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All Electronic Tolling (AET): Frequently Asked Questions

In 2012, MassDOT made the decision to transition to an All Electronic Tolling (AET) system for the Massachusetts Turnpike (I-90) as well as all of the Boston tunnels and the Tobin Memorial Bridge. MassDOT is currently testing the AET system and plans to activate it by the end of October.

AET: Background

- **Why is AET being implemented?**

The primary purpose of AET is to increase safety and convenience for the traveling public by eliminating the sometimes dramatic speed reductions and congestion that occur at toll plaza, which studies have shown to be a significant source of crashes. AET will improve safety since crashes occur more frequently both in the approaches to toll booths and as vehicles exit the toll booths and move into travel lanes. The crash rate for the Weston toll plaza, for example, is about 60 percent higher than it is on the adjacent mainline roadway.

AET will also help improve air quality by reducing emissions from vehicles idling in toll lanes or accelerating and decelerating in manual collection toll lanes as well as in existing E-ZPass lanes, where drivers must now reduce their speed to 15 miles an hour. AET will save the motoring public more than 800 hours of time every day, or 280,000 hours a year. The system will also save drivers up to 875,000 gallons of gasoline a year.

- **How does AET work?**

AET gantries have been installed and equipped with sensors that will electronically register toll charges as vehicles pass under them. Drivers will no longer have to stop at a toll plaza and will be able to maintain a safe highway speed.

If a vehicle has an E-ZPass transponder, the toll will be automatically charged to the E-ZPass account associated with that vehicle. Drivers are not required to use transponders; if a vehicle does not have an E-ZPass transponder, cameras mounted on the gantry will photograph the vehicle's license plate and the registered owner will be sent an invoice. In addition to the actual gantry charge, customers who do not use an E-ZPass transponder will pay a "pay-by-plate" processing fee to cover mailing, processing, and other costs.

Drivers who do not have E-ZPass transponders are encouraged to obtain one, free of cost. For more information on obtaining a transponder, visit the E-ZPass web page at mass.gov/ezpassma.

AET Gantries

- **How were gantry locations selected?**

Gantry locations were selected based on a 2012 study by AECOM that considered traffic volume, roadway geometry, and other factors.

AET gantries have been installed at these Massachusetts Turnpike locations: Lee (mile marker 10.01), Blandford (mile marker 26.25), Westfield (mile marker 40.86), Ludlow (mile marker 57.68), Warren (mile marker 69.78), Charlton (mile marker 89.10), Hopkinton (mile marker 104.86), Southborough (mile marker 109.07), Framingham (mile marker 113.92), Weston (mile marker 120.21), Newton (mile marker 126.18), Brighton (mile marker 130.04), Allston (mile marker 131.15)

Gantries have been placed so that tolls will be collected in both directions on the Tobin Bridge and all Boston tunnels. The southbound gantry on the Charlestown side of the Tobin Bridge has been operational since July 2014 and an additional gantry has been placed in Charlestown on the northbound side. On the Sumner/Callahan tunnels, gantries have been added on the East Boston side of the two tunnels. At the Ted Williams Tunnel, AET equipment has been placed on existing structures on the South Boston side both eastbound and westbound.

- **Why do some stretches of the Turnpike, such as Weston and Hopkinton, have several gantries while other sections, especially along the western portion of the Turnpike, have relatively few sections and a driver can enter and exit the Turnpike without paying a toll?**

The original goal was to locate gantries between every turnpike interchange so that all customers would pay. However, analysis determined that it would not be cost effective to install gantries between all of the closely spaced interchanges around Springfield and Worcester, where both toll rates and traffic volumes are relatively low.

- **Why has a gantry been installed at the Newton interchange, which had been un-tolled?**

The placement of the AET gantry between Interchanges 16 and 17 in Newton is intended to discourage I-95/128 cut-through traffic by drivers who attempt to avoid the Weston toll and to increase tolling equity as this section had previously been tolled. Just as passenger vehicle tolls were restored to Exits 1 through 6 on the western part of the Turnpike in 2013, toll collection will be restored to the Newton area with this gantry. Gantry locations were based on a study conducted in 2012.

Setting AET Gantry Rates

- **Is MassDOT raising tolls on the Turnpike, tunnels and Tobin Bridge?**

MassDOT is not implementing a toll increase; the goal in setting gantry rates is to remain revenue neutral, maintaining existing revenue collection is to be substantially equal to what had been collected prior to AET. However, individual drivers may see their tolls decrease, stay the same or increase for a given trip from point to point within the Turnpike since tolls will be charged and collected at gantries that vary from current toll locations. This change in the location of toll collections required MassDOT to set the rates that will be charged at each gantry. As part of the effort to keep the tolling changes revenue neutral, AET rates will be set so that passenger vehicles with E-ZPassMA transponders traveling from the New York border to Boston will pay less after AET is in effect than they did before; E-ZPassMA customers currently pay \$6.60; under AET they will pay \$6.15.

- **How were gantry rates set?**

Gantry rates were developed by calculating the per mile cost of travel on different sections of I-90 and setting rates at each gantry to be as close to that per mile cost of travel today, making adjustments to address issues of toll equity and the need to ensure that total revenue generated on the Western Turnpike and Metropolitan Highway System each remain substantially equal to the total revenue generated by the current toll system.

- **What about point-to-point or gantry to gantry charges within the Turnpike?**

In 1997, the Massachusetts Legislature split the Massachusetts Turnpike into two “facilities”: the Western Turnpike, from the New York State border to Weston, and the Metropolitan Highway System, which includes the Turnpike east of Weston, the Central Artery, the Callahan, Sumner, and Ted Williams Tunnels (the Tobin Bridge was added later to the MHS). Under the law, revenue from each “facility” can only support the operations and debt of the respective facility. This was done to insulate Western Turnpike users from paying for the Big Dig debt. Proposed gantry rates are thus designed to maintain existing turnpike and MHS revenue levels. But due to the spacing of the gantries, point-to-point toll rates may go up or down. Some trips that are currently un-tolled now will be tolled and vice versa. A series of public hearings on proposed gantry rates will be held in September. Once the public input process is completed, members of the MassDOT Board will review and vote on the toll structure.

- **Will tolls change on the Tobin Bridge?**

Currently, passenger vehicles traveling southbound over the Tobin Bridge without an E-ZPass transponder pay \$3.00 under the “pay-by-plate” system. Passenger vehicles with an E-ZPass transponder pay \$2.50.

When AET goes live, the Tobin Bridge will be tolled in both directions, with the toll split equally so that E-ZPassMA customers will pay the same roundtrip amount as today. Qualified residents of Chelsea and Charlestown will continue to be eligible for the Tobin Bridge resident discount program, whereby \$0.15 will be collected in each direction. To qualify for the discount, a vehicle owner must live in zip codes 02129 or 02150.

- **What about tolls to use the Sumner/Callahan/Ted Williams Tunnels?**

As with the Tobin Bridge, tolls will be collected in both directions for use of the Sumner, Callahan and Ted Williams tunnels. The fare for E-ZPassMA customers in each direction will be half of what those drivers currently pay for traveling in one direction. The tunnel resident discount program will remain and eligible customers will be charged \$0.20 in each direction.

- **Will people pay anything extra if they don't have a Massachusetts EZPass transponder?**

Yes. For each vehicle class, MassDOT is proposing three rates at each gantry:

- One rate is for users of E-ZPass transponders issued by the Commonwealth (E-ZPassMA);
- One rate is for users of compatible transponders issued by other states (residents of other states can obtain EZPassMA transponders if they wish);
- One rate is for vehicles that do not have any transponder and will be billed using the Pay-By-Plate system. This billing will include both the gantry charge and a processing fee to offset mailing and other costs associated with Pay-by-Plate users.

- **What if I don't have an EZPass transponder or don't want one that is linked to a bank account?**

MassDOT encourages everyone who will be using the AET system to obtain an EZPass transponder, which are free MassDOT will be distributing transponders this fall in many communities where AET will be going live. Transponders are also available at Registry of Motor Vehicles branches and at American Automobile Association offices. Further information about where and how to get transponders can be found at www.mass.gov/ezpassma.

An E-ZPassMA account does not need to be linked to a bank account but instead can be replenished with cash for those who do not have bank accounts or would prefer not to link their EZPass account to a bank account.

- **Will people have a chance to comment on these proposed AET tolls and fees?**

Yes. Beginning after Labor Day, MassDOT is planning to hold seven public hearings about AET. Comments made during these public meetings, or submitted in writing, will help inform deliberations by the MassDOT Board, which plans to vote on the new AET charges in October.

Privacy and AET Data Policies

- **What kind of personal data will the gantries collect?**

By both law and policy, MassDOT is committed to ensuring the privacy of all motorists. All data collected will remain secure and kept confidential.

The All Electronic Tolling system collects data to detect vehicles passing through toll zones and to charge the appropriate toll. Data is collected about license plate, transponder, location, and time. Cameras collect still images and video records axles to assure billing is appropriate for vehicle type. Speed data is used to ensure an accurate image capture of vehicle license plate by cameras; speed data is not and cannot be used for any traffic law enforcement purposes. In order to minimize the risks that AET data could be accessed for inappropriate uses, MassDOT requires AET contractors to keep current with all standards for data security, including Payment Card Industry and Personally Identifiable Information standards. .

- **Will information collected by AET be used to issue speeding tickets or for other traffic law enforcement?**

No. The purpose of AET is to collect tolls. Data from AET cameras or auto readers cannot be used to issue tickets for speeding or other moving violations in the Commonwealth. MassDOT has no plans to change that, meaning AET gantries will not be used for moving violation enforcement.

- **Is AET data retained?**

Data is collected through the AET system solely for the purpose of accurately charging and collecting tolls. The records and data collected are not public records per statute and will be retained only as necessary to carry out this purpose. MassDOT is in the process of preparing for filing with the State Records Conservation Board a retention and disposal schedule for this data.

MassDOT plans to submit a proposed schedule to the Board for approval by the middle of September.

- **What is the “Hot List” and does MassDOT intend to use it?**

The AET contract signed in 2014 called for a Hot List function, which would provide real-time notification via email to specified email addresses whenever an identified plate or transponder goes through a gantry. MassDOT will not use this Hot List capability for traffic enforcement, such as speeding violations or non-payment of tolls. MassDOT is in discussions with public safety officials about the very limited circumstances in which the Secretary of the Executive Office of Public Safety could request use of AET-generated Hot List information in the case of time-sensitive public safety

emergencies, such as Amber Alerts. Once this work is complete, MassDOT will propose regulations limiting the use of Hot Lists.

AET Costs and Savings

- **Is the Commonwealth saving money by converting to AET?**

While projections several years ago said AET would save about \$50 million a year in operating costs, that estimate did not include initial capital costs and also did not fully account for operating costs for the new AET system. AET will reduce toll collection operating costs by about \$5 million annually but some operating expenses will increase, such as the costs of processing and mailing bills to Pay-by-Plate users. As MassDOT continues to improve collection and other practices, net toll revenues may rise further.

In addition to operating costs, capital costs have been incurred to build the AET system and will be incurred to demolish the toll plazas and reconstruct roadways by the end of 2017. Total costs to design and build the physical AET system are approximately \$130 million and toll demolition and roadway reconstruction will cost about \$133 million, excluding the Sumner Tunnel.

Toll Plaza Demolition

- **What will happen to the existing Toll Plazas?**

Drivers will gain the full benefit of AET once the toll booths have been removed and they can use the highways, bridges and tunnels at safe highway speeds. The process of demolishing current toll plazas will begin as soon as AET goes live.

As soon as AET goes live, work will begin to demolish the center lanes of the toll plazas and reconstruct portions of the roadway. During this period, vehicles will be channelized into lanes and guided through the legacy toll lanes; the speed limit through this phase will continue to be 15 MPH, as it is today. This work will be completed in 30 days or less.

Once this work is completed and through the winter, traffic will then be channeled through the center of the legacy toll plazas, using barrels, barriers, and signage. During this phase, drivers will be able to travel at a posted work zone speed limit. Toll plaza demolition activities will include removal of the existing toll booth structures, and access tunnels, and removal of existing parking lots and toll plaza buildings. The roadway will be reconstructed to accommodate vehicles using the new roadway alignment. All work is to be completed by the end of 2017.