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KDOT availability to discuss how express toll lanes would manage U.S. 69 congestion in Johnson County

Express Toll Lanes (ETLs) are a new-to-the-region strategy for managing congestion along busy highway corridors like U.S. 69 in southern Overland Park, the busiest four-lane highway in Kansas. It is one of several potential solutions being examined as part of the U.S. 69 Modernization and Expansion Project (69Express), a study the Kansas Department of Transportation (KDOT) is undertaking along with its partners, the Kansas Turnpike Authority (KTA) and the City of Overland Park (OP).

Because ETLs have not been fully considered before as a metro Kansas City transportation solution, KDOT is making available Lindsey Douglas, Deputy Secretary – Economic Investment, Policy and Fiscal Affairs, for interviews with local media to talk about ETLs, what they are and how they can work to manage congestion and deliver other potential benefits to Johnson County and the region.

To schedule an interview, by April 9 contact:

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Background Information

The study is underway because extensive congestion and unpredictable travel times, already mainstays during morning and evening rush hours, threaten the area's economic vitality and quality of life. Additional traffic that comes with anticipated development and population growth is expected to triple peak travel times through the corridor by 2040.

Historically, the solution to congestion has been to add more general-purpose lanes. This approach reduces congestion in the short term, but over time, traffic fills up the new lanes or even exceeds previous levels and begins generating demand for yet more highway expansion. For example, some projections estimate that 8 to 10 lanes – instead of the four currently there – would be required to handle congestion at 135th Street and U.S. 69 expected within the next three decades.

ETLs are one option being considered because they would significantly delay – or perhaps eliminate for the foreseeable future – the need to add more lanes to U.S. 69. They do this by better balancing traffic across all available lanes. They offer people the choice of paying a toll to travel in the ETLs. When drivers move into an ETL, they encounter less congestion and higher average speeds. Drivers who choose to stay in the free general-purpose lanes experience less congestion as a result. Tolling also encourages users to share cars, use transit or shift discretionary travel to off-peak times when U.S. 69 is less busy.

Adding capacity or ETLs are not the only options being considered. Other strategies include:

No-Build Alternative

All projects like 69Express first start by looking at what happens if nothing is done other than already-planned improvements. In the case of U.S. 69, this would mean no capacity improvements, ongoing rehabilitation and maintenance only, building the U.S. 69 northbound bridge at 179th Street and updating the U.S. 69 Guardrail End Terminal (improving the ends of guardrails throughout the corridor).

Improve Alternate Routes

This strategy involves making improvements to parallel and supporting arterial roadways: Metcalf Avenue, Antioch Road, Switzer Road and Quivira Road. It also would look to improve traffic operations through signal coordination, arterial capacity improvements and transit improvements. These actions would require City, County and transit agency commitments and investments.

Manage Existing Capacity

Another approach uses a combination of technology and policy incentives to improve safety and reduce bottlenecks. This approach would identify a combination of Transportation Systems Management Strategies (such as ramp metering and queue warning systems) with Traffic Demand Management Strategies (relying on policies to promote carpooling, staggered work shifts and telecommuting).

Improve Multimodal Options

This strategy involves increasing transit and personal mobility choices by improving roadways or shoulders for better multimodal connections, increasing the number and frequency of transit routes and providing better bike and pedestrian facilities along with park-and-ride lots. Other improvements could include: bus-on-shoulder, bus

rapid transit and light, heavy or commuter rail. Many of these courses of action also would require City, County and transit agency commitments and investments.

The current phase of the Project is expected to conclude by early 2022 with the completion of the Environmental Assessment document. The Project involves extensive public outreach with residents, businesses, travelers and others. To learn more or sign up for project updates, visit www.69express.org.

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KDOT urges all motorists to be alert and obey the warning signs when approaching and driving through a highway work zone. To stay aware of all road construction projects across Kansas go to www.kandrive.org or call 5-1-1. Drive safely and always wear your seat belt.

This information can be made available in alternative accessible formats upon request. For information about obtaining an alternative format, contact the KDOT Office of Public Affairs, 700 SW Harrison St., 2nd Fl West, Topeka, KS 66603-3754 or phone 785-296-3585 (Voice)/Hearing Impaired – 711.

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