California Department of Transportation
District 7 – Los Angeles & Ventura Counties
100 South Main Street, Los Angeles, California 90012
Maria Raptis, Public Information Officer, 213-897-9372
http://www.dot.ca.gov/dist07

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS
Foothill Freeway (I-210) Congestion Relief Project

What is the I-210 Congestion Relief Project?

Motorists at on-ramps waiting to enter I-210 have found that non-stop streams of vehicles on the mainline make it difficult to merge onto the freeway. The goal of the I-210 Congestion Relief Project is to utilize ramp metering to manage the flow of vehicles entering the freeway as well as to address other safety concerns. This improvement will also help to alleviate unnecessary weaving that occurs while entering the freeway and when trying to exit with quick, last minute maneuvers. Very often, it is these last-minute maneuvers that cause accidents. The meters will help to ease congestion around an incident on the system, when they unfortunately occur.

How did this project come about?

Caltrans was involved in research and software design of an innovative and adaptive metering system when funding from Governor Schwarzenegger's 2006 Strategic Growth Plan became available. Caltrans was able to deliver the I-210 Congestion Relief Project in less than two years. The I-210 corridor was a perfect fit to implement this unique system because of its 50-mile length, numerous long on-ramps and connection to many other major arteries such as Routes 2, 57, 118, 134 and 605.

Which freeways have activated ramp metering?

The I-210 Congestion Relief Project includes the entire 50-mile route from the San Bernardino County line to Interstate 5 near Sylmar. Ramp meters and freeway-to-freeway connector meters became active on the I-210 corridor from the San Bernardino County line to Pasadena beginning March 2008. Ramp meters on I-210 from Pasadena to I-5 were activated on June 10, 2009 and those on southbound U.S.-101 between Rancho Road in Thousand Oaks and Las Virgenes Road in Calabasas became active on June 15, 2009. Ramp meters on northbound U.S.-101 within these same limits will be activated on a future date.

Why has Caltrans installed stop lights on the I-210 freeway? (Freeway-to-freeway connector metering)

The lights are not the same type of stop-and-go lights found on streets and highways. These traffic lights are freeway-to-freeway connector meters that are technologically advanced to read and calculate data to better predict and adapt to congestion. The metering system is able to respond to real-time traffic situations, congestion and incidents that motorists are unaware of ahead on the freeway corridor. The goal is to better control the flow of traffic on I-210, which is one of the most heavily traveled and congested east-to-west freeway corridors in Los Angeles County.

How can meters improve my commute?

On-ramp meters collect and transmit information in real-time using fiber optics and algorithms. The data collected from each ramp meter and freeway-to-freeway connector meters is compiled to predict what may be happening further ahead on the route and adjust meters to prevent congestion from too many vehicles simultaneously entering the freeway. The metering system is able to re-adjust when accidents or other incidents occur and can also calculate historical data of traffic flow from the past 5 or 10 minutes or from past weeks, months, or years to predict traffic patterns. A short wait on the ramp will result in smoother, consistent traffic flow on the mainline, resulting in faster travel time and less congestion and delays for everyone.

Has construction completed? What is left to do?

Construction has completed and all equipment has been installed, but Caltrans has yet to activate five freeway-to-freeway connector meters on I-210. As of June 10, 2009, all on-ramp meters along the I-210 corridor (eastbound and westbound) are now active. In March and April 2008, four freeway-to-freeway connector meters became fully operational from northbound I-605 and from northbound SR-57 to eastbound and westbound I-210. By fall 2009, Caltrans will activate meters on five more freeway-to-freeway connector interchanges onto eastbound and westbound I-210 from Routes 2, 118 and 134.

It seems that there are ramp meters at every on-ramp along I-210. Why so many?

Yes, every entry point on eastbound and westbound I-210 corridor from the San Bernardino County line to the I-5 Interchange has been metered. This amounts to 1,000 ramp meters to better control the flow of traffic onto the heavily traveled corridor.

Who monitors the meters?

With the assistance of information gathered through fiber optic cables and wire loops beneath the pavement, Caltrans Ramp Metering staff at the Los Angeles Regional Transportation Management Center remotely monitor, collect data, set appropriate metering rates and make adjustments at any given location on the entire I-210 corridor. In addition, staff performs on site monitoring and evaluations at meter locations, as needed.

Traffic is bottlenecking at some ramp meters. Why is this happening when the flow on I-210 has improved?

With any new system, there is an adjustment and familiarization period, however, motorists will see an improvement in their overall travel time on the mainline freeway.

It appears that congestion at the meters causes impatient drivers to cut in line rather than wait.

As with all law enforcement issues on state-owned freeways and highways, all illegal maneuvers are the responsibility of the California Highway Patrol. The public is asked to plan ahead and expect delays while motorists become familiar with these improvements. A short wait at the ramp meter will result in smoother, consistent traffic flow on the mainline, resulting in faster travel time and less congestion and delays for everyone.

Why now? I've been driving I-210 for twenty years and there has never been a problem.

While you may not experience gridlock today, it is the responsibility of Caltrans to look 20 to 30 years into the future and prepare for population growth and more vehicles. In fact, population and vehicle growth is steadily climbing and this trend is expected to continue.

Update: 6/23/2009