



Bella Vista Bypass (Highway 71) Frequently Asked Questions Regarding Tolling

To assist in answering some of the most frequently asked questions about the design and implementation of a toll collection system for the Highway 71 Bella Vista Bypass, a list of questions and responses has been developed. This list is not all-inclusive and does not answer every question or situation.

Introduction

In an effort to provide a reliable commute and a high level of customer service to users of the Bella Vista Bypass, the Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department (AHTD) is designing the Bella Vista toll road with state of the art toll collection technology and services. AHTD will provide comprehensive services to ensure the operational efficiencies, congestion management and fiscal integrity of this long awaited transportation facility is successful on its anticipated scheduled opening in 2013.

Provided in this summary is an overview of the key operational elements of a tolling system with both cash and electronic payment options.

Why is the Bella Vista Bypass being tolled?

The last two Federal-aid transportation bills have not provided enough funding to address the region's long-range transportation needs. A statewide study completed in 2002 concluded that tolls on the Bella Vista Bypass could be considered financially feasible. In 2007, further analyses were conducted to determine the viability of constructing the Bypass. At that time, tolling and a federal loan were considered in the financial plan. However, there still existed a funding shortfall and the project did not proceed.

Recently, the opportunity for funding has become available through an ARRA TIGER Discretionary Grant program. If the application is successful, the ARRA TIGER Discretionary Grant funds along with tolling could provide adequate funds to bridge the funding gap. To maximize the federal funds that may be received, tolling of the facility is necessary.

Will the Missouri portion of the Bypass be tolled?

No. In 2005, the Missouri Department of Transportation (MoDOT) secured their portion of the Bella Vista Bypass funding through the passage of the Amendment 3 ballot initiative. The *Smoother, Safer, Sooner* program allocated the necessary funding to construct the Missouri portion of the Bypass without the use of toll financing.

Will this new toll road ever be converted to a free road?

Yes. In accordance with the Toll Agreement between the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and AHTD, once the financing of the construction of toll facility is repaid, the toll will be removed from the Bella Vista Bypass. The loans and bonds are expected to mature approximately 35 – 40 years from project opening.

How much will it cost to use the toll road?

The Bella Vista Bypass is currently undergoing an investment-grade traffic and revenue study and the toll rates have not been set. The cost to use the toll road will be consistent with other toll facilities in the United States, which in today's dollars is 10 to 15 cents per mile.

Will different types of vehicles pay different tolls?

Yes, the toll pricing structure will be based on the type of vehicle. The toll amounts have not yet been determined. However, it is typical that large commercial vehicles are charged a slightly higher user fee than smaller personal vehicles.



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I pay a gas tax now. By paying a toll, am I being double-taxed?

Paying to drive on a toll road is an optional user fee, not an additional tax. It is the driver's option to use existing routes without a fee or to use the new toll facility with a fee. One of the main purposes of the proposed project is to alleviate current traffic congestion on existing Highway 71. Motorists who choose to drive the toll road and pay the user fee should experience reduced travel time to their destination.

When will the Bella Vista Bypass open?

The Bella Vista Bypass may open as soon as late 2013. Right-of-way acquisition is virtually complete. If adequate funds are received from the ARRA TIGER Discretionary Grant, construction may begin as soon as 2010.

If adequate funds are not received through the ARRA TIGER Discretionary Grant and the TIGER TIFIA Federal-aid loan, the project may revert to Pay-As-You-Go. There is no timeline for construction for this project funded under a Pay-As-You-Go scenario.

How do I pay the toll?

Tolls are collected at the plazas along the roadway or at the ramps. Tolls may be paid with cash or by electronic toll collection (ETC) through the use of a toll transponder.

What is a toll transponder?

An ETC system consists of a small electronic device, similar in size to a credit card. The transponder is placed on the inside of your vehicle's windshield. The transponder is registered by electronic readers that are installed over the roadway. When traveling in the ETC lane, an overhead antenna will read the toll tag transponder and the toll will be automatically deducted from your prepaid toll tag account. An enforcement system is in place to prevent toll-skipping.

How will a driver get a toll transponder?

A driver will receive a transponder when a pre-paid account is established at the customer service center. Accounts can be established either by phone, in person, or via the internet. A driver's license, vehicle information and a minimum balance is required to activate a toll tag account. When the driver uses the toll road, the amount will automatically be deducted from this account.

What happens if I don't pay? Is there a fine?

If you do not have a toll transponder with an active account and you do not stop and pay cash, your license plate will be recorded by the enforcement system as a violator of the facility. When a violation occurs, a notice will be sent that may include a warning or a notice to pay outstanding tolls, administrative fees, and possibly enforcement fines. The exact amounts of these fines have not been established, but would be consistent with other toll facility policies in the United States.

What equipment is needed for a toll facility? Will additional right-of-way be acquired?

ETC includes a gantry or scaffold that will be constructed over the lanes. This gantry will contain all the necessary equipment to collect tolls and provide enforcement of violators. Plazas will also be constructed for cash customers. A relatively minor amount of additional right-of-way may be needed for the construction of the single mainlane toll plaza and six ramp plazas (three on southbound exit ramps and three on northbound entrance ramps). The cost for toll collection equipment and installation would be approximately 5 to 10 percent of the total capital cost of the project.



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How will the privacy of drivers be protected?

The privacy of AHTD customers will be protected. The personal information of citizens accessing the toll facilities will only be used by law enforcement agencies to enforce toll collection. Any other use of customer personal information by a law enforcement agency must be accompanied by a court order.

AHTD will not sell, distribute, or make available in any way, the names and addresses of ETC system account holders. The photo enforcement systems used to capture the license plates of toll violators will not capture images of the driver and/or passengers inside the vehicle, only the exterior of the vehicle and/or license plates. The video and images captured by the system will only be used for toll operations and toll payment enforcement purposes. They will not be shared with the public and they cannot be used in court proceedings or law enforcement activities unrelated to toll violations. The recorded images will not be retained for longer than is needed for enforcement or payment verification purposes. These safeguards will protect both toll customers as well as AHTD, by helping to ensure that AHTD does not become unduly burdened by requests for information that are beyond the mission of toll collection.

How will public safety on the toll road be enforced?

To enhance safety conditions along the roadways and to ensure drivers comply with posted toll and traffic requirements, Arkansas Highway Police along with local law enforcement will provide assistance. These law officers will provide aid to motorists, enforce state highway laws, respond to accidents, and maintain the necessary level of safety and service to keep the roadways safe for all customers.

Do toll roads increase noise and air pollution?

Both noise and air quality issues are being studied as part of the re-evaluation of the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the project. Noise mitigation will be considered if noise levels are above the criteria set by FHWA. If noise mitigation is feasible, it will be provided by AHTD to ensure compliance with federal noise standards.

Air quality is a regional issue and all large transportation projects must be included in the regional air quality analysis. According to the analysis, if transportation improvements are not made air pollution could increase due to local traffic congestion.

What is a Customer Service Center?

The primary role of the Customer Service Center (CSC) will be to enroll new customers and provide customer account maintenance and payment options. The CSC will essentially serve as the “face and personality” of the toll collection operations. The AHTD will ensure that the CSC staff will be friendly, well trained and qualified customer service representatives. The CSC will be primarily responsible for:

- New Toll Tag Account Enrollment
- Toll Tag/Transponder Distribution
- Toll Tag Account Updates
- Payment Collection
- Violation Processing
- Customer Inquiries

What happens if I don't have a toll transponder? Is there a fine? How much will the fine be?

If you do not have a toll transponder with an active account, your license plate will be recorded as a violator of the facility. When a violation occurs, you will be sent a notice that may include a warning or a notice to pay outstanding tolls, administrative fees, and possibly enforcement fines. The exact amounts of these fines have not been established, but will be consistent with other toll facility policies in the United States.



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What happens if I forget my transponder?

The Bella Vista Bypass toll road will process both cash and electronic toll payments. If you do not have your transponder with you, then you may proceed to a cash collection lane. You will not be charged on your tag account if you do not have it with you.

I do not plan on being a frequent user of the toll road. Should I still consider opening an account?

Payment by the electronic method will be fast, easy and convenient for customers. When an account is established, an initial deposit will be requested. Money in the account will only be deducted for the amount of tolls that are used. A customer can close their account at any time. The unused funds will be returned to the customer upon return of the transponder to AHTD.

How will the public be kept informed of the project and its status?

Public and agency participation and input are always critical in building support for a toll road project. AHTD will work to establish an open and inclusive public and agency information plan for this project to ensure all interested parties have an opportunity to be involved. The program will potentially include additional public meetings, project newsletters, placing information on the AHTD and other local government web sites, and presentations to community organizations upon request. The public will be notified about upcoming meetings regarding tolling.

Printed information and other marketing media will be developed to explain the benefits and details on how to obtain a toll tag or open an account. Types of marketing and advertising efforts might include promotional mailers, print and voice advertising and attendance at community events.

How can I become involved as a private citizen?

Comments received at the public hearing, as well as letters and written comments will be documented and become part of the project record during the re-evaluation of the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). Additionally, these comments will be included in the environmental documentation that is submitted to FHWA for approval. The public will be notified about upcoming meetings regarding tolling.