, *Flagship*, also carried an Express Lanes story on its front page and Navy Public Affairs provided assistance getting word of the travel change out through its base transportation offices.

Next, VDOT engaged a public relations firm to help market the *CHOICES* message to the public through billboard and radio advertising, in addition to social media channels (Twitter/Facebook). E-ZPass and E-ZPass Flex were the primary focus of the billboard campaigns. Estimates were the paid media campaign, which launched in September 2017, could cost upwards of half-a-million dollars. However, because the internal VDOT Communications Team performed extensive outreach prior to the paid campaign, the final cost for radio advertising, billboards and social media was \$371,000.

VDOT established a website - *64ExpressLanes.org* - to drive the public to Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) and to share information on how to download an I-64 Express Lanes App. While creatively thinking outside the box, the site also included a carpool karaoke-style interview with Virginia's Deputy Secretary of Transportation, a native of Hampton Roads, who traveled I-64 frequently and who could talk about the benefits of Express Lanes.

Outreach also included information that revenue generated from Express Lanes would be returned to the region for future improvements to the I-64 corridor. This addressed concerns from the focus groups about tolling motives.

It was also important to make a distinction between ***E-ZPass***, (which for the first time allowed solo drivers willing to pay to use the lanes during peak periods), and ***E-ZPass Flex*** (which allowed motorists to travel for free if they had at least one passenger in their vehicle and their transponder was turned to the "on" position). The message was reinforced on the web site, in the outreach and paid media campaigns, as well as through extensive media coverage and news releases.

Earned media was a critical component of the outreach and all local media outlets (newspaper, broadcast and digital online services) covered the story prior to the conversion, as well as provided coverage the day of implementation and immediately following. Two local talk shows also invited the deputy secretary to talk about the new lanes.

A measurement of our success proved to be the penetration rate of the E-ZPass and E-ZPass Flex transponders. On the first day of tolling, 82 percent of all vehicles using the I-64 Express Lanes had vehicles equipped with either E-ZPass or E-ZPass Flex. Within a week the penetration rate was up to 87 percent. The percentage was much higher than anticipated since neither device was required when the lanes operated as HOV lanes. We feel confident our extensive public outreach and paid and earned media efforts proved highly effective.

In hindsight, two ways for improving our community outreach would include a dedicated phone line available for motorists to call with questions the week before and the first week of operations, and additional "how to" videos developed for our website.

I-64 Express Lanes URLs

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M0Un4axPhHQ>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tJ8CgIdAEpg>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=btgULXKTyeY>

[https://pilotonline.com/inside-business/blogs/inside-biz-staff-blogger/article\\_94bc5c27-5562-5762-84ea-fd347d1d04f3.html](https://pilotonline.com/inside-business/blogs/inside-biz-staff-blogger/article_94bc5c27-5562-5762-84ea-fd347d1d04f3.html)

<http://www.64expresslanes.org/>

# More CHOICES For Travelers



COMING DECEMBER 2017

## ExpressLanes

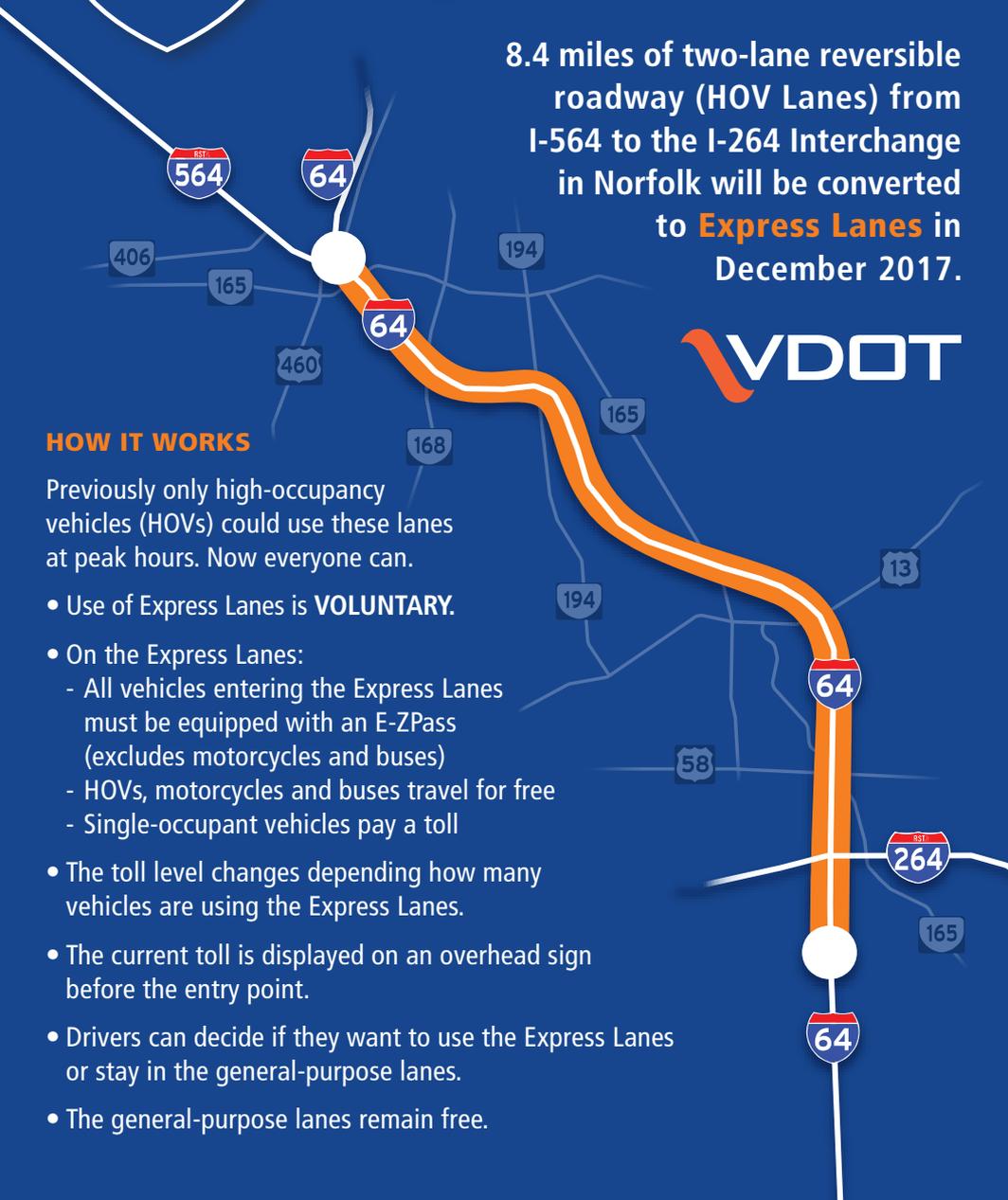
8.4 miles of two-lane reversible roadway (HOV Lanes) from I-564 to the I-264 Interchange in Norfolk will be converted to **Express Lanes** in December 2017.



### HOW IT WORKS

Previously only high-occupancy vehicles (HOVs) could use these lanes at peak hours. Now everyone can.

- Use of Express Lanes is **VOLUNTARY**.
- On the Express Lanes:
  - All vehicles entering the Express Lanes must be equipped with an E-ZPass (excludes motorcycles and buses)
  - HOVs, motorcycles and buses travel for free
  - Single-occupant vehicles pay a toll
- The toll level changes depending how many vehicles are using the Express Lanes.
- The current toll is displayed on an overhead sign before the entry point.
- Drivers can decide if they want to use the Express Lanes or stay in the general-purpose lanes.
- The general-purpose lanes remain free.





## E-ZPASS FLEX

A switchable E-ZPass designed for those who are traveling with two or more people in their vehicle.

- When you have two or more people in your vehicle, you can slide the switch to the right and the transponder will display "HOV ON." Do this before entering the roadway and you can ride the Express Lanes for free
- For those riding solo, slide the switch to the left, covering the words "HOV ON," and travel the Express Lanes at the toll rate
- E-ZPass Flex also works like a standard E-ZPass wherever E-ZPass is accepted

## EXPRESS LANES

- Reduce congestion in the general purpose lanes
- Make better use of highway capacity we currently have available
- Improve travel time reliability for drivers
- Revenues raised entirely support the I-64 corridor

## HOURS OF OPERATION

- Monday - Friday only
- 5am-9am (Westbound)
- 2pm-6pm (Eastbound)
- The lanes will remain open outside these hours for non-express travel

## TOLL PAYMENT

- You need an E-ZPass to travel on the Express Lanes during operational hours
- All drivers must have either a standard E-ZPass or E-ZPass Flex transponder
- To travel for free, an E-ZPass Flex transponder is required so the driver can indicate there are two or more occupants in the vehicle, to meet the HOV2+ requirement



## OBTAINING AN E-ZPASS

An E-ZPass account can be opened and replenished with cash, check, debit card, credit card, or bank transfer. There are no monthly fees.

- Online at [EZPassVa.com](http://EZPassVa.com)
- By phone at **877-762-7824**
- E-ZPass Flex transponders are currently available at these E-ZPass Customer Service Centers:
  - Norfolk, 1701 Church Street
  - Portsmouth, 4010 Victory Boulevard
- E-ZPass On-the-Go retailers include City of Norfolk, City of Chesapeake, City of Suffolk, City of Portsmouth, Department of Motor Vehicles, Farm Fresh, Creekmore Hardware, Navy Exchange, Pit Stop, Taylor's Do It Centers

**For more information visit:  
[www.64expresslanes.org](http://www.64expresslanes.org)**

