

Bay Area Infrastructure Financing Authority
Network and Operations Committee

February 14, 2025

Agenda Item 5a

Express Lanes START Pilot Findings and Recommendations

Subject:

Presentation of findings from the evaluation of the Express Lanes START pilot. At the BAIFA meeting on February 26, 2025, staff will request approval for staff to develop recommendations on the next steps for the pilot, including: i. extending the allowable time for BAIFA Express Lane pilots through a future toll ordinance amendment; ii. expanding the Express Lanes START pilot to the I-80 Solano Express Lanes corridor; and iii. collaborating with partner express lane operators to determine the timing and extent of potential future expansions of the pilot, which could include Interstate 680 (I-680).

Background:

Express Lanes START is an effort to make express lane tolls more affordable and thereby improve access and mobility for Bay Area residents earning a low income. This pilot program is consistent with the Plan Bay Area 2050 Vision's guiding principles, particularly our 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 on eligibility and enrollment systems originally developed for Clipper STARTSM. Qualified pilot participants receive at least 50% off tolled trips on the Interstate 880 (I-880) Express Lanes depending 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[®] account. These eligibility criteria and the enrollment process are consistent with those for Clipper START, except that the FasTrak account requirement is unique to the Express Lanes program. Attachment A summarizes the Express Lanes START Marketing and Outreach program. In July 2024, BAIFA voted to extend the pilot to March 2026 so BAIFA can continue to offer the benefit while completing the evaluation and taking action on next steps.

Pilot Findings to Date

Staff evaluated data collected in the first 12 months of the pilot (April 2023 through March 2024) to determine program outcomes relative to twelve performance targets. Full evaluation results are presented in Attachment B. Most significantly, while the program signed up fewer enrollees than targeted, enrollees used the express lanes more than anticipated. Customers who had FasTrak before enrolling in Express Lanes START incurred I-880 express lane violations less often after joining the program. Because of low enrollment, unit cost per enrollee exceeded the target during the formal evaluation period; enrollment has continued to increase through 2024, and the unit cost per enrollee has now come down enough to meet the target. Clipper START has also experienced lower enrollment than initially planned. As reported at the January meeting of the Regional Network Management Committee, staff is working to develop strategies to increase awareness and uptake for Bay Area residents and investigate new options for eligibility determinations across both programs. Key strategies to enhance program reach include partnering with agencies and organizations and cross-qualifying individuals already enrolled in other programs.

After completing the formal Express Lanes START pilot evaluation in September, staff shared results with partners and stakeholders and listened to feedback. At the October 2024 Policy Advisory Council Equity and Access Subcommittee meeting, committee members suggested ideas for improved marketing and program design changes to make it more attractive to eligible participants. The project's Advisory Group met in October 2024, where members raised concerns about regional consistency; they expressed interest in comparing the results of BAIFA's pilot with the next phase of San Mateo's mobility program before making a commitment to a larger-scale deployment of the Express Lanes START discount model. The program was presented at the Express Lanes Executive Steering Committee in November 2024, and partner agencies echoed a desire for a regionally consistent approach to equity programs.

Near-Term Activities

Staff is working on several activities to encourage greater enrollment and retention in the program through the remainder of the pilot. More specifically, staff will:

- Deploy new strategies for advertising and community partnerships
- Begin the biennial process to re-verify existing customer eligibility
- Implement several of the cross-cutting recommendations presented at the January Regional Network Management Committee related to partnerships and cross-qualification
- Coordinate with efforts to improve access to and usage of FasTrak, as discussed at Bay Area Toll Authority meetings late last year.

Staff will also continue to partner with other Bay Area express lane operators to identify an equity program that has regional support, including other potential models that could be considered in the long-term.

Next Steps

Staff seeks direction on how the Authority wishes to proceed. While pilot participants highly value the program, it will serve a very focused customer base by nature even with the planned marketing and enrollment strategies described above, because the program only benefits the small number of eligible drivers who are willing to pay for a faster trip on the I-880 express lanes. BAIFA and partner express lane operators will continue the conversation on how to support equity on Bay Area express lanes, but any recommendations that may come from this effort cannot be implemented for customers before the pilot is scheduled to end in March 2026. Rather than let the pilot end without an alternative in place, staff would consider expanding and extending the pilot while work continues on regional approaches and long-term options. More specifically, staff would develop recommendations regarding:

1. Extending the duration of the current pilot on I-880; this would require an update to the BAIFA toll ordinance, which currently sets a maximum three-year timeframe for BAIFA pilots.

2. Expanding the pilot to the I-80 Express Lane in Solano County in fall 2025 to provide a means-based discount in this future express lane corridor, in conjunction with a potential pilot of weekend tolling on the I-80 Express Lane. (Staff presented this weekend pilot at the December 13, 2024 Committee meeting.)
3. Collaborating with partner express lane operators to determine the timing and extent of potential future expansions of the pilot, which could include I-680.

Staff seeks direction on pursuing this work now to inform activities and actions needed over the next several months in preparation for opening of the I-80 Express Lanes in Solano County later this year. These include amendment of the toll ordinance, starting with a public notice and comment period this spring followed by Authority approval this summer, and integration with the FasTrak Customer Service Center.

Issues:

None identified.

Recommendations:

None. This item is presented to the BAIFA Network and Operations Committee as an information item. Staff will be requesting approval at the BAIFA meeting on February 26, 2025, for staff to develop recommendations on the next steps for the pilot, including: i. extending the allowable time for BAIFA Express Lane pilots through a future toll ordinance amendment; ii. expanding the Express Lanes START pilot to the I-80 Solano Express Lanes corridor; and iii. collaborating with partner express lane operators to determine the timing and extent of potential future expansions of the pilot, which could include I-680.

Attachments:

- Attachment A: Summary of Express Lanes START Marketing and Outreach
- Attachment B: Detailed Results for 12-month Evaluation Period
- Attachment C: Presentation



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