

**Bay Area Infrastructure Financing Authority  
Network and Operations Committee**

**July 11, 2025**

**Agenda Item 5a**

**Express Lanes START Pilot Approvals:**

- i. Expansion to new Express Lanes on Interstate 80 (I-80) in Solano County;**
- ii. Extension for an additional 36 months through March 2029**

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**Subject:**

Refer to the Authority approval of changes to the Express Lanes START pilot: (i) expand the pilot by adding the discount to the new Express Lanes on I-80 in Solano County when tolling commences in late Fall 2025; and (ii) find good cause to extend the duration of the pilot for an additional 36 months, through March 2029 and approve such extension, all subject to the expiration of the 30-day waiting period for the amended and restated toll facility ordinance approved at the Authority meeting on June 25, 2025 to become effective July 25, 2025.

**Background:**

Express Lanes START <sup>SM</sup> is an effort to address the affordability of express lane tolls for residents earning a low income. This pilot program is consistent with the Plan Bay Area 2050 Vision's guiding principles, particularly the goals to make the Bay Area more affordable, connected, and diverse. The pilot has been in operation since April 2023 and was designed to build upon the eligibility and enrollment systems originally developed for Clipper START. Qualified pilot participants receive 50% off tolled trips on the Interstate 880 (I-880) Express Lanes in addition to any discounts based on vehicle occupancy. Pilot participants must provide proof of identity and household income at or below 200% of the Federal poverty level as well as have a Bay Area mailing address and a FasTrak<sup>®</sup> account. The eligibility criteria and the enrollment process are consistent with those for Clipper START, except for the requirement to have a FasTrak account, which is needed to use the express lanes.

BAIFA initially approved the pilot for an 18-month operating period from April 2023 through October 2024. In July 2024, the Authority approved an extension of the pilot for another 18 months to allow sufficient time to collect additional data and complete a detailed evaluation of the early pilot outcomes. The evaluation results were presented to this committee in February 2025. The top-line finding of the evaluation was that, while the program signed up fewer

enrollees than planned for, pilot participants used the express lanes more than anticipated. In the past several months, staff have been looking at opportunities to enhance the program based on initial feedback and results. Staff have been helping customers navigate the biennial eligibility renewal process and developing new marketing strategies to increase future enrollment. Staff have also identified several technical issues, and resolving them over the next few months should lead to greater rates of applicants completing the initial enrollment process and successfully renewing as program participants. Work is also continuing to coordinate with other MTC means-based initiatives such as the Clipper START program and a future State Route 37 tolling discount program in an effort to continually address barriers, enhance awareness, and expand/streamline enrollment for these programs.

Pilot Expansion:

BAIFA is currently implementing new express lanes on Interstate 80 (I-80) in Solano County; this new corridor is scheduled to open in late fall 2025. In recent months, several Commissioners and local elected officials have expressed a desire to have BAIFA's means-based discount available on the new I-80 Express Lanes to help ease the financial burden for residents earning a low income who choose to use the express lanes. In particular, the Solano Transportation Authority has indicated that its support for the planned pilot of weekend operation of the new I-80 Express Lanes is contingent on the availability of the Express Lanes START program during the weekend operations pilot. Although the Express Lanes START program is still a pilot, evaluation results to date show that existing participants used the express lanes and greatly value the discount they receive on I-880. Expanding the pilot to a second BAIFA corridor could make the program more attractive to participants and would also help staff understand whether the results on a second corridor are the same as the initial pilot outcomes on I-880.

Staff have been coordinating with BAIFA's consultants and vendors to understand the technical and administrative requirements necessary to make this change, with a goal of having the pilot ready for customers when tolling operations on I-80 begin later this year. The pilot's marketing plan will need to be adjusted to serve two corridors and deliver locally-relevant advertising and outreach. Some adjustments to the FasTrak Regional Customer Service Center (RCSC) will be required. Staff will also leverage activities with outreach efforts to increase access to FasTrak®.

**Pilot Extension:**

Since mid-2022, BAIFA's Toll Facility Ordinance has included the authority to carry out pilot projects to test alternate tolling and discount policies and new technologies for up to 36 months. The Express Lanes START pilot launched in April 2023 and is currently scheduled to end 36 months later, in March 2026. The new I-80 Express Lanes in Solano County are scheduled to open in late fall 2025, potentially only a few months prior to the current end date of the pilot. Based on the experience with the initial pilot launch in early 2023, it can take several months for eligible residents to learn about the program, apply, gain approval, and start to use their discount. In June, the Authority approved amendments to the toll ordinance that, among other changes, allow BAIFA to extend its pilots for an additional 36 months (i.e., a total of 72 months) upon a finding of good cause. Under this revised policy, staff recommends BAIFA extend the Express Lanes START pilot for an additional 36 months to allow for a more thorough evaluation of the effects of adding the I-80 corridor to the program while continuing to offer the toll discount on I-880. An extension would allow existing participants to continue to receive toll discounts and new customers to enroll while staff evaluates the effects of the expansion and other enhancements to the pilot. Staff will also be able to use this additional time to continue internal coordination across MTC's means-based discount programs and external coordination with stakeholders and partners as staff refines the long-term regional approach to means-based discounts on express lanes. Note that this recommendation does not preclude the Authority from taking an action to end the pilot in an earlier timeframe if that option is preferred.

**Fiscal Impact:**

In anticipation of this action item, BAIFA's Capital Budget for Fiscal Year (FY) 2025-26 includes a total of \$2.1 million to implement and operate an expanded pilot through the end of the fiscal year. There will be no impact on the BAIFA FY 2025-26 budget if the pilot is expanded and extended. Funding for the remaining years of the pilot extension will be requested in future annual budgets.

**Recommendation:**

That the Committee refer to the Authority the following:

- i. Approval of expansion of the Express Lanes START discount pilot to the new I-80 Express Lanes in Solano County when that corridor opens later this year; and
- ii. A finding that good cause exists for the extension of the Express Lanes START pilot for an additional 36 months, through the end of March 2029, and approval of such extension.

Above approvals shall be subject to the expiration of the 30-day waiting period for the amended and restated BAIFA Toll Facility Ordinance approved at the Authority meeting on June 25, 2025, to become effective July 25, 2025.

**Attachments:**

- Attachment A: Presentation



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