IN THIS CASE STUDY YOU WILL LEARN:

1. About Georgia’s first two Reversible Express Lanes Projects on the I-75 South Metro and Northwest Corridor roadways that were completed January 2017 and September 2018 by GDOT and SRTA.

2. About development of a program where Parsons and GDOT Highway Emergency Response Operators (HERO) spent hundreds of hours training to safely operate and reverse the Express Lanes, communicate and coordinate with the GDOT Traffic Management Center (TMC) and manage incident response to mitigate impact to motorists.

3. About how the Express Lanes have provided predictable commute times and faster options for motorists.

BACKGROUND

The I-75 Northwest Corridor (NWC) Express Lanes are part of a network of new, optional express lanes designed to improve mobility and provide reliable trip times throughout metro Atlanta. The Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) provided engineering, construction, operations, and maintenance services, while the State Road and Tollway Authority (SRTA) partnered to deliver a dynamic pricing system to operate the roadway. The project added 29.7 miles of reversible express lanes along I-75 from Akers Mill Road to Hickory Grove Road and along I-575 from I-75 to Sixes Road. On I-75, there are two lanes from the I-75/I-285 Interchange to the I-75/I-575 Interchange. At the I-75/I-575 split, one express lane continues on both I-75 and I-575. The lanes feature dynamic pricing with rates rising as demand increases during peak travel times and falling at off-peak times, giving drivers the choice to pay to bypass congestion. Construction costs for this project were $834 million. This project is the most complex express lanes project in the country and the most innovative project in Georgia’s transportation history. The success of this project relied heavily on interactions and collaboration between industry and community partners. Coordination of various schedules and dependencies presented a tremendous challenge to GDOT. To facilitate collaboration and ensure a seamless transition between the delivery and operation phases of the project, GDOT looked to implement the “Go-Live Taskforce.” The Taskforce brought stakeholders and partners together with the common goal of advancing the project and delivering a safe, sustainable, and operable system.
The Go-Live Taskforce was broken down into working groups and sub-working groups, that deliberated, reported, and resolved key issues and risks that impacted the delivery of the project and the opening of the toll system. Working groups met monthly and membership included GDOT and SRTA as subject matter experts, while engaging external stakeholders as needed.

**TSMO PLANNING, STRATEGIES, AND DEPLOYMENT**

The Go-Live Taskforce consisted of the following working groups:

- **Executive Committee**: This committee included executive leadership and key decision-makers. Quarterly meetings were held with this group to discuss progress, policies, and key decisions.

- **Steering Committee**: This committee was made up of the engineering and operations management teams from both GDOT and SRTA, and key individuals from the Delivery team.

- **Delivery and Operations**:
  - **Infrastructure**: Consisted of the construction project management team and focused on the overall delivery of the project.
  - **Operations**: Consisted of key personnel from the GDOT Traffic Management Center (TMC) and the SRTA Traffic Operations Center (TOC). This group identified the requirements, expectations, and needs for all tolling and ITS equipment installed on the project. This working group provided oversight for the development and integration of the ITS devices and software development for the Reversible Access Control System (RACS) and back-up software.
  - **Incident Management**: Consisted of the GDOT TMC Highway Emergency Response Operator (HERO) management team, GDOT TMC Operator Management, SRTA TOC Operations Management. This group championed the needs of incident management teams, including HERO and TMC Operator training. This group engaged with emergency responder personnel to ensure those teams knew how to use the lanes and provided training in how to respond to events in the lanes.

- **Software**: Consisted of software developers tackling the challenges associated with the operating software for the reversible express lanes.

- **Data Collection**: Consisted of personnel from GDOT TMC and SRTA Office of Transportation Performance and Innovation. This working group was responsible for coordinating the needs for volume and speed data.

- **Transit**: Consisted of SRTA and transit partners focused on planning and coordinating the needs of future transit operations in the express lanes.

- **Maintenance**: Consisted of management from GDOT State Maintenance and the GDOT District Office(s). This working group was responsible for identifying and planning for future maintenance needs.

- **Communications**: Consisted of staff from GDOT and SRTA's Office of Communications. This working group was responsible for messaging and outreach to media and traveling public, general facility and Peach Pass marketing, and planning groundbreaking/ribbon-cutting events.

- **Legal & Finance**: Consisted of financial and legal experts from both GDOT and SRTA teams. This group was responsible for establishing intergovernmental agreements for the operations and maintenance and ensuring that all legal and financial agreements were in place.

- **Human Resources**: Consisted of GDOT and SRTA personnel and was responsible for coordinating personnel and resource needs, particularly for facility operators.

The goal of Go-Live was a seamless transition from the construction to operations project phases. As the developer worked to prepare the roadway and express lane system for opening, the simultaneous need for traffic operations and toll integration staff to enter the facility for system integration, testing, and HERO training became critical.

**COMMUNICATIONS PLANNING AND EXECUTION**

Go-Live was the instrument used for coordination. The Taskforce determined the best way to manage needs were through an online shared calendar. Parties were granted the access they had submitted via the calendar. Doing so streamlined the management of identifying the critical location, type of work, and duration each
party needed. The value of the Go-Live Taskforce was inherently Communications Planning and Execution. Go-Live broke down the traditional silos that exist within organizations. It brought stakeholders in the overall project success together in an unlikely gathering of minds to accomplish the unique task of not only delivering a successful project but ensuring that this delivery involved the handoff to maintaining and operating departments and agencies.

Strategic communications to motorists was vital. Throughout the Taskforce, communications groups engaged communities along the corridor, providing education and collecting feedback. A huge campaign was undertaken by SRTA to register new toll users. As the construction approached the open to traffic date, a communications campaign was executed, including ribbon-cutting and community events, and media promotions.

OUTCOMES, BENEFITS, AND LEARNINGS

The Go-Live Taskforce model had been piloted on another reversible express lanes project in the Atlanta-metro area, the I-75 South Metro Express Lanes. Due to its success, the effort was expanded and adopted to fit the NWC project, a project three times the size of the I-75 South Metro Express Lanes. The Taskforce was mobilized a year prior to the contractual completion date, and working groups began to gather shortly after. The NWC project faced challenges that could have led to delays in the opening of the system. However, the Go-Live Taskforce provided a platform for collaboration between stakeholders and was the means to on-time delivery. The NWC has seen over 7.4 million trips since opening in September 2018 and has reduced rush hour by over an hour in morning and evening commutes. The express lanes see traffic speeds 20 percent faster than general purpose (GP) lanes, with the GP lanes seeing speeds 20 mph faster than before the express lanes opened. Due to the success of the Go-Live Taskforce, this tool will be used in Georgia’s Major Mobility Investment Program (MMIP), an $11 billion program for the delivery of significant projects throughout the state of Georgia, and will continue to bring all partners across the metro-Atlanta region together.