



Future operation of flex lanes on I-17

First-of-its-kind system in Arizona will change how drivers travel along the Interstate

Motorists driving Interstate 17 north of Phoenix have seen crews moving dirt and blasting rock over the last year to make way for a wider and safer 23-mile stretch of highway between Anthem Way and Sunset Point, as part of the I-17 Improvement Project. When the project is completed in 2025, drivers on the approximately 8 miles between Black Canyon City and Sunset Point will experience the first flex lanes in Arizona’s highway system.

The Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT) has a new animated video online to help explain how the new flex lanes will work, found on a newly launched webpage dedicated to explaining the system, along with providing information and resources for drivers.

“The flex lanes are an innovative solution that increases safety and helps address congestion in a very challenging geographic area,” said Annette Riley, ADOT’s project manager for the I-17 Improvement Project.

The two-lane flex lane system is being constructed adjacent to the existing southbound lanes and will carry one direction of traffic at a time. The flex lanes are a proven system that safely addresses traffic congestion during peak travel times, or if an unplanned incident would otherwise create all-too-familiar delays. Typically, the flex lanes will be open to northbound traffic Monday through Saturday and to southbound traffic on Sunday. However, the direction of the flex lanes will be changed as needed, to whichever has the heaviest traffic. They will be operational at all times, seven days a week.

The new crossover lanes will allow vehicles to safely access the flex lanes, which will be separated from the existing southbound lanes by a concrete barrier. Steel gates will be installed in this concrete barrier in four locations, allowing emergency responders access to the flex lanes, to redirect traffic into the general purpose lanes in the event of an incident.

ADOT’s Traffic Operations Center will manage and monitor the flex lanes remotely using cameras that will be placed throughout the corridor.

- Dynamic overhead guide signs will alert drivers to the open direction of the flex lanes.
- Safety systems will be in place to prevent vehicles from entering the flex lanes when traffic is flowing in the opposite direction.
- A specialized automated net barrier and swing gate system will operate at both ends of the flex lanes.
- When one direction of the flex lanes is closed, a series of swing gates will be extended. These gates get progressively wider and block access to the flex lanes.
- Beyond the swing gates, a vehicle-arresting barrier with a net in the down position will also prevent vehicles from entering the flex lanes in the wrong direction.

These components of the flex lanes safety system are designed specifically for reversible lane operations in controlling the direction of traffic. For more information on the entire 23-mile I-17 Improvement Project between Anthem Way and Sunset Point, visit improving17.com.

