



PACE TO LET BUSES DRIVE ON I-55 SHOULDER

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By [Paul Meincke](#)

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Pace begins a new experiment next month. The suburban transit agency will let buses drive on the shoulder of the Stevenson Expressway to avoid congestion and get around traffic jams.

The people riding a Pace coach bus recently had one of the least expensive commutes in town - \$4 for the trip southwest to Bolingbrook where they park for free. But the journey on the Stevenson can at times be agonizingly slow. So the plan is when rush hour leads to gridlock the Pace buses will be allowed to run on the left shoulder to make better time.

"The bus won't use the shoulder when traffic is traveling more than 35 miles per hour, but when it slows to less than 35 miles per hour, the bus will run on the shoulder," explains a promotional video.

When they are running the shoulder the buses can never exceed 35 miles an hour. So, what might this plan save in travel time?

"Conceivably you can save anywhere from 15 to 20 inches up to half hour depending on traffic," said Rick Kwasneski, Pace chairman.

In other cities where a "bus on shoulder plan" is used, there is a travel time savings, but it's variable. And, of course, there is the road debris that inevitably accumulates on the shoulder, and the cars that breakdown.

"Most people don't pay much attention to the left as they do to the right, so it could shock someone and cause an accident," said Robert Williams.

There are signs up. The state department of transportation is going to have to do more frequent shoulder sweeps, and state police perhaps more patrol when this two year pilot project begins the middle of next month.

Supporters say it makes sense to give it a try.

"It's much cheaper than putting rail down or dedicating new lanes for bonuses," said Ill. State Rep. Bob Rita.

"If they get downtown 15 to 20 minutes faster a day, that's almost two to three hours a week they can save and maybe that'll encourage more people to use it," said Rober Claar, Bolingbrook mayor.

Bus on shoulder is not a new concept. Minneapolis-St. Paul has had it since the early 90s, but the traffic load is different here, and safety questions certainly can't be minimized.

This is a two year pilot program that will be run only on roughly 15 miles of the Stevenson on roughly 15 between Interstate 355 and Kedzie and only at rush hour. If it's seen as a success at the end of two years, it could be expanded to other expressways.

Source:

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