



95 EXPRESS



News Clip

From: *Miami Herald*, Thursday, November 6, 2008
Subject: State urges commuters to register '95 Express' carpools

State urges commuters to register '95 Express' carpools

BY LARRY LEBOWITZ

With new electronic tolls imminent on northbound Interstate 95 in Miami-Dade County, state transportation managers are urging commuters to sign up now for carpools and vanpools that will provide free access to the lanes.

The Florida Department of Transportation is still hedging on the actual date that the new variably priced tolls will begin, but an announcement is expected within days, not weeks.

South Florida Commuter Services has registered 215 new "3+" carpools, with 650 individual commuters, who will be able to use the new 95Express lanes for free.

"We've had a tremendous number of inquiries about the 3+ carpool," especially after the new highway configuration was completed in early July, said Jim Udvardy, executive director of the three-county program.

"But I think people are in a wait-and-see mode. Once they see that people are traveling faster in peak hours, especially at night coming out of downtown Miami, they're going to sign up, because they are going to gain a real advantage."

Fernando Berriel of Boca Raton signed up for the new carpooling rights with two co-workers at the Medicare hearings and appeals office in downtown Miami.

They usually work 7 a.m. to 3 p.m. weekdays -- often putting them on the road at the cusp of the morning and evening rush hours.

Berriel said they all used to drive separately from south Palm Beach County, but decided to carpool as they started to learn about the new express lane program and as gas prices spiked at \$4 a gallon.

"We will all save money . . . gas and wear-and-tear on our cars," Berriel said. "But we're also doing something good for the environment. That helped me make that decision."



95 EXPRESS



Udvardy said approximately 2,500 people in Miami-Dade, Broward and Palm Beach counties have registered their hybrids to obtain free access to the lanes regardless of the number of passengers in the more fuel-efficient vehicles.

Of those 2,500 hybrids, an estimated 20 to 25 percent said they would use the lanes at least three times a week. The majority appear to be occasional I-95 travelers who will not be commuting during the traditional peak hours.

Twenty-four vanpools have signed up for free access to the express lanes, including four new ones.

In addition to an identifying decal that will give them access to the express lanes, carpoolers will have to disable their SunPass transponders so they won't automatically deduct tolls.

Commuter services is issuing shield bags that disable the older, white SunPass transponders and disabler plates that disable the newer "Mini Pass" windshield stickers that went on sale in July.

"We'd rather sign them up now, before the tolls start, so they won't have to wait five to seven days to get a sticker and start receiving the benefit," Udvardy said.

For more information on 95Express carpools, vanpools and hybrid registration, commuters should call 1-800-234-RIDE or click on 1800234ride.com. For more information on 95Express, click on www.95express.com.

The first phase of 95Express will provide the biggest benefit for commuters who live in Broward and north of the Golden Glades interchange in Miami-Dade.

The next phase, with southbound express lanes from the Golden Glades to downtown Miami, are tentatively set to open at this time next year.

The final phase, north- and southbound express lanes between the Golden Glades and I-595 in Broward, could open in late 2010 or early 2011.