

WOW Transportation Focus Group

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Big Win on I-405 Tolls

Drivers on I-405 had a big win this week when the Washington Transportation Commission ordered the removal of tolls on the I-405 Managed Express Toll (HOT) lanes at night, on weekends and on six major federal holidays starting at 7:00 pm, Friday, March 18.

Vic Bishop, Chair-Elect of the Eastside Transportation Association, along with two other ETA Board Members and a representative of the Bellevue Chamber of Commerce made public comments on the record at the March 15 regular meeting of the Commission after a detailed presentation by WSDOT staff showing the analysis of the options available. The Commission subsequently unanimously approved the toll removal on an emergency basis (for public health and safety) and started the process to make the changes permanent.

Removing these tolls at night, on weekends and holidays is one of the band aids Governor Inslee and the Democratic leadership recommended in February, after the 31,000 STOP405tolls petition created a major political battle. It is a good band aide, but misses the major point. House Transportation Committee Chair Judy Clibborn (D), 41st District, Mercer Island refused to allow a hearing in her committee on HB 2312 which would have undone one of the two HOT lanes between Bellevue and Bothell to become an additional general purpose lane. Other band aide measures were also recommended by the Governor and legislators that still need to be acted upon, like replacing the northbound auxiliary lane from SR 520 to NE 70th St. and from SR 527 to I-5. However, the Commission has no authorization to implement those issues.

See the blog post on STOP405tolls.org at <http://stop405tolls.org/2016/03/15/wstc-opens-405etl-to-all-on-nights-weekends-but-doesnt-address-the-biggest-problems/> for more details.

None of the recommended band aides would have a major impact on the biggest issue of providing congestion relief for the vast majority of I-405 users getting to and from a job on the weekdays. The legislature made a choice in 2011 to implement the two lane Managed Express Toll Lanes after \$250+ Million of construction for new lanes paid for with gas tax revenue from the 2003 and 2005 gas tax increases. Initiative 912 was an attempt to repeal the 2005 gas tax increase which specifically identified these lanes as general purpose lanes.

I-912 was soundly defeated by statewide voters in November, 2005 and WSDOT proceeded to make improvements to I-405 and other state highways. We now have new lanes paid for with general gas tax revenue which require a toll to use in the commute times with significant congestion in the general purpose lanes.

Remember, Managed Express Toll lanes cannot work unless there is congestion in the general purpose lanes. The managers must have congestion to create an incentive to pay the toll.

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Watch for more ST Fabrications about U-Link

Sound Transit is opening the U-Link connection between Downtown Seattle and Husky Stadium ten years late and at least double the cost of the originally approved ballot issue in 1996 by voters. Watch for exclamations of “Under budget and six months early” by light rail proponents. This of course is after multiple moving of the goal posts for budget and schedule.

The 1996 Sound Move ballot issue by Sound Transit promised light rail from NE 45th St. in the University District to SeaTac Airport within 10 years (that would have been 2006, not 2016) for just under \$3 Billion and would carry 105,000 daily riders. After many disastrous explanations the Initial Segment of Central Link opened in 2009 from Westlake Center in Downtown Seattle to Tukwila Station costing more than the total original budget. It was extended to the Airport later that year. In 2015 it carried fewer than 40,000 riders per day.

On March 18, 2016 U Link will open to revenue service north to Husky Stadium, still short of the promised NE 45th St. Station (that won't open until 2021, when ST 2 finally kicks in with service to Northgate). Only passage of ST 2 in 2006 and a major grant from the Federal Transit Agency allowed ST to move ahead with the current U Link segment.

King County Metro Transit is implementing a major re-routing of their buses serving northeast Seattle to terminate at the Husky Stadium Station, right at the Montlake Triangle. Watch for traffic congestion reports related to this transfer location designed to enhance rail ridership with major transfers from buses. When Eastlink opens in 2023 Sound Transit projects that 80% of the rail ridership will be transfers of existing transit riders from buses.

The opening of U Link to Husky Stadium has been carefully timed to be the opening salvo for the campaign to ask voters for over \$1 Billion in new taxes per year forever (that's over \$500 per year per average household, escalating with inflation over time) for light rail extensions in Seattle and elsewhere. The ballot issue will be set this summer for a November vote. **Hang on to your wallets.**

Light Rail: Does too little, Costs too much, Takes too long.