

# EXPRESS LANES START<sup>SM</sup> FACT SHEET

In the San Francisco metropolitan area, transportation is the third-largest monthly expense on average, which is especially burdensome for households that earn a low income (Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2020-21 data). While public transit is a good choice for some trips, it is not always a viable option and, as the Bay Area continues to grow, traffic can be bad. Express lanes are being built to support buses and carpools, and also to allow solo drivers to pay a toll to bypass traffic when it really matters. Express lane tolls go up or down as traffic changes and can be expensive. The Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) wants to learn if making express lanes more affordable for low-income earners will improve their mobility options and access to opportunities, so in June 2022, MTC approved a trial program to offer toll discounts to low-income earners on its I-880 Express Lanes between Oakland and Milpitas. The program is called Express Lanes START<sup>SM</sup> and is the first of its kind in the nation.

## ABOUT THE PROGRAM

Express Lanes START will make the I-880 Express Lanes more affordable for Bay Area residents earning a low income. Drivers who meet eligibility requirements can apply and, if approved, will get at least 50% off all tolled trips in the I-880 Express Lanes using FasTrak<sup>®</sup>. The toll discount does not apply to any other express lanes or toll bridges. The trial program will run for 18 months and MTC will evaluate it based on the first 12 months of operation. Participants who agree to be contacted for occasional surveys and paid focus groups will be entered into a monthly drawing for a \$500 gift card.



Express Lanes START / Fact Sheet



## KEY ELEMENTS

**Participants must apply and be approved.**

### Eligibility

- Individuals who have an annual gross household income of up to 200% of the federal poverty level (\$29,160 for a single person and \$60,000 for a family of four in 2023) may qualify for the Express Lanes START discount.
- Applicants need to provide proof of income eligibility in the form of copies of their EBT card, Medi-Cal card, Muni Lifeline number, Clipper START card number, county eligibility letter or the most recent tax return. Other forms of proof of income may be considered.
- Participants must have a mailing address in the nine-county Bay Area.

### FasTrak Account

- Participants must have a FasTrak account with the Express Lanes START discount activated in their account and a properly set FasTrak Flex toll tag in the vehicle. Sign up for FasTrak at [BayAreaFasTrak.org](http://BayAreaFasTrak.org).
- Participants need to register their vehicle's license plate number in their FasTrak account.

### Toll Discounts

Express Lane START participants will only receive toll discounts in the I-880 Express Lanes between Hegenberger Road in Oakland and Dixon Landing Road in Milpitas. The discount is based on the number of people in the car, including the driver.

- Driving alone = **50% discount** on the posted toll
- Two-person carpool (HOV 2) = **75% discount** on the posted toll
- Three or more person carpool (HOV 3+) = **Free**

## TIMELINE

Express Lane START will run for 18 months. The results of the program will be evaluated after 12 months. Once the evaluation is complete, MTC will decide whether to continue the program.



## QUESTIONS

### **When will the discount be available?**

The discount will be available in the I-880 Express Lanes starting in early 2023.

### **Who is eligible to participate?**

Individuals who have a mailing address in the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area and have an annual gross household income of up to 200% of the federal poverty level (\$29,160 for a single person and \$60,000 for a family of four in 2023) may be eligible.

### **How do people apply for the discount?**

Eligible participants can apply at the program website or by mailing or faxing a paper application.

### **In what languages will the application be available?**

The application is available in English, Spanish, Chinese and Vietnamese.

### **How do participants receive the discount?**

If a participant already has a FasTrak account and is approved for Express Lanes START<sup>SM</sup>, the discount will be activated in their FasTrak account automatically when the application is approved.

If a participant does not have a FasTrak account, they can still apply for the Express Lanes START discount. If approved, they will receive a unique approval code during the application process. Then, they will enter the code when signing up for a FasTrak account at [BayAreaFasTrak.org](http://BayAreaFasTrak.org) and the discount will be activated.

Once the discount is activated in a FasTrak account, the discount will be automatically applied. For each tolled trip in the I-880 Express Lanes, the cost will be deducted from the FasTrak account's prepaid balance and the FasTrak statement will show the full toll and a credit for the discount. The discount will not be applied to any trips made before the date the discount is activated in the FasTrak account.

### **How can people find out more about the discount and how to apply?**

More information about Express Lanes START can be found at the program website. Community-based organizations and social service and public health agencies can also order promotional materials (brochures which include an application, small posters and large posters) through the website to promote the program to their clients.

Potential participants without access to the internet or who prefer in-person assistance can visit Roots Community Health Center (Oakland), East Bay Asian Local Development Corporation (Oakland), Fremont Family Resource Center (Fremont) and Vietnamese Voluntary Organization (San Jose) for information and assistance with applications; however, these organizations will not accept applications.

### **When will a toll for a trip I took in the I-880 Express Lanes be charged to my FasTrak account?**

Tolls for trips made in all express lanes, including the I-880 Express Lanes, usually take up to two weeks to be charged to a FasTrak account. It is important to monitor FasTrak account activity and to factor unposted tolls into the account balance to avoid accidental penalties for not having enough money in the account when the tolls post. Participants can review their account activity online at [BayAreaFasTrak.org](http://BayAreaFasTrak.org).

### **How long will this program be available?**

The discount is available for the duration of the trial, which will run for 18 months. MTC will be evaluating results of the program after 12 months and decide whether to continue the program.

### **Who do I contact if I have questions?**

For more information about Express Lanes START, email [expresslanesstart@bayareametro.gov](mailto:expresslanesstart@bayareametro.gov).

For questions about FasTrak, visit [BayAreaFasTrak.org](http://BayAreaFasTrak.org).