

Just 2 now, Yamuna expressway to open eight FASTag lanes at all toll plazas

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NOIDA/NEW DELHI: The FASTag lanes at the Yamuna Expressway's toll plazas will not slow you down if you're planning to drive down to the Taj for Christmas or New Year. From December 22, all the three toll plazas – at Jewar, Mathura and Agra – will operate eight FASTag lanes on either carriageway. At present, just two lanes on each carriageway are FASTag-enabled, which cause traffic to funnel at these toll booths, extending the wait time.

The agreement that paves the way to open the six additional lanes was signed by Yamuna Expressway concessionaire Jaypee Infratech Ltd and IDBI Bank on Wednesday. The need for more lanes has been felt for a while with traffic jams being reported from all three toll plazas.

Arun Vir Singh, CEO of the Yamuna Expressway Industrial Development Authority that has administrative control of the region, told TOI, "The jams occur mostly in the morning and evening peak hours. People have to wait 20-25 minutes, leading to long queues at the tolls. But now, with the additional FASTag lanes, the waiting period will end. I have also directed officials to take necessary measures to prevent road accidents on the expressway."

Sources said the Indian Highways Management Company (IHMCL), which is under the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) and is implementing the FASTag programme, had cautioned that the FASTag facility would be withdrawn from the expressway if lanes were not increased.

"Since FASTag is a national programme and NHAI is implementing it across the country, we receive complaints, irrespective of whether a highway or expressway is operated by a private player or a government agency. So, we were getting a bad name for no fault of ours. People have a genuine reason to complain since they have already put money in their FASTags for a smoother ride at toll plazas," said an NHAI official.

Santosh Pawar, GM (operations) at Jaypee Infratech, said that they did not expect the sudden increase in the number of FASTag vehicles after the second Covid lockdown. According to Pawar, a phase-wise increase of lanes was planned earlier. "But from about 40,000 vehicles, the number of vehicles has increased to nearly 80,000 a day now across the 165km Yamuna Expressway. This number goes up to about one lakh during weekends. On Diwali day and around it, the number had risen to 1.5 lakh," said Pawar.

Pawar said procuring the necessary equipment, some of which was sourced from abroad, took time. These include radio frequency identification (RFID) readers, barriers, sensors, AVC (automatic vehicle classification), etc. "These need time to install and test. Hence, there's no delay in increasing the number of lanes. We had planned to increase the lanes in a phased manner," said Pawar.

Officials said the busiest stretch of the Yamuna Expressway is the 49km between the Jewar toll plaza and Zero Point, where the Noida Expressway ends.