ERP helps cut congestion, drivers agree

Traffic falls as travel habits change

WHEN a new set of Electronic Road Pricing (ERP) gantries begin operation, a chorus of complaints is heard and echoed—ERP gantries drawn above lift doors—are circled freely on the Internet. Many users now believe that this means of congestion control is actually going from a smoother ride to work.

About 20 per cent of drivers polled this year said ERP had reduced traffic compared to last year. This was one of the key findings of a survey of 230 motorists over a two-week period, conducted by the Singapore Press Holdings’ rewards department, the survey covered motorists of different ages and with varying household incomes and education levels.

A subtle shift of 20 per cent was seen during the survey period last year. What has changed is the fact is that 11 new gantries have been added, bringing the total to 68 nationwide. This is

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When fine new ones in the heartlands.

Many ERP changes have also been increased.

Of the drivers who felt congestion had reduced during busy periods, more than half (57 per cent) said they had saved 15 minutes or more on the road as well. Prices having cut down considerably, and 60 per cent said they were willing to stick it out on higher fees, to get even smoother roads.

Experts say the signs that ERP is working are that motorists are changing their travel habits and-more importantly, that congestion has eased.

Property executive John Lee travel-ecologist for the city of 3.5m every 3.8m with a 15 per cent increase in ERP charges to save a few minutes every day.

Mr Lee, 30, said: “Generally, I find the ERP has reduced one major reason that travel to my workplace in the last two months.”

So why are motorists feeling less pressured on the roads? Survey results point to several factors.

First, more motorists are getting off at different times, leading to a more even flow of vehicles on the roads during the morning peak hours.

Some 41 per cent of motorists now leave for work before 7.45am—before ERP changes kick in—to 34 per cent last year.

Another 26 per cent reduce by 10 per cent last year.

Sales Manager Kelvin Tan, who specialises in transport economics at the Singapore Management University (SMU), is encouraging to see that the benefits of ERP’s congestion control measures are filtering through to the overall transport system.

One motorist who has changed his travel routine is civil servant, Daniel Lee. He now starts work an hour earlier to avoid a new 45-cent Expressway gantry near his office which would add an extra $1 on his 70-cent journey to Northland. Since ERP, he says he has cut down the number of drivers who are affected, and reduced the number of drivers who leave before 8.30am, he said.

Also setting off earlier to work may not be such a bad thing, said Government Parliamentary Committee deputy chairman, Mr P. H. Tan. He said this could happen in other countries, such as Australia and Indonesia, where car owners would start work earlier and end work later, he said.

A second reduced charge affected by ERP is that some motorists are opting for a different route.

Some 12.4 per cent of motorists who use ERP gantries have taken an alternative route.

“ Though the proportion of motorists who changed their driving habits has actually dropped from 26.8 per cent to 10 per cent this year, experts say it is enough to show a significant change on the road,

And this is the case even though a smaller proportion of motorists—1.4 per cent—have switched to public transport compared to 4.4 per cent last year,

Prof Phan said: “All that is needed is to ease out 5 to 10 per cent of people and this will help to significantly smooth the flow of the road.”

And it looks as though more “squeezing” could still be done.

The proportion of drivers who are willing to pay higher ERP charges for a smooth ride during the morning peak hours has increased from 32 per cent last year to 42 per cent this year.

National University of Singapore’s Associate Professor Lim Ding-ting from the Centre of Transportation Studies said: “Since more drivers seem to acknowledge the benefit they derive from ERP, this may mean that people are prepared to take up more aggressive ERP rates to further enhance the transport congestion.”

WITH ERP: Power motorists use Tao Payoh Lagoon 6 during the peak hour when ERP is in effect; the queue was lengthy April this year.

WITHOUT ERP: Once the restricted period is over, traffic on the road improves significantly. Many motorists say ERP has helped cut their travel time during peak hours, by reducing congestion.