



Pete Ricketts, Governor

Department of Roads

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

“Use Both Lanes to Merge Point” Signs Going up on US-34/75, Plattsmouth-Bellevue North to Encourage “Zipper Merge” Process

November 1, 2016 (Omaha, Neb.) — Motorists traveling on US-34/75 in the area of the Plattsmouth to Bellevue North construction project will see a series of signs asking them to “Use Both Lanes to Merge.” This process is known as a “late or zipper merge” and is utilized when traffic is reduced from two lanes to a single lane and will occur on Saturday, November 5, according to the Nebraska Department of Roads.

A “late or zipper merge” occurs when motorists use both lanes of traffic until reaching the defined merge area, and then alternate in “zipper” fashion into the open lane. This type of merge works best for situations where reoccurring backups are expected, while the “early” merge is best when there are no backups and traffic is free flowing.

Tim Weander, NDOR District 2 Engineer, noted that the late/zipper merge is needed as traffic will be restricted to two lanes on this project from November 2016 until spring 2019. This method is also preferred for traffic on all two-lane to single-lane merge locations.

“Because this segment of highway carries 20,000 vehicles daily and traffic backs up for a mile or more during peak hours when lane reductions occur, it is an ideal location for the late/zipper merge,” according to Weander.

An NDOR study shows the late/zipper merge reduces congestion delays and crashes in these types of work zones, when compared to the traditional work zone traffic control. The late/zipper merge has been used by the Minnesota Department of Transportation (DOT) and several other DOTs with success.

Motorists are asked to watch for the “late or zipper merge” signs, including the first sign, “Use Both Lanes to Merge Point.” At the merge point, a sign will indicate “Merge Here” by showing two traffic lanes converting into a single lane. The sign will also instruct drivers to “Take Turns.” Each driver needs to take turns with other drivers when merging to fully employ the merge concept. If done correctly, this will improve traffic flow conditions, prevent confusion and reduce unnecessary congestion.

Whether employing the late/zipper merge or any type of merge, motorists are reminded to drive cautiously through construction work zones.

#NDOR#

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NR20-GT



Do the

Zipper MERGE

The logo features the word "Zipper" in a blue, sans-serif font and "MERGE" in a bold, yellow, sans-serif font. Below the text is a stylized illustration of a zipper pull and teeth, with the teeth pointing to the right.

What is a zipper merge?

When a lane is closed in a construction zone, a zipper merge occurs when motorists use both lanes of traffic until reaching the defined merge area, and then alternate in “zipper” fashion into the open lane. This is also referred to as a “late merge.”

What are the benefits?

- Reduces differences in speeds between two lanes
- Reduces the overall length of traffic backup by as much as 40 percent
- Reduces congestion on freeway interchanges
- Creates a sense of fairness and equity that all lanes are moving at the same rate

Zipper merge vs early merge

Many drivers react to the first “lane closed ahead” sign by slowing down too quickly and moving to the traffic lane that will continue through the construction area. The driving behavior can lead to unexpected and dangerous lane switching, serious crashes and road rage.

Zipper merging, however, benefits individual drivers as well as the public at large. Research shows that these dangers decrease when motorists use both lanes until reaching the defined merge area and then alternate in “zipper” fashion into the open lane. **Watch a brief video on how it works** (<http://www.roads.nebraska.gov/news-media/web-stories/zipper-merge/>)

So, I’m supposed to merge late?

Yes! As you see the “lane closed ahead” sign and traffic backing up, stay in your current lane up to the point of merge. Then take turns with other drivers to safely and smoothly ease into the remaining lane. When traffic is heavy and slow, it is much safer for motorists to remain in their current lane until the point where traffic can orderly take turns merging.

When not to do the zipper merge

When traffic is moving at highway speeds and there are no backups, it makes sense to move sooner to the lane that will remain open through construction.