

## May/June 2021 Focus Group Summary

### Overview

[ETC Institute](#) conducted seven focus groups with 60 eastern Johnson and Miami County residents to gather input regarding U.S. 69 improvements between 103rd and 179th Streets. The focus groups were structured to:

- Identify participants' use of and expectation regarding U.S. 69;
- Explore their reactions and perceptions to potential improvement options; and
- Gauge how their reactions changed as they were educated about different improvement and funding options being considered for U.S. 69.

Participants took part in the Zoom focus group meetings May 26-28, 2021, and covered five broad topic areas outlined below.

### **1. Usage and General Perceptions of U.S. 69 Corridor**

All focus group participants were familiar with    and regular users of    U.S. 69 between 103rd and 179th Streets. The primary reasons most used U.S. 69 were to commute to work, run errands and take part in family/recreation activities. The majority reported that U.S. 69 had worsened in the past six months despite COVID. More than 90% thought improving U.S. 69 is important or very important.

### **2. Reactions to Two Options for Making Improvements to U.S. 69**

Participants preferred comprehensive approaches to solving U.S. 69 issues, especially ones that minimized construction time and traffic disruptions. They also preferred minimizing how much land was used for improvements, citing a desire to avoid higher costs and greater impacts to the environment.

### **3. Introduction to Express Toll Lanes and Potential Costs to Users**

People in the focus groups were familiar with Express Toll Lanes (ETLs). As they considered the potential use of ETLs on U.S. 69, the majority deemed the likely toll to be reasonable. Most said they would use ETLs at a frequency that reflected their individual needs and preferences.

### **4. Reactions to Local Contribution Funding Source Options**

Focus group participants supported improving U.S. 69 using a Traditional Widening option or by using ETLs in similar amounts. However, there were significant differences based on where respondents live. A majority of Overland Park residents favored ETLs; those who lived farther away, outside of Overland Park, were more likely to favor Traditional Widening. This appeared to reflect the opinion that those who use the facility should help pay for it rather than having the burden fall on Overland Park alone, along with many Overland Park residents seeing value in having tolls cover the City's local funding contribution needed to advance the project to construction.

### **5. Assessment of KDOT's Public Involvement Efforts for the U.S. 69 Improvements Project**

More than 80% of participants knew about the improvements being considered, thanks to a broad range of communication channels used by the Project, including: website; public meetings/forums; virtual

open houses; local news (TV, radio, newspapers); social media; and Project and City of Overland Park newsletters. Nearly 70% rated the informational campaign as good or excellent.

### **Participant Demographics**

Focus groups consisted of 42 participants from Overland Park and 18 from Miami County and Johnson County areas outside of Overland Park with demographic attributes reflecting the Project Area:

- Gender of Participants: Male 59.3%  
Female 40.7%
- Age of Participants: 18 to 34 - 16.7%  
35 to 44 - 15.0%  
45 to 54 - 16.7%  
55 to 64 - 25.0%  
65 to 74 - 21.6%  
75 or older - 5.0%
- Race/Ethnicity Asian - 6.7%  
Black or African American - 3.3%  
Hispanic or Latino - 6.7%  
Multiracial or Multiethnic - 1.7%  
Native American or Alaska Native - 0.0%  
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander - 0.0%  
White (not Hispanic) - 81.6%  
Other race or ethnicity - 0.0%

\* \* \* \* \*

### **Learn More**

To learn more about the Focus Groups – or about the Project overall – please visit the [69Express Project website](#) and [sign up to be updated about the Project](#) as it progresses. You can post comments or pose questions about the Project at [the website feedback page](#) as well.



*U.S. 69 Virtual  
Focus Groups  
Summary Report*

Submitted by  
**ETC Institute**  
June 4, 2021

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## Overview

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ETC Institute conducted focus groups with eastern Johnson and Miami County residents to gather input on issues related to improvements that are being considered to U.S. 69 between 103<sup>rd</sup> and 175<sup>th</sup> Streets. A total of seven focus groups were conducted between Wednesday, May 26, and Friday, May 28, 2021. The topics that were discussed at each of the meetings included:

- Usage and General Perceptions of U.S. 69 Corridor
- Reactions to Two Options for Making Improvements to U.S. 69
- Introduction to Express Toll Lanes and Potential Costs to Users
- Reactions to Local Contribution Funding Source Options
- Assessment of KDOT's Public Involvement Efforts for the U.S. 69 Improvements Project
- Other General Reactions to the U.S. 69 Improvements Project

A total of 60 residents participated in seven focus groups which were conducted as described below:

- **Group 1** was conducted via Zoom from 11:30 a.m.-1:00 p.m. on May 26, 2021.
- **Group 2** was conducted via Zoom from 5:00-6:30 p.m. on May 26, 2021.
- **Group 3** was conducted via Zoom from 7:00 p.m.-8:30 p.m. on May 26, 2021.
- **Group 4** was conducted via Zoom from 11:30 a.m.-1:00 p.m. on May 27, 2021.
- **Group 5** was conducted via Zoom from 5:00-6:30 p.m. on May 27, 2021.
- **Group 6** was conducted via Zoom from 7:00 p.m.-8:30 p.m. on May 27, 2021.
- **Group 7** was conducted via Zoom from 11:30 a.m.-1:00 p.m. on May 28, 2021.

Of the 60 participants, 42 were from Overland Park, and 18 were from Miami County and areas outside of Overland Park in Johnson County. The demographic composition of the focus groups is shown in the tables on the following page.

### *Gender of Participants*

| <b>Answer Choices</b>  | <b>Responses</b> |       |
|------------------------|------------------|-------|
| Male                   | 35               | 59.3% |
| Female                 | 25               | 40.7% |
| Another gender         | 0                | 0.0%  |
| Prefer not to disclose | 0                | 0.0%  |

### *Age of Participants*

| <b>Answer Choices</b>  | <b>Responses</b> |       |
|------------------------|------------------|-------|
| 18 to 34               | 10               | 16.7% |
| 35 to 44               | 9                | 15.0% |
| 45 to 54               | 10               | 16.7% |
| 55 to 64               | 15               | 25.0% |
| 65 to 74               | 13               | 21.6% |
| 75 or older            | 3                | 5.0%  |
| Prefer not to disclose | 0                | 0.0%  |

### *Race/Ethnicity of Participants*

| <b>Answer Choices</b>                     | <b>Responses</b> |       |
|---|------------------|-------|
| Asian                                     | 4                | 6.7%  |
| Black or African American                 | 2                | 3.3%  |
| Hispanic or Latino                        | 4                | 6.7%  |
| Multiracial or Multiethnic                | 1                | 1.7%  |
| Native American or Alaska Native          | 0                | 0.0%  |
| Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander | 0                | 0.0%  |
| White (not Hispanic)                      | 49               | 81.6% |
| Another race or ethnicity                 | 0                | 0.0%  |
| Prefer not to disclose                    | 0                | 0.0%  |

The following pages summarize the input received from the focus group participants for each of the major topics discussed.

## Topic #1: Usage and General Perceptions of U.S. 69

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All focus group participants were very familiar with U.S. 69. All participants reported that they were regular users of U.S. 69 between 103<sup>rd</sup> and 179<sup>th</sup> Streets. Eight people indicated they had been traveling on this section of U.S. 69 for their "entire life," and five said they had been using this section of highway since it was first constructed. Participants were asked to describe the frequency and reasons they used U.S. 69. This information is summarized below.

### Frequency of Use:

- **7 or More Times Per Week:** Fifty-seven (57%) of all participants indicated they used the study area U.S. 69 corridor daily. Several indicated making multiple daily trips on weekdays and weekends.
- **3-5 Days Per Week:** More than one-third (35%) of participants said they used the corridor three to five times per week on average. Approximately one-half of those who reported this usage rate indicated they had used U.S. 69 more frequently before the pandemic, but for various reasons, had not yet returned to pre-COVID-19 usage patterns.
- **1-2 Days Per Week:** The remainder of the focus group participants (8%) indicated using the corridor approximately once or twice each week. Many of these were older participants who at one time had used the corridor for their daily work commute but who were now retired and driving on U.S. 69 less frequently.

**Reasons for Using U.S. 69:** Of those participants who offered specific reasons for their use of the study area U.S. 69 corridor, two-thirds (67%) indicated they used the highway regularly to commute to and from work and to keep business appointments. Nearly one-third (30%) mentioned shopping and errands as being among their primary reasons for using the corridor, while 25% cited family/recreation activities as reasons for their usage. Other reasons frequently mentioned were school, medical appointments, and trips to the airport. Several participants said they used the U.S. 69 corridor for "everything." One representative comment was, "I use 69 multiple times every day, for everything. Work, shopping, kids' activities... Every time I leave the house I'm using it."

**Perceptions of Traffic Flow:** Participants were asked, "*Over the past six months, how do you think traffic flow has changed on U.S. 69 between 103<sup>rd</sup> and 179<sup>th</sup> streets?*" Results are shown below.

| <b>Answer Choices</b> | <b>Responses</b> |       |
|-----------------------|------------------|-------|
| Gotten worse          | 32               | 53.3% |
| Stayed the same       | 17               | 28.4% |
| Gotten better         | 11               | 18.3% |

More than half of all participants (53.3%) said the traffic flow within the U.S. 69 corridor had gotten worse during the previous six months, and virtually all of them mentioned recent relaxation of pandemic-related restrictions and the reopening of many workplaces. As one participant offered, "Now that the pandemic is opening up I think traffic has progressively gotten worse. Six months ago, 69 was a ghost town, even during rush hour."

Twenty-eight percent (28.3%) of participants indicated they thought the traffic flow on U.S. 69 was about the same as six months ago, but several of these participants acknowledged that they avoid the highway during peak traffic hours. "I have the luxury of avoiding 69 during rush hours so any change in the traffic may not be as apparent to me. It definitely isn't back to 2019 levels, but that may depend on time of day."

The remaining participants (18.3%) thought that traffic flow on U.S. 69 had gotten better, but some of these respondents indicated that they were not using U.S. 69 very often six months ago, so they were really comparing current traffic flows to pre-pandemic levels. One representative comment was, "I just don't see many backups, even around the 435 interchange, so it definitely hasn't returned to pre-COVID traffic levels."

**Importance of Making Improvements to U.S. 69:** Participants were asked, "*Overall, how important do you think it is to make improvements to U.S. 69 between 103<sup>rd</sup> and 179<sup>th</sup> streets?*" Results are shown below.

| <b>Answer Choices</b> | <b>Responses</b> |       |
|-----------------------|------------------|-------|
| Very Important        | 43               | 71.7% |
| Important             | 12               | 20.0% |
| Somewhat Important    | 5                | 8.3%  |
| Not Important         | 0                | 0.0%  |

Nearly three-fourths of the participants (71.7%) indicated they thought making improvements to the U.S. 69 study corridor is "very important." Another twenty percent (20.0%) said the improvements are "important." Reasons given generally fell into one of two categories: (1) concerns about traffic flow and (2) concerns about safety. Some quotes from participants that were shared during this portion of the discussion are provided below:

- "U.S. 69 is one of the busiest stretches of highway in Kansas and before COVID it was already bumper to bumper."
- "The highway is already too congested and will get worse. And it's not just extra lanes that are needed, the ramps need to be re-designed and made safer."
- "The pandemic may have bought us some time, but it's very important to address it now to facilitate growth for the future."
- "We see a lot of growth moving south, a lot more housing. They're building a new apartment building every day. Louisburg is turning into South Overland Park with all the development."
- "We have to have the corridor ready to handle the increased traffic."

## Topic #2: Reactions to Two Design Options for Making Improvements to U.S. 69

The moderator informed participants that one of the primary reasons they were asked to participate in the focus group was to provide input on two alternative design proposals being considered for U.S 69 corridor improvements. The moderator described each of the two design options. After describing each option, the moderator asked each participant to provide feedback about what he or she liked, disliked or did not understand about each option. Finally, the moderator asked each participant to choose which option they preferred. It should be noted that in four of the seven focus groups Option A (the Traditional Approach) was discussed before Option B (the Four-Phased Approach). In the other three groups, Option B was introduced first. Participant responses to questions about each option did not seem to be affected in any discernable way based on which option the moderator presented first.

**Reactions to Option A:** The image that was shown to focus group participants to help them visualize Option A (the Traditional Approach) is provided below.

### Option A



*Features of Option A (the Traditional Approach) that were shared with focus group participants:*

- *Adds one new through lane in each direction.*
- *In some sections of U.S. 69, Option A would require constructing separate parallel lanes, called collector-distributor roads. (These would be similar to what drivers encounter on I-435 between Roe and Nall Avenues, where collector-distributor roads on either side of I-435 move traffic to and from the arterial roads.)*
- *The U.S. 69 interchanges at Blue Valley Parkway and at I-435 would be reconfigured.*
- *Improvements to local interchanges and supporting cross streets would be made.*
- *Existing pavement and bridges would be reconstructed.*
- *Total cost would be \$740 million.*
- *Improvements could be broken up into as many as 9 separate phases.*
- *Depending on a local contribution from Overland Park, the first three phases could be combined and built starting in 2022; other phases as money become available.*
- *Without a local contribution, construction would likely not begin before 2025.*

Participants were asked, **“Do you generally like or dislike the Option A approach for the improvements to U.S. 69?”** Results are shown below.

| <b>Answer Choices</b>                   | <b>Responses</b> |       |
|---|------------------|-------|
| Like Option A – Traditional Approach    | 45               | 75.0% |
| Dislike Option A – Traditional Approach | 13               | 21.7% |
| No Opinion                              | 2                | 3.3%  |

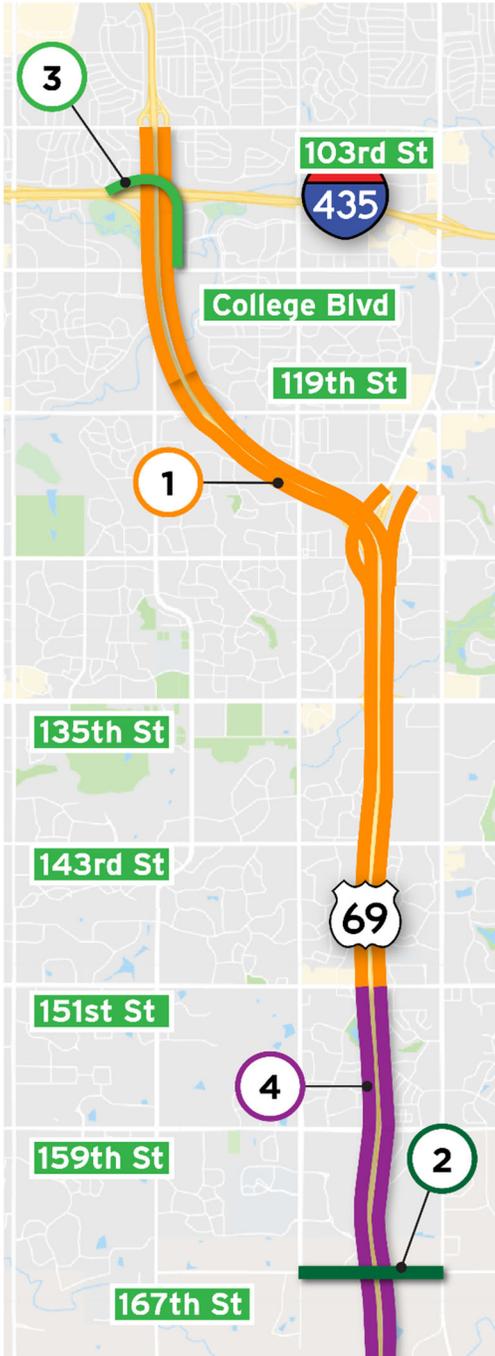
Three-fourths of the participants (75.0%) indicated they generally liked Option A because it seemed “comprehensive” in the way it addressed a wide range of traffic flow and safety concerns. One participant said, “I like the multi-phase approach. It seems to cover everything”. Another person said that “by doing it in smaller phases, the whole thing won’t be under construction at the same time.” Most participants liked the fact that Option A has 3 lanes in each direction and a new flyover to connect U.S. 69 to westbound I-435.

In addition, several of the participants liked the collector/distributor roads that were included in the design of Option A. One person said, “I think collector/distributor roads would really help alleviate some of the traffic, especially during the construction period. They seem to have worked really well on I-435 by Nall and Roe. We need more improvements like that.”

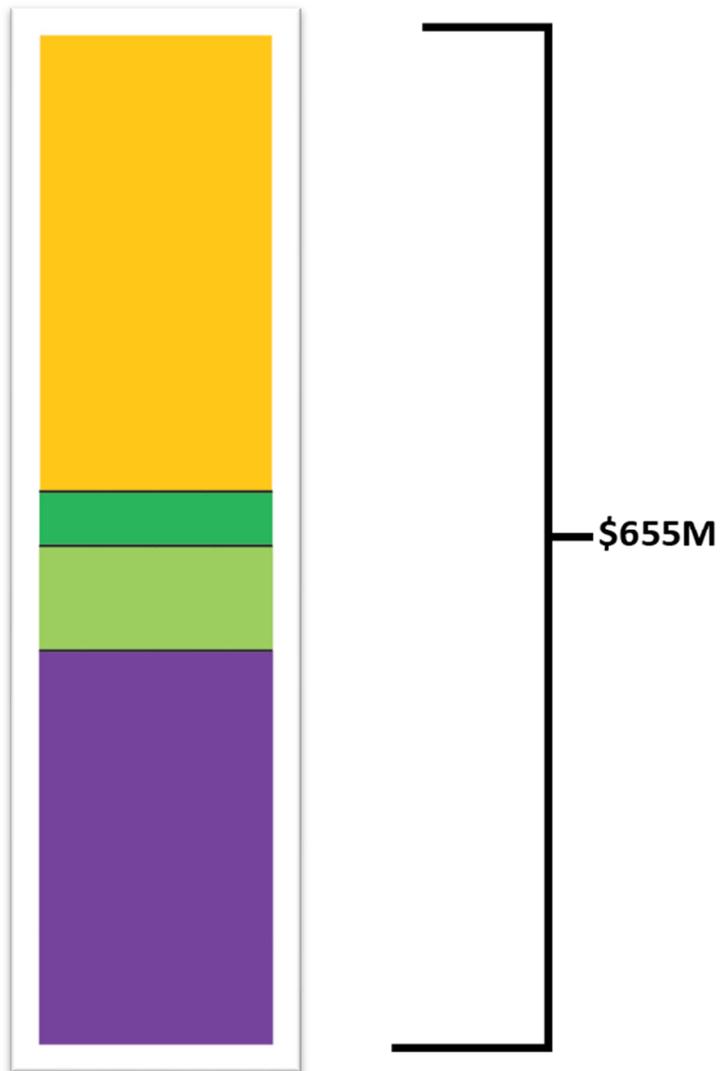
The two major reasons that 21.7% of the participants did not like Option A were that people thought it was confusing and/or it would take too long. One participant said, “There are too many phases. How long is this project going to go on? It looks like it will turn into I-435 where construction has been going on for 30 years.” A second person said, “by the time all these phases are finished, the improvements will be obsolete.” Although some participants liked the collector/distributor roads, others did not because they thought they made the “footprint” for highway too large, which would require too much land and have a negative impact on the environment.

Two participants (3.3%) said they were unable to express an opinion about Option A because they felt they did not have enough information about the plan.

**Reactions to Option A:** The image that was shown to focus group participants to help them visualize Option B (the Four-Phased Approach) is provided below.



## Option B



Features of Option B (the Four-Phased Approach) that were shared with focus group participants:

Option B:

- Adds one new through lane in each direction.
- In some sections of U.S. 69, Option B would require auxiliary lanes to improve ramp connections. (These would be similar to what drivers encounter on US 69 between 159<sup>th</sup> and 151<sup>st</sup> Streets.)
- The U.S. 69 interchanges at Blue Valley Parkway and at I-435 would be reconfigured.
- Improvements to local interchanges and supporting cross streets would be made.
- Existing pavement and bridges would be reconstructed.
- Improvements would be constructed in 4 separate phases.
- Total cost would be \$655 million.
- First phase could be built by 2025. Construction starting in 2022.
- Other phases would follow when increased traffic levels warrant additional improvements.

Participants were asked, “Do you generally like or dislike the Option B approach for the improvements to U.S. 69?” Results are shown below.

| Answer Choices                          | Responses |       |
|---|-----------|-------|
| Like Option B – Four-Phased Approach    | 40        | 66.7% |
| Dislike Option B – Four-Phased Approach | 20        | 33.3% |
| No Opinion – Four-Phased Approach       | 0         | 0.0%  |

Two-thirds of participants (66.7%) said they generally liked Option B. People who liked Option B thought it could be completed faster. They also liked the lower cost and the smaller footprint of the project. As one participant offered, “I like that Option B addresses the most problematic areas first and the most important things are all done together.” Another participant said, “Fewer phases seems like less disruption for a shorter length of time, and I like that it doesn’t cost as much. Anything that gets it done faster and costs less is good. A third person who liked Option B said, “I really like Option B because it has a smaller footprint without the distributor roads. This will be better for the environment and help avoid taking people’s homes and businesses.”

Among those who did not like Option B, the primary concern was that they did not think Option B included as many improvements as Option A. Several participants expressed concerns that the cost savings in Option B would be achieved because Option B offers less improvements than Option A. Most of those who did not like Option B did not think Option B would handle traffic flow as well as Option A because Option B did not have the collector/distributor roads.

**Preferences Between Option A and Option B:** Participants were asked, *“After seeing the two options, which one do you like the most?”* Results are shown below.

| Answer Choices | Responses |       |
|----------------|-----------|-------|
| Option A       | 34        | 57.6% |
| Option B       | 22        | 37.3% |
| Neither        | 3         | 5.1%  |

Fifty-eight percent (57.6%) of participants expressed a preference for Option A, focusing most of their positive comments on a preference for the collector/distributor included in the option. Representative comments included, “I really like the collector/distributor roads that can bleed traffic off the main thoroughfare. It’s safer,” and, “the cost difference is minimal, and the collector/distributor roads keep the traffic moving. Plus, I’m skeptical Option B would really cost less anyway.”

It should be mentioned that a few participants seemed to suspect that express toll lanes might be included in Option B. Though the subject had not yet been raised by the moderator, those participants seemed to have been exposed to publicity regarding the possibility of express toll lanes, and referenced their general disdain for tolls in comments they made in support of their expressed preferences for Option A.

Those who preferred Option B (37.3%) offered a version of the same sentiment regarding their preference for the option: “Smaller footprint, shorter time frame, lower cost, and simpler plan.”

Three participants (5.1%) refused to express a preference. Each of them said neither option went “far enough” in its proposed improvements, and one of them said, “by the time they finish either option we’ll need to fix it all again.”

### **Topic #3: Introduction to Express Toll Lanes and Potential Costs to Users of the U.S. 69 Corridor**

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The moderator then introduced the concept of express toll lanes for the first time in each focus group. Participants were asked, *“Are you familiar with Express Toll Lanes?”* Results were as follows:

| Answer Choices | Responses |       |
|----------------|-----------|-------|
| Yes            | 54        | 90.0% |
| No             | 6         | 10.0% |

Participants then were asked, *“Have you seen Express Toll Lanes in other states? And if so, where?”* Results were as follows:

| <b>Answer Choices</b> | <b>Responses</b> |       |
|-----------------------|------------------|-------|
| Yes                   | 52               | 88.1% |
| No                    | 7                | 11.9% |

Among the states mentioned by those who had seen express toll lanes in other areas were: Texas, Colorado, California, Illinois, New Jersey, Virginia, Washington DC, Florida, Washington, and Oklahoma.

At this point in each focus group, the moderator presented a short video made by the Colorado Department of Transportation (CDOT) to ensure that all participants shared the same understanding of express toll lanes.

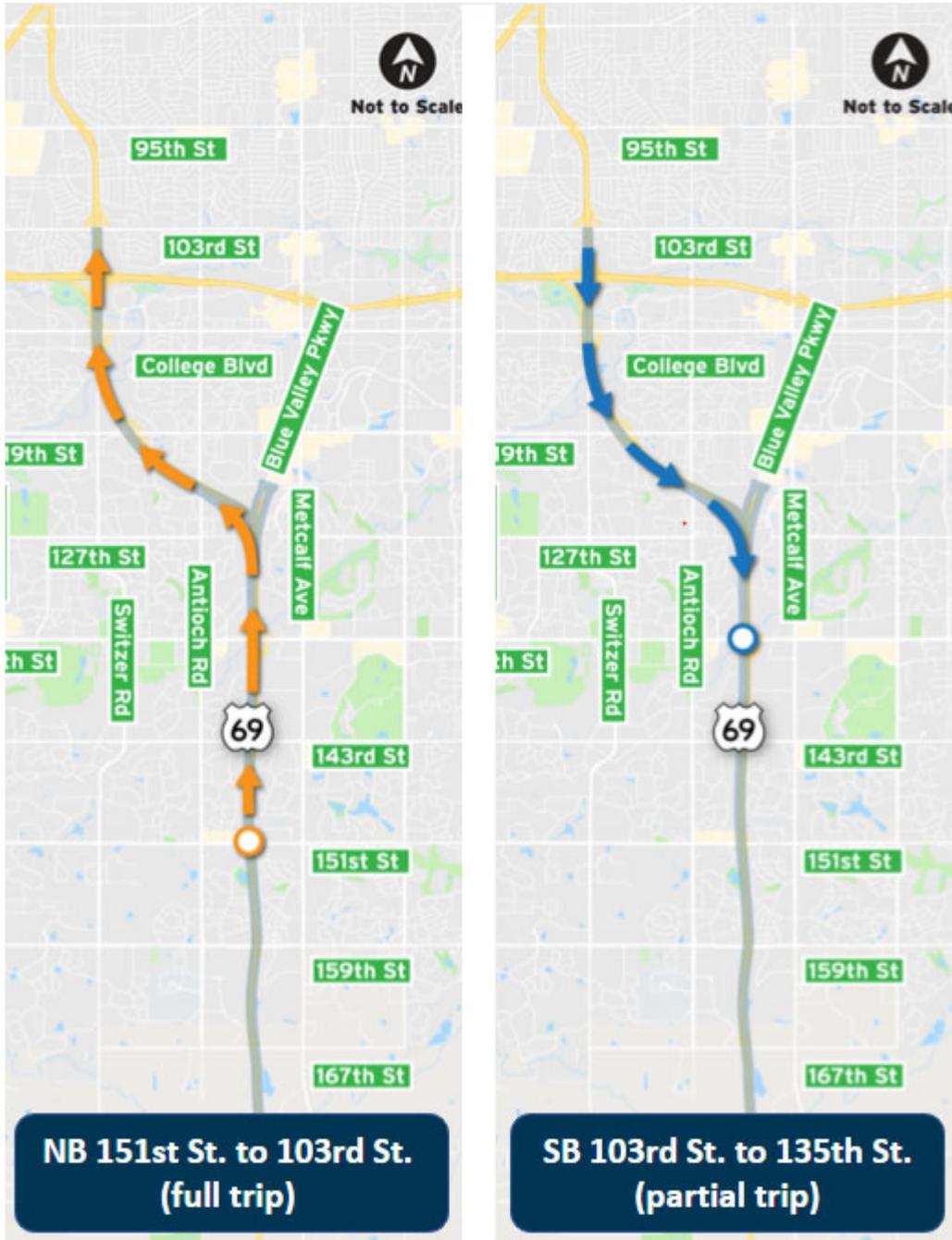
After they had viewed the video, participants were asked, *“For those of you who said you had seen Express Toll lanes before, are the toll lanes in the video we just watched what you had in mind?”* Results were as follows:

| <b>Answer Choices</b> | <b>Responses</b> |        |
|-----------------------|------------------|--------|
| Yes                   | 54               | 100.0% |
| No                    | 0                | 0.0%   |

The moderator then disclosed to each focus group that the key difference between the two design options they had discussed before watching the video was that Option B included one express toll lane in each direction. The specific information that was then shared with the focus group participants about Option B is provided below:

- Option A (Traditional Widening) requires more time and money to build than Option B (Express Toll Lane) because Express Toll Lanes:
  - Can start construction sooner.
  - Require fewer lanes to guarantee reliable travel times, which means:
    - A smaller footprint and lower costs
    - Faster construction with less inflation risk
    - Fewer phases mean less overall impact to traffic during construction
  
- Tolls used on Express Toll Lanes are used to manage congestion better and help fund construction for new lanes. They are not used to make a profit. Once in place, tolls enable KDOT to balance traffic across all lanes and provide travelers with an option to better plan when and how they travel in the corridor.

**Reactions to the Fees.** The moderator then shared information about the fees that are being considered for the Express Toll Lanes on U.S. 69. The slide below is the image that was shown to the focus group participants. The image contains pricing options for a full trip (left side) and a partial trip (right side).



Depending upon traffic and travel time, the moderator told focus group participants that a trip in the toll lane would cost between:

- 35 cents to \$1 for a trip from 103<sup>rd</sup> Street to 135<sup>th</sup> Street southbound (afternoon rush hour)
- 65 cents to \$1.50 for a trip from 151<sup>st</sup> Street to 103<sup>rd</sup> Street northbound (morning rush hour)

Participants were also reminded that two of the three lanes would always be free to use.

**Reactions to the Proposed Tolling Fees.** After the moderator had presented the potential costs of express toll lanes to the users, participants were asked, *“Based on the information I shared, do you think the proposed toll of 65 cents to \$1.50 to travel from 151<sup>st</sup> Street to 103<sup>rd</sup> Street during the morning rush hour is reasonable?”*

Results were as follows:

| Answer Choices | Responses |       |
|----------------|-----------|-------|
| Yes            | 35        | 58.3% |
| No             | 25        | 41.7% |

A majority (58.3%) of participants thought the fees that were presented were reasonable. One representative comment was, “it’s not unreasonable to pay to go faster. If time is money, that’s cheap.”

Among those who did not think the toll cost was reasonable (41.7%), most focused their comments on the collective cost of using the express toll lanes daily. “Using it twice a day, five times per week will really add up.” Another person said, “as often as my family uses it, this is going to cost us \$20 a day. That’s an exuberant amount.” Another participant said he felt the U.S. 69 corridor distance was too short to justify the toll costs by saying, “I’d find an alternative route. The toll feels high for that short of a distance. I wouldn’t pay that much to use it when there are other ways to get where I need to go.”

**How Often People Would Pay to Use the Toll Lane to Avoid Congestion on U.S. 69.** Participants were asked, *“At a rate of 65 cents to \$1.50, how often do you think you would pay to use the toll lane to avoid congestion between 151<sup>st</sup> Street and 103<sup>rd</sup> Street during morning rush hour?”* Results were as follows:

| Answer Choices      | Responses |       |
|---------------------|-----------|-------|
| Most of the time    | 12        | 20.0% |
| Some of the time    | 13        | 21.7% |
| Only in emergencies | 19        | 31.7% |
| Never               | 16        | 26.6% |

Two-fifths (41.7%) of the focus group participants indicated they would use an express toll lane during morning rush hour at least some of the time. Nearly one-third (31.7%) said they would only pay to use the lane in an emergency. More than one-quarter (26.6%) of participants said they would never pay to use the toll lanes.

Many of those who said they would use the toll lane some or most of the time indicated they were willing to pay to reduce the length of their morning commute. Several participants, including some who said they would only use the lanes in an emergency, said they really liked the concept of having those who use the lanes pay the cost. One participant said, “Why should every resident of Overland Park have to pay for the improvements through our taxes when only those who choose to use the toll lanes could pay for it?”

Most of the participants who said they would “never” use the express toll lane admitted their general opposition to toll roads in all forms. One representative comment was, “I am adamantly against all tolls. We are already taxed out the wazoo and we pay a high gas tax that is supposed to pay for road improvements. Once a toll comes in, it never goes away. It only goes up.” A few of the participants expressed doubt that the express toll lanes would function as intended. One participant said, “My experience with these lanes in other states is that you’re paying but you don’t end up going any faster.”

#### **Topic #4: Reactions to Local Contribution Funding Source Options**

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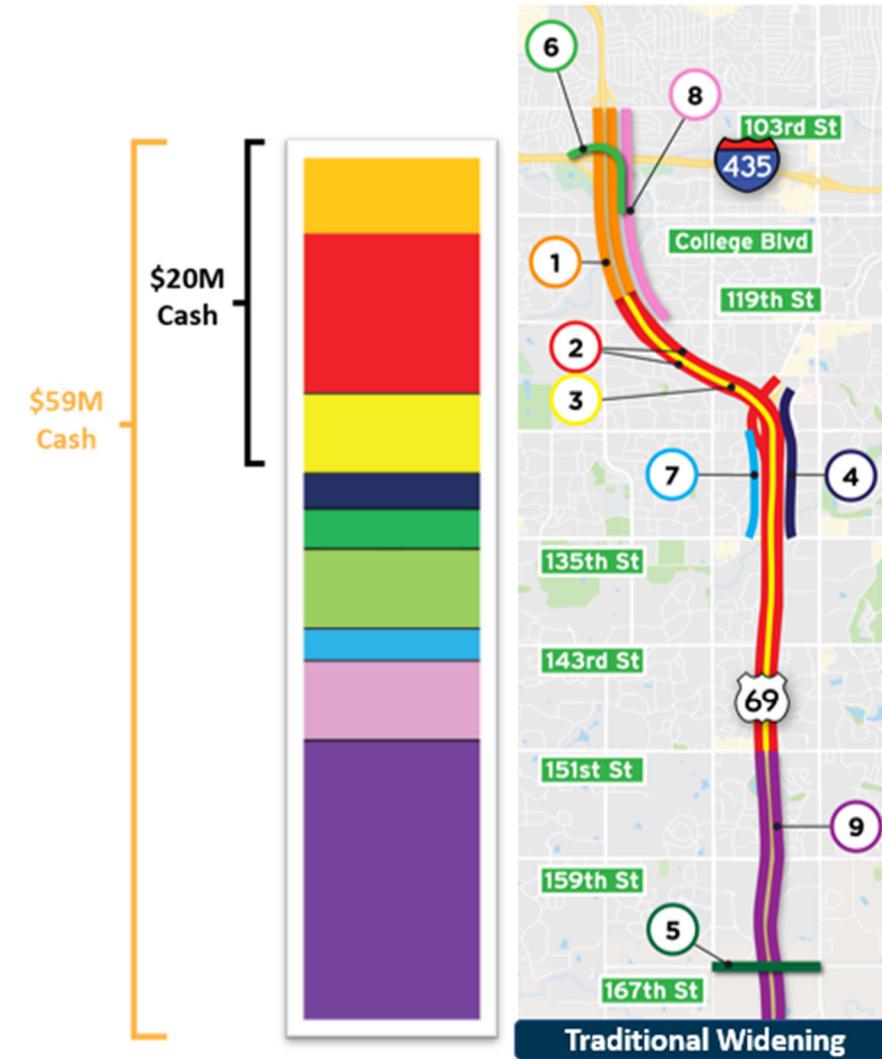
**Introduction to Local Funding Contribution Within the IKE Transportation Program:** The moderator read the information in ***bold italics*** below to the focus group participants before showing the participants updated slides of Options A (Traditional Approach) & B (Four-Phased Approach/Express Toll Lanes). The updated slides which are shown on the following pages included information about the local funding contribution for each option.

***“The IKE Transportation Program is built on partnerships, and communities across the State are providing a local funding contribution so their projects can be constructed sooner. Regardless of the option selected (ETL vs. traditional widening), a local contribution would be needed to modernize and expand U.S. 69 in the immediate future.***

***The next slide I am going to share shows how the local contribution for the project could be paid for with each Option. The moderator will then briefly review the differences between the options. The key difference is that, in Option B, the contribution by Overland Park is replaced by the tolls.”***

The moderator then gave a more detailed overview of Option A and B. The slides and the information provided about each option are shown on the following two pages.

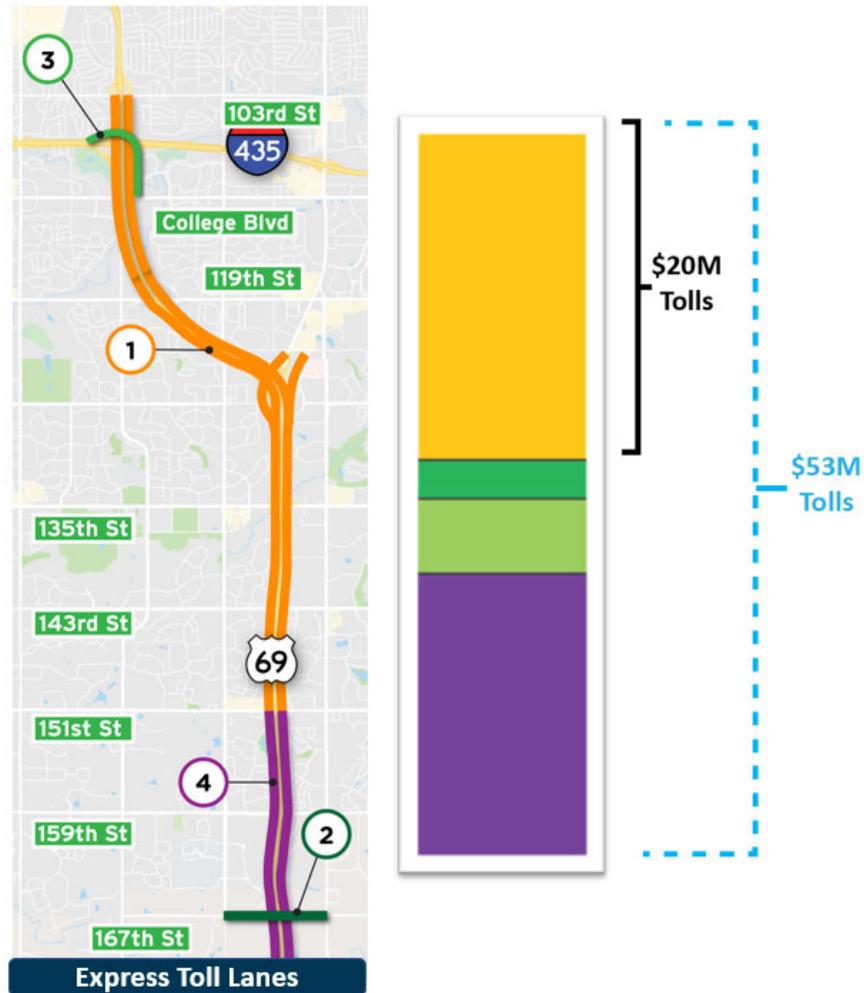
## Option A



With Option A, the moderator provided participants with the following information:

- The City of Overland Park could provide a one-time \$20 million payment for a combined Phases 1-3.
- If the City provided an upfront local contribution for each phase, this could total \$59 million for all phases.
- If the City chose to provide their local contribution in installment payments rather than in cash upfront, the costs could be significant to account for inflation.

# Option B



With Option B, the moderator provided participants with the following information:

- Tolls would be collected to cover the City of Overland Park's \$20 million local contribution for Phase 1.
- Tolls would be collected to fund construction of all phases of the project without additional cost to the City (KDOT takes on revenue and inflation risk).
- Tolls are collected only from those that choose to use the express lanes.
- Over 50% of toll revenue is anticipated to come from users outside of Overland Park.

After explaining the local contribution funding sources for each option, the moderator asked each participant, “Based on the information you have received about the feasibility, costs, and local contribution funding sources for each option, which do you prefer?” The results were as follows:

**Preferred Design Option After Focus Group Participants Were Informed of the Local Funding Options**

| <b>OPTIONS</b>  | <b>OP Residents</b> | <b>% OP Residents</b> | <b>Non OP Residents</b> | <b>% Non OP Residents</b> | <b>TOTAL</b> | <b>TOTAL %</b> |
|---|---------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|--------------|----------------|
| <b>Option A:</b> Traditional widening method; \$740 million, up to 9 phases of construction or a smaller number of combined phases, direct cost to Overland Park residents and businesses, no direct cost to users                              | <b>17</b>           | <b>40.5%</b>          | <b>12</b>               | <b>66.7%</b>              | <b>29</b>    | <b>48.3%</b>   |
| <b>Option B:</b> Express toll lanes; \$655 million, four phases of construction, no direct cost to Overland Park, direct cost to users who choose to use the express toll lanes, free general-purpose lanes would remain available to all users | <b>23</b>           | <b>54.8%</b>          | <b>4</b>                | <b>22.2%</b>              | <b>27</b>    | <b>45.0%</b>   |
| <b>Neither</b>  | <b>2</b>            | <b>4.8%</b>           | <b>2</b>                | <b>11.1%</b>              | <b>4</b>     | <b>6.7%</b>    |
| <b>TOTAL</b>  | <b>42</b>           | <b>100.0%</b>         | <b>18</b>               | <b>100.0%</b>             | <b>60</b>    | <b>100.0%</b>  |

Overall, support for Option A and Option B was about the same. Nearly half (48.3%) of the focus group participants preferred Option A (Traditional Widening), and nearly half (45.0%) preferred Option B (Express Toll Lanes). Although support was split among all participants, there were significant differences based on the location of the respondents home. Among focus group participants who were from Overland Park, a majority (54.8%) support Option B (Express Toll Lanes), 40.5% supported Option B (Traditional Widening), and 4.8% did not like either option. Among focus group participants who were NOT from Overland Park, two-thirds (66.7%) supported Option A (Traditional Widening), 22.2% supported Option B (Express Toll Lanes), and 11.1% did not like either option.

The most common theme expressed in the comments of those who supported Option A (Traditional Widening) was a negative disposition toward toll lanes in general. One participant said, “I don’t like ‘pay-to-play’ on public infrastructure. The toll you have proposed is already too high, and it will probably just go up. Another person who supported Option A said, “I prefer three lanes open to everyone. We should avoid tolling at all costs”. Another person who preferred Option A said, “I don’t like the open-ended nature of tolls. When do they go away? Once it is paid for, does KDOT keep the tolls and use them for other projects outside the area?” Another said, “I just wish the tolls would end at some point. KDOT should tell us what happens with that revenue over time. Can they guarantee the toll money will stay in our area?”

Among those who supported Option B (Express Toll Lanes), the most common opinion expressed was a preference for having those who chose to use the express toll lanes pay for the improvements. As one participant said, “The cost of the toll manifests with people like me who would actually use the express lanes. If it makes my life easier, I will pay a few dollars a day. I’m willing to help pay for the improvements we all know we need on 69.” Another supporter of Option B said, “I dislike tolls but I think this approach (Option B) is better. Two free lanes are still available for people who don’t want to pay the tolls.”

Several residents of Overland Park who preferred Option B said they really liked the fact that a portion of the toll revenue would be paid by people who do not live in Overland Park. One Option B supporter said, “If half the tolls are paid by people who live outside Overland Park, it’s like getting a fifty-percent discount for Overland Park. Why would we want to pay for all of it ourselves?” Other residents of Overland Park who supported Option B said they saw value in the fact that the tolls would cover Overland Park’s entire local funding contribution even in the event toll revenue failed to meet current projections. As one participant said, “I like that KDOT is on the hook if there is a shortfall of toll revenue, or if this project ends up costing a lot more than we expect. Why should the residents of Overland Park take on all that risk?”

Four focus group participants did not select either option. In each case, they indicated a need for additional information before expressing a preference. One participant said she preferred Option A, but only if the local funding contribution area could be expanded. “Why not have all of Johnson County, not just Overland Park, pay for Option A? Why shouldn’t Miami County contribute? We all depend on 69.” Others expressed an interest in knowing more specifically how Overland Park would pay the local funding contribution amount. One of the participants who did not select Option A or Option B said, “I’m undecided. Can Overland Park get that local contribution money without raising taxes on residents? If so, I like that better than a toll. But if the City cannot cover it without taxes, I prefer Option B. I just don’t want to pay any more taxes.”

## Topic #5: Assessment of KDOT’s Public Involvement Efforts for the U.S. 69 Improvements Project

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Once discussion of the two options was completed, participants were asked, “*Excluding this survey, have you heard or seen any information about the improvements that are being considered to U.S. 69 between 103<sup>rd</sup> and 179<sup>th</sup> Streets?*” Results were as follows:

| Answer Choices | Responses |       |
|----------------|-----------|-------|
| Yes            | 49        | 83.1% |
| No             | 10        | 16.9% |

Those participants who answered in the affirmative were then asked, “*From which sources did you get information?*” Participants were encouraged to specify all sources from which they received any prior information about the U.S. 69 Improvements Project.

| Answer Choices                             | Responses |       |
|--|-----------|-------|
| Websites ( <i>US69Exoress.org</i> )        | 0         | 0.0%  |
| Public Meetings/forums                     | 3         | 5.1%  |
| Virtual Open Houses                        | 0         | 0.0%  |
| Information from the City of Overland Park | 14        | 23.7% |
| TV (Local News)                            | 16        | 27.1% |
| Radio                                      | 0         | 0.0%  |
| Social Media (Facebook, Nextdoor, etc.)    | 29        | 49.2% |
| Other (Including newspapers)               | 18        | 30.5% |

Most participants who indicated they had received information from the City of Overland Park mentioned the quarterly newsletter circulated within the community. Social media was cited as an informational source by almost half of the participants (49.2%), with “nextdoor.com” being mentioned most often. Local television news was cited by twenty-four percent (23.7%) of participants. Of those participants who mentioned an information source in the “Other” category (30.5%), most indicated a newspaper was that source, frequently the *Kansas City Star*.

None of the participants mentioned websites, virtual open houses, or radio as one of their informational sources.

Participants then were asked, *“Overall, how would you rate KDOT’s efforts to keep the public informed and engaged about improvements that are being considered to U.S. 69 between 103<sup>rd</sup> and 179<sup>th</sup> Streets?”* Results were as follows:

| <b>Answer Choices</b> | <b>Responses</b> |       |
|-----------------------|------------------|-------|
| Excellent             | 16               | 26.7% |
| Good                  | 25               | 41.7% |
| Average               | 15               | 25.0% |
| Poor                  | 4                | 6.6%  |
| Very Poor             | 0                | 0.0%  |

Participants generally thought KDOT had done a good job keeping the public informed and engaged about improvements that are being considered to U.S. 69. More than two-thirds (68.4%) rated KDOT’s efforts as “excellent” or “good”; one-fourth (25.0%) rated the efforts as “average”, and 6.8% of focus group participants rated KDOT’s efforts as “poor”.

As one participant said, “I think KDOT is doing a pretty good job keeping us informed considering all the challenges they face with this project.” Many participants viewed the focus groups as an indication that KDOT was honestly trying to get input from the public. Some participants indicated they would prefer to see KDOT increase its presence on social media, with Twitter being mentioned most often. One person said she thought opponents to the toll lane option were “sharing disinformation on social media to undermine the project.” She thought “officials at KDOT should be more actively using Twitter and Facebook to balance the negative information being shared to alleviate some of the confusion.”

When asked if there were any other comments about KDOT’s public engagement efforts, one participant expressed concern that the information provided by KDOT and the City of Overland Park had given him the impression that KDOT had already decided to move forward with express toll lanes. He said he was surprised to learn at the focus groups that a final decision had not been made. Another participant echoed this opinion by saying that she thought KDOT had been trying too hard to “sell” the public on the idea of express toll lanes.

## Topic #6: Other General Reactions to the U.S. 69 Improvements Project

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Finally, participants were asked, *“Do you have any additional comments you would like to share before we end our meeting?”* Most participants reiterated opinions offered during previous topic discussions, but a few new ideas were introduced.

Three participants mentioned a preference for concrete barriers as a means of separating express toll lanes from free lanes, as opposed to the plastic or rubber posts used on some highways. One of these people said, “I think a concrete barrier is safer. In Dallas, they just drive right over the plastic (posts) and swerve in and out of the lanes. I’ve seen it cause accidents more than once.”

A few proponents of toll lanes said they thought that opposition to toll lanes was based more on the “fear of the unknown” because Kansans have historically resisted the use of toll lanes. One of these people said, “No one likes change except a wet baby.” Another said, “It’s a scary change for people who are worried that it’s a slippery slope if you let tolls in. But if it’s a cheaper, faster way to make the improvements that we absolutely need, it’s a slope I’m ready to go down?”