

## Chaos at toll plazas as commuters grapple with enforcement of FASTags



Chaos continues on national highways as commuters grapple with the enforcement of [FASTags](#) across the toll plazas. Some struggled with cash while others paid hefty penalties for a seamless movement on the roads.

Traffic on Kherki-Daula, one of the busiest toll plazas, on National Highway 8 connecting the national capital region with Mumbai, was slower than usual as cars struggled to zip past the barrier, after it became cashless from February 16.

The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways made all toll plazas, across the country, cashless.

Essentially, it has become mandatory for vehicles to have a FASTag in order to move seamlessly on national highways. In the absence of the FASTag, the vehicle owner has to pay double the toll amount as penalty to pass through the plaza.

Pramod Kumar, 45, seated in his SUV with his wife and mother, was agitated when his car was stopped at the Kherki-Daula toll plaza. He didn't have a FASTag and scoffed at Poonam, 25, an employee with the agency managing the toll plaza.

"Whenever something like this happens, we call our seniors. Some people argue with us a lot," Poonam said. Though she couldn't corroborate the numbers, she said that an estimated 50% of the cars that passed by the booth, managed by her through the day, lacked FASTags.

Kumar relented after being informed about the mandate on FASTags by Poonam's senior colleague Jawan Singh. He then paid Rs 130, double the toll tax, to cross over to the other side.

"This is a usual scene since the FASTags became compulsory, people argue with us and sometimes even resort to abuse and violence. Even officers from the paramilitary forces like ITBP and CRPF and even Delhi Police officials ask for exemption. We have been told that on this highway only Army officers and Haryana state officials are exempted from toll, and no one else," said Singh, 47, who works for the toll plaza management company.

Kumar wasn't the only one oblivious to the government diktat on FASTags. During the 45 minutes spent on the toll plaza, it was found that several of them were either unaware of the mandate or simply didn't care about installing one in their cars.

Lack of FASTags has also become a business opportunity for banks to aggressively push for these digital tags by appointing volunteers, right at the entrance of the toll plazas.

Several volunteers, belonging to different banks and payment platforms, could be seen jostling with each other to entice the car owners. They are hired by banks for the purpose of selling FASTags and are paid a lump sum on a monthly basis.

Shubham Tiwari, 23, who works for Paytm, managed to sell 150 FASTags over the last one week, a massive pick-up from about 20-25 tags earlier.

"We have been selling these tags for the last few months, but the sale has picked up only after the government made it compulsory to have one installed in the vehicle," Tiwari said.

Tiwari works for Paytm, which offers a full recharge of Rs 150 tag, however, other banks including IDFC, ICICI and IndusInd Bank have no such offers.

"Our Rs 150 tag comes with Rs 100 recharge whereas Paytm offers full value. The customers opt for that payment gateway when they hear about the offer," said Ajay Yadav, 19, who works for Indusind Bank.

Some volunteers also face skepticism when it comes to purchase or recharge of the FASTags.

“They (commuters) don’t trust us, they are not confident of buying the tags from us, they would rather pay double the tax and penalty,” Ankit Sharma, a 24-year old volunteer with the ICICI Bank, said.

The situation was similar at the Badarpur border toll plaza, where customer response to FASTags was sluggish.

“The customer response to the FASTag sale on the toll plaza is slow because 95% of the commercial vehicle owners already have them and passenger vehicle owners are in no hurry to buy them,” said Uttam Chavan, 46, who works for MEP Infra, the company that manages the NHAI toll plaza at Badarpur border.

The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways has made FASTags mandatory for M and N categories of motor vehicles.

The M category includes vehicles having at least four wheels and used for carrying passengers. Your personal vehicle comes under this category.

The N category includes vehicles with at least four wheels and used for carrying goods. Additionally, such vehicles may carry people as well.

[FASTags](#)