

Steven L. Choi

A recent article on Bay Area bridges and FasTrak has caught my attention. For years the toll booths on Bay area's bridges have supported extensions, construction and maintenance of the bridges. Without toll booths the bridges would not even exist. They have worked well and efficiently, but in the last five years the toll prices on the bridges have gone up as much as two dollars. For example, the Golden Gate Bridge's toll price two years ago was three dollars, but now has gone up to five. With the rise of toll price also comes with a growth in traffic congestion. Traffic problems have plagued the Bay area for years and even triggered construction for a new Bay Bridge. One main solution to this problem was the introduction of FasTrak. San Francisco officials and bridge administrators decided eek last to release FasTrak in stores and shops around the Bay Area. Their decision interested me in delving into the implications on consumer behavior and decision making.

The first to thing to examine is the availability of the electronic trackers. I think it's trustworthy to conclude that since the trackers are easier to access more of them will be sold. Convenience is important to products like FasTrak because consumers don't know where to get them. Another reason consumers would not purchase FasTrak is if they don't have short term needs; perhaps it might be a waste of timely paying the bill that FasTrak sends at the end of each month. According to Pindyck the theory of consumer behavior begins with people's preferences for one market basket versus another. A question that you would have to ask yourself is: what is the opportunity costs in purchasing FasTrak? One possibility would be paying the monthly bill and going through the process of purchasing FasTrak. Do the majority of people who purchase FasTrak work in the city? Or are some tourists/locals who don't go to San Francisco often but want to purchase one for the sake of convenience? The "market baskets" here would be between paying the toll every time one crosses it as opposed to accumulating toll prices and paying it one time at the end of each month?

From the firm's point of view (Bay Area transportation system) it would be a waste two allocate three lanes on the Bay Bridge for FasTrak **only** drivers. Often when I cross the bridge during peak times I notice that the FasTrak only lanes are empty. Technically they are not being implemented correctly and their role as FasTrak only lanes decreases revenue. The main problem here is that the normal driver does not have the time or the knowledge of how to purchase a tracker. Once the trackers are sold in gas stations and businesses around the Bay area commuters will be face the choice: should I get the tracker now or later?

Article endorsed by: Aaron Kwon and Tad Park

## BAY AREA

### FasTrak to sell devices in stores

[Michael Cabanatuan, Chronicle Staff Writer](#)

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As soon as this summer, Bay Area motorists should be able to pick up a **FasTrak** transponder along with a gallon of milk, a prescription or a cup of coffee.

In an effort to coax more commuters into paying their tolls electronically with **FasTrak**, Bay Area transportation officials said Wednesday they have started recruiting retailers to sell the transponders.

"We think it's so important to have transponders readily available to people," said Rod McMillan, director of bridge oversight and operations for the Bay Area Toll Authority. "We want to move as fast as we can."

To get a **FasTrak** transponder now, motorists must apply over the Internet or telephone or by fax, or visit the customer service center on the Embarcadero in San Francisco. On occasion, a temporary center has been set up at toll plazas.

**FasTrak**, now seven years old, has been stuck in the slow lane with just 39 percent of the drivers crossing the region's toll bridges using it to pay their tolls electronically. Across the nation, particularly on the East Coast, other toll bridges and tollways have up to 75 percent of their drivers paying electronically.

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The Bay Area Toll Authority, a division of the regional Metropolitan Transportation Commission that oversees operation of state-owned toll bridges, is working to drive up the use of **FasTrak**. Transportation officials have said they expect to convert the majority of lanes at all bridge toll plazas to **FasTrak**-only lanes.

The nation's most successful electronic toll-collection systems credit their high market share to the discounts they offer electronic toll-payers, and to arrangements with retailers that sell their transponders in grocery, drug and convenience stores.

The toll authority on Wednesday amended its contract with ACS State and Local Solutions, which handles the distribution of **FasTrak** transponders and customer service, to establish a retail distribution program at a cost of up to \$212,800.

Several retailers have been contacted and are interested in selling **FasTrak** transponders, McMillan said, but none have signed up yet. Rather than choosing a single retail chain, as some electronic-toll operators have done, **FasTrak** will probably be sold by multiple merchants, he said.

Transponders sold through stores will come with a certain amount of prepaid toll value, but motorists will be required to register and link their account to a credit card or checking account when the prepaid amount is exhausted, he said. Merchants would receive a still-to-be-determined commission for each transponder sold.

The toll authority expects to distribute about 40 percent of all transponders through retail outlets, said Linda Lee, a planner with the authority. Some electronic-toll systems issue 80 percent of their transponders through stores, she said, and the toll authority hopes to get there eventually.

Toll authority members suggested attempting to enlist everyone from gas stations to car dealers to the Department of Motor Vehicles to sell transponders.

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