

Be good neighbours

The first year for 495 Express Lanes

The opening of the 495 Express Lanes in Virginia introduced the biggest change to the region's traffic patterns in more than 30 years and improved the travelling experience for everyone who uses the Capital Beltway.

In its first year, the project delivered on the promise of faster, more reliable trips, new options for carpools and bus riders, and better incident response.

In FY14, we conducted in-depth research on customer experience on the 495 Express Lanes to better understand how we could improve. We engaged our customers and Beltway road users through online surveys and qualitative discussion groups¹, and asked them a series of questions related to toll-pricing, road signs and usage.

The online survey revealed what customers found appealing about the Express Lanes:

- Fewer slow-downs (90%)
- Exits/entrances that circumvent traffic on arterial roads (85%)
- Predictable travel times (84%), and
- Dedicated safety crews (83%).

At the same time, several barriers to the usage of the 495 Express Lanes were identified. They centered on the pricing of tolls, traffic uncertainty, confusion over how to use the lanes and not having an E-ZPass. Based on this research we updated our communications materials to better communicate with existing and potential customers.

The research also looked at ways to help drivers make informed decisions about using the Express Lanes. One output will be the implementation of real time alerts via email and SMS about the cost of travel to their destination.

We will continue to engage with our customers to understand their appetite for these options, and will investigate their feasibility for future introduction.

[Read more](#) about the 495 Express Lanes in its first year.

¹ Two surveys were conducted in September 2013 and May 2014. Information was analysed from an online, quantitative survey conducted with over 1600 Greater Washington, D.C. area (Northern Virginia, Washington D.C., Southern Maryland) drivers.

