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# I-95 Express Lanes could ease strain of Thanksgiving getaway



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The I-95 Express Lanes are seen next to the the regular travel lanes of the interstate. (WTOP/Dave Dildine)

WASHINGTON — With the greatest holiday getaways just days away, there will be no highway in greater demand than Interstate 95. However, the Thanksgiving getaway could see more relief this year as drivers on I-95 in Northern Virginia will have a few more lanes.

“This is the first Thanksgiving for the 95 Express Lanes,” says Mike McGurk with Transurban, the operator of the highway.

The southern extension of the express lanes into Stafford County was opened last year in late December.

“Thanksgiving is right around the corner and a lot of drivers want to save themselves some time — they want to avoid headaches in traffic,” he says.

While many who opt to pay the toll will likely save themselves time, those who venture south of Dumfries, toward the southern end of the lanes during the height of the afternoon rush hours, should stay alert.

McGurk says the lanes have “performed well” around the major holidays and on most days but points to a few exceptions.

“The biggest challenges at the southern end were around the one-off Thursdays and Fridays during the summer,” he says.

When I-95 is overcapacity, traffic at the end of the express lanes is slowed by the action of those drivers merging into delays in the main lanes. This has led to several miles of slow traffic through the Quantico Marine Base.

In the past, Transurban has dissuaded drivers from using the lanes when there are delays by increasing the cost beyond Woodbridge and by alerting drivers of the congestion by posting messages on electronic message signs near exit ramps that led back into the main lanes. He says those signs will be activated if needed as the holiday nears.

The reversible lanes will be open in their normal weekday configuration next Tuesday and Wednesday. On Thanksgiving, the lanes will be open to northbound traffic all day long. The lanes will remain open to northbound traffic through late Friday morning and are scheduled to serve southbound traffic by about 1 p.m. Friday.

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