

## Detailed Pilot Evaluation Results

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This document presents the results of the evaluation of the first year of the Express Lanes START means-based discount pilot on I-880 in Alameda County. The evaluation included twelve performance metrics with associated targets. Additional research and analysis were conducted after the formal evaluation period to help understand early results.

### Data Sources for Evaluation

The evaluation included data and information extracted from multiple sources:

- Express Lanes START application system
- FasTrak back-office system
- Express Lanes toll system
- Traffic counts
- Customer surveys
- Focus groups and interviews

### Program Goals

The Express Lanes START pilot program has three goals:

- Increase access to the I-880 Express Lanes. Choosing to pay for a more reliable trip in the Express Lane is more difficult for very low-income drivers; the program lowers the barrier to entry for this group.
- Provide a good customer experience, both in terms of signing up for the program and also in using the lanes.
- Maintain operational integrity for Express Lanes overall, including minimal negative impacts to lane speeds, customer service center operations, or revenue outcomes.

### Evaluation Metrics

The program team established 12 evaluation metrics associated with the three program goals and developed quantitative targets for each metric to help determine if this equity program, as designed and implemented, could deliver the program goals. The table below is a simplified “report card” based on the performance outcomes for the formal evaluation period, which covers the first 12 months of operation, from April 2023 through March 2024. The results indicate with

a checkmark that 8 of the 12 targets were met and indicates with an X that 4 of the 12 targets were not met within the first year of the program.

*Table 1: Performance outcomes for first year of pilot operations*

Goal	Target Metrics	Result
<b>Goal 1: Increase Access</b>	1) 16,000 Applications	×
	2) 15,000 Approved Applications	×
	3) 13,500 Enrolled Households	×
	4) Existing FasTrak customers increase use of the I-880 express lanes 25%	✓
	5) New FasTrak customers make 1 or more I-880 express lane trips per month	✓
	6) All Express Lanes START customers average 1 or more I-880 express lane trips per month	✓
	7) Applicant race & ethnicity aligns with I-880 corridor residents	✓
<b>Goal 2: Good Experience</b>	8) Customers agree or strongly agree that applying for Express Lanes START is easy (rank >4)	✓
	9) The # of monthly Express Lanes START customer calls to the FasTrak CSC ≤ 2% of customers	✓
	10) 90% of Express Lanes START FasTrak® customer accounts are in “Good Standing”	✓
<b>Goal 3: Maintain Operations</b>	11) Pilot operating cost is \$500 or less per enrollee	×
	12) Express Lane speeds do not fall as a result of the pilot	✓

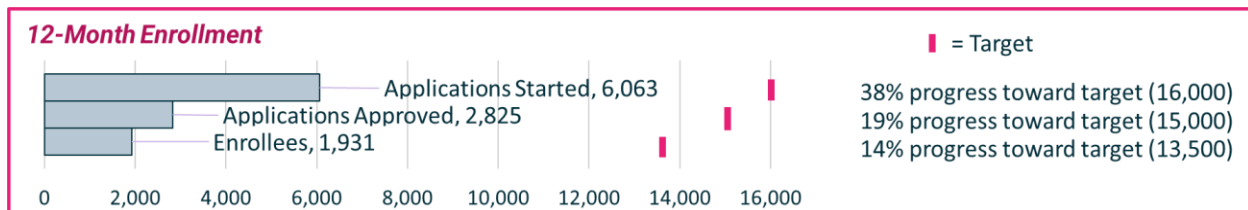
Since the end of the formal evaluation period, enrollment has increased enough that the results on metric #11 (operating cost per enrollee) are now within the target range.

### Metrics 1-3: Applications and Enrollment

The chart below shows how the pilot performed against the first three evaluation targets Specifically:

- In the first 12 months of the pilot, a total of 6,063 applications were started, which is 38% towards the target of 16,000 applications.
- 2,825 of these applications were approved in this same timeframe, which is 19% of the target of 15,000 approved applications.
- Of the approved applications, 1,931 customers fully enrolled by applying the Express Lanes START discount to a FasTrak account, which is 14% of the target of 13,500 enrolled customers.

*Figure 1: Total applications and enrollment in Express Lanes START in first year of pilot operations*



The drop between applications started and applications approved is primarily due to incomplete applications. Although Salesforce is programmed send reminders for applicants to complete the process, staff does not survey applicants who do not finish, so we do not know the exact reasons for this drop-off. About three quarters of applicants who do not finish their application stop at the point where they are asked to confirm their income and provide verification documents. The remaining 25% stop at the point where they are required to upload proof of their identity. Given these statistics, it seems reasonable to conclude that many customers start the process hoping that they would qualify for the program and follow the steps up to the point where they realize either that they do not meet the criteria after all, or they are unable or unwilling to share their documents. Separate from people who do not finish the application, another, much smaller share of the drop is from customers who provide insufficient documentation to confirm eligibility.

Salesforce is programmed to send notifications to applicants after the verifier makes this determination, and the verifier will assist applicants if they reach out to customer service for more information. There are varying degrees of success getting responses.

Second, the drop from approved applications to enrollees is due to customers who do not complete the required steps to link the discount to a FasTrak account. If a customer provides their FasTrak account number on their application, the discount gets automatically applied, their enrollment is immediate, and no further action is needed to begin using the I-880 lanes at a discount. If an application is approved without a FasTrak account, the customer is instructed to sign-up for FasTrak using an Express Lanes START discount code to complete enrollment. Almost a third of approved applicants did not take this final step in the process. In some cases, customers have trouble applying the discount code correctly. In other cases, applicants may decide that FasTrak is not a fit after they are approved. General feedback related to FasTrak received during development of BATA's Equity Plan indicates that some people feel uncertain about the effort required to fund and manage FasTrak.

#### **Metrics 4-6: Express Lane Usage**

Even though enrollment was less than the target, those who enrolled used the I-880 Express Lanes at a high level. Enrollees who used the lanes were called "participants."

- For participants who had FasTrak before joining the pilot, the target was a 25% increase in their I-880 Express Lanes paid trips. These participants increased their paid I-880 Express Lane trips between 33% and 66% per quarter compared to the corresponding quarter before the pilot began.
- Second, for participants who became new FasTrak customers when they joined the pilot, the target was that they would take at least one paid trip per quarter. Instead, this group of participants took a median of 4 paid trips per quarter.
- For Express Lanes START participants overall, the target was that they would take an average of 1 paid trip per quarter, which is the typical usage rate for I-880 Express Lane customers. The participants outperformed the target by taking a median of 4 paid trips per quarter.

- Lastly, 74% of enrollees participated by making at least one trip on the I-880 Express Lanes during the first 12 months of the pilot with 49% of enrollees making at least one paid trip and the other 25% making only free HOV3+ trips.

**Metric 7: Applicant Diversity**

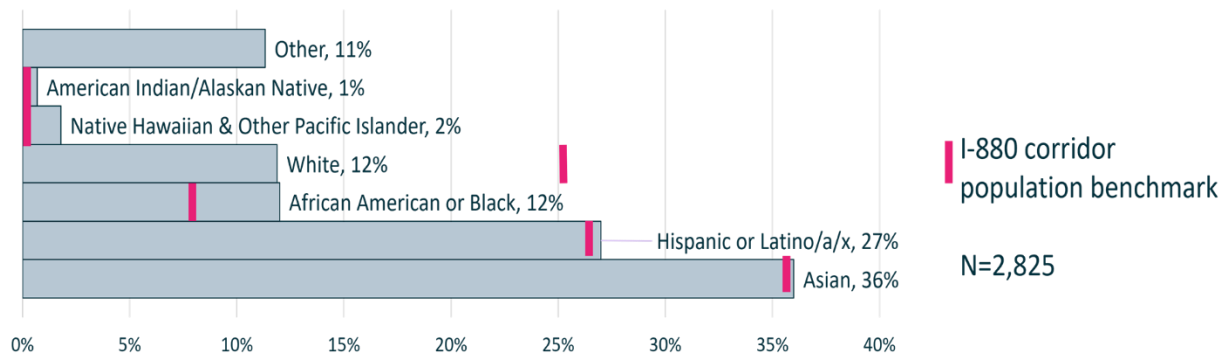
The last target related to the goal of increasing access was that the race and ethnicity of approved applicants would align with the diversity of I-880 corridor residents. Applicants self-identify their race and ethnic group on the application. The figure below shows the share of approved pilot applicants in each race & ethnicity at the end of the first 12 months (the grey bars in the chart) relative to the benchmark shares of corridor residents by race/ethnicity (the pink stripes).

The grey bars surpass the benchmarks for most groups including:

- American Indian/Alaskan Native,
- Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander,
- African American or Black,
- Hispanic/Latin-x
- and Asian

The share of approved applicants who are white is about half the share of white residents living in the I-880 corridor due to the larger proportional participation by other groups.

*Figure 2: Self-identified race and ethnicity of Express Lanes START approved applicants in first year of pilot operations*

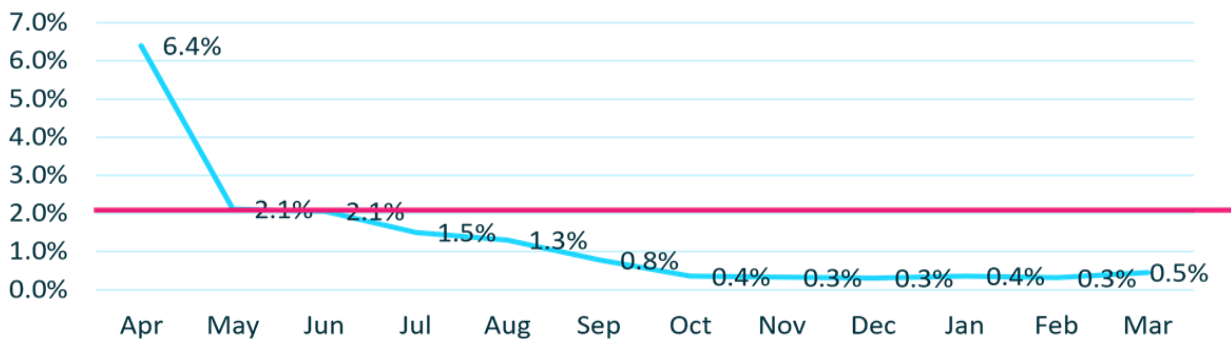


### Metrics 8-10: Customer Experience

The 8<sup>th</sup> evaluation target was that applicants ranked the application process highly in terms of ease. At the end of the application process, applicants were asked to score the process from 1 to 5, where 1 was very difficult and 5 was very easy. The target was an average score of 4 out of 5, and the average score was 4.1, just meeting this target.

The 9<sup>th</sup> evaluation target was related to whether Express Lanes START enrollees were able to navigate systems at least as well as other FasTrak customers. The target was that no more than 2% of Express Lane START customers would call the FasTrak customer service center each month with questions related to the program. This target is similar to the call-in rate for all FasTrak customers. The figure below shows that, after the first month of the program, the number of Express Lane START -related calls to the customer service center dropped to 2.1% of all accounts. By the fourth month, the call rate was below 2%, and it has remained well below 1% since then.

*Figure 3: Express Lanes START customer call-in rate to FasTrak Customer Service Center in first year of pilot operations*

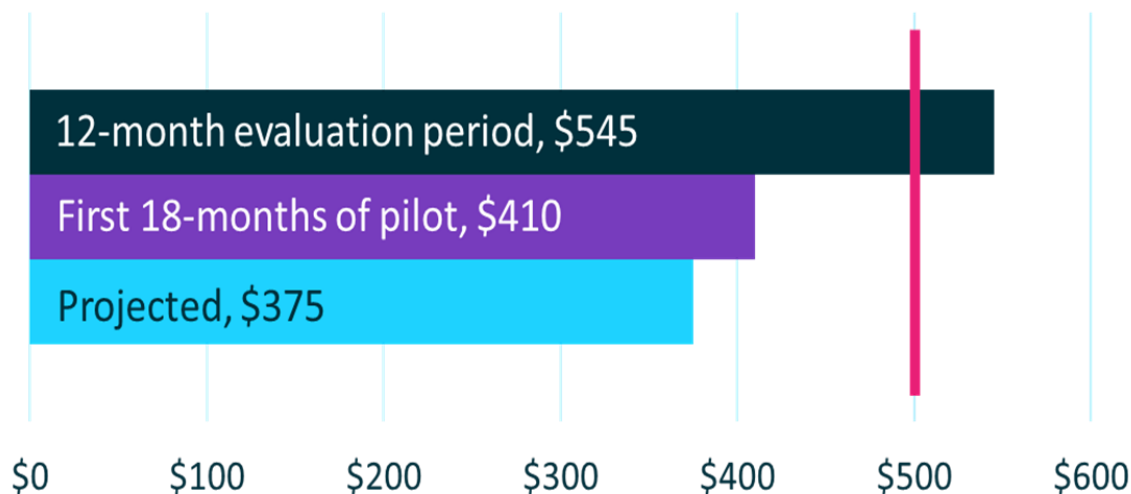


The 10<sup>th</sup> evaluation target was that 90% of the Express Lane START accounts are in good standing, which is defined as having an active account as opposed to having a warning or being in collections or revoked status. At the end of the 12-month evaluation period, 92% of Express Lanes START accounts were in active status, which exceeded the target. This result compares favorably with the overall FasTrak customer base. For example, as of July 2024, 3.5 million of 5 million total FasTrak accounts are in active status, which is on the order of 70%.

### Metrics 11-12: Express Lane Operations

The 11th evaluation target was intended to be a test of the cost-effectiveness of the program by looking at the pilot operating costs per enrollee. This metric includes all staff and vendor costs except for one-time expenses to set up the technical systems needed for the program. The target was that the annualized operating cost would be less than \$500 per enrollee. The figure below shows that, in the first 12 months of the pilot, the operating cost was approximately \$545 per enrollee, not meeting the target. Given the unexpectedly low enrollment numbers in that same period, the result is not surprising. For comparison, the figure also shows that the cost has come down since the evaluation period, with annualized costs through the first 18 months of the pilot coming out to about \$410 per enrollee. Cost per enrollee is expected to fall even further as enrollment continues to climb.

Figure 4: Express Lanes START actual and projected operating cost per enrollee



During the evaluation period, participants who made paid trips saved an average of \$74 per year, which works out to a total of \$71,400 collectively for all participants. Based on the total number of paid trips, the average discount was about \$3.50 per trip.

The 12th evaluation target was that lane operations were not negatively impacted by the program. Because participants made only 20,300 paid trips during pilot, less than 1% of paid I-880 express lane trips, the pilot did not have a material effect on speeds in the express lane or affect overall financial results.

### **Additional Key Findings**

After the formal 12-month evaluation period, staff probed areas of interest to augment understanding of the initial results.

First, potential customers are a considerably smaller group than initially expected. In addition to meeting the income and geography requirement, a person needs to drive I-880 frequently, travel for distances and at times where and when the time savings is valued, to be willing to spend money to pay for the more reliable trip instead of using the free general-purpose lanes, and have the ability and willingness to sign-up for and manage a FasTrak account.

CBO partners reported that FasTrak account management is a barrier for some customers, that they do not have the means for auto-load or are reluctant to have automatic debits they do not manage, particularly when pricing on Express Lanes is hard to predict. Staff surveyed Express Lanes START customers who had received a violation after joining the program, and 40% of respondents reported difficulty managing their FasTrak accounts, despite the fact that 75% of these respondents use a credit card to fund their accounts. The survey asked these customers about ways to make it easier to manage FasTrak accounts. The options that received at least 50% support from respondents were:

- Sending a text or email alert before charging the credit card (55%)
- Creating an app that allows people to check their FT balance (60%)
- Create more ways to pay (CashApp, Venmo) (50%)
- Provide flexibility about how much to add to the FT account (80%)

This feedback is consistent with comments received in more general FasTrak outreach and engagement and with the expanded efforts conducted as part of BATA's Equity Action Plan. As part of the forthcoming efforts to increase access to FasTrak, the FasTrak team is exploring initiatives that make it easier to obtain and use FasTrak.

Although some Express Lanes START customers did incur violations, there is evidence this program may help reduce the rate of violations in general. Across all the Express Lanes START participants who had a FasTrak account before the pilot, 22% fewer of these accounts had a violation on I-880 Express Lanes during the first year of the pilot than in the year before the pilot started—the overall violation rate did fall.



### Summary of Program Outcomes

The Express Lanes START program largely met its goals, although results to date are a mix of positive outcomes and lingering concerns.

Related to the goal of **increased access**, program participants were frequent express lane users, but overall program uptake is low. As noted above, the effort to join this program only makes sense for a subset of eligible drivers in the I-880 corridor, so the program does not have broad appeal to all low-income households, but for those who use I-880 often, the program lowers the bar to express lane entry.

Results from surveys & focus groups indicate that the program provides a **good customer experience**. Participants express strong support for the program citing the value of saving time and money. Additionally, the program appears to be helping customers reduce their express lane violations relative to the status quo. On the other hand, a FasTrak account is required to use Express Lanes, which may be holding some people back from taking advantage of this program. Lastly, for the goal of **operational integrity**, the low level of enrollment cuts both ways. While traffic operations were not negatively affected, operating costs relative to customer benefit received are high. Even with increased enrollment, the cost will likely remain higher than the benefit for the remainder of the pilot period. At the same time, even if enrollees are not making a significant number of half-price trips, they may benefit from the assurance that they have more choice to use the express lane when they most need it.