

CHAPTER 7

FREEWAY DRIVING



Freeways, interstates, expressways, and toll roads offer fast and efficient routes of travel. They're usually safer than other kinds of roads because they have one-way traffic, a limited number of entrances, and other special safety features. On the other hand, they can encourage boredom and fatigue that the driver must guard against. Where designated as permissible by federal law, vehicles may travel at speeds up to 75 mph on rural interstates (65 mph for heavy trucks), and up to 65 mph on urban interstate highways, unless otherwise posted. At these speeds, a single error can be disastrous.

Travel Plans

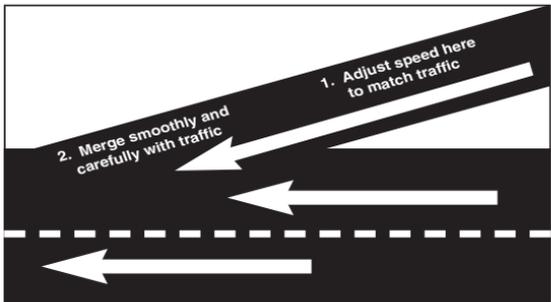
Before starting a long freeway trip, make yourself a travel plan. Plan for food, rest, and fuel stops. On short trips, know the name, route, entrance, and exit numbers.

Entering a Freeway

Freeway entrances usually have three basic parts: an entrance ramp, an acceleration lane, and a merging area.

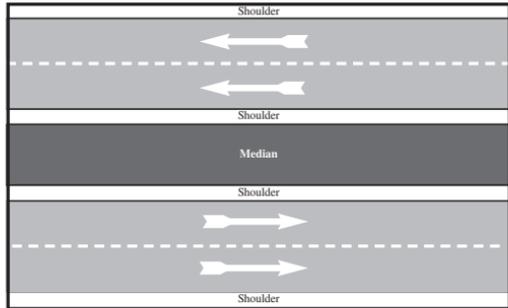
While on the entrance ramp you have a chance to observe traffic conditions on the

freeway. The ramp will straighten out into the acceleration lane where you should accelerate to the speed of freeway traffic. In the merging area, you must blend into the flow of traffic on the freeway's outside lane.



Follow these procedures:

- Before you enter the ramp, make sure it's the one you want. If you enter the wrong entrance by mistake, never try to back up or turn around through the median. **Freeway median crossovers are for highway maintenance or emergency vehicle use only. It is illegal for any other vehicles to use them.** If you need to get off the freeway or change directions, wait until the next exit to do so.
- Once on the ramp, check traffic around you and on the freeway. Signal and begin looking over your left shoulder for a gap in the traffic large enough for your vehicle to fit into without crowding anyone.
- As the ramp straightens, accelerate to the speed of the freeway traffic so you can blend in smoothly. Remember, you must yield to the traffic already on the highway.
- Once you're traveling at the speed of traffic, you can make a simple lane change, merge with the flow of vehicles, and turn off your turn signal.



Possible Entrance Problems

The suggestions above were written with an ideal freeway entrance in mind. Sometimes on older freeway entrances or freeways built with limited space, the ramp, acceleration lane, or merging area may be shorter than ideal. In such places, or when traffic is heavy, you may have to take extra precautions.

For example, in heavy traffic gaps are hard to find. If there's no opening, you may have to slow down before reaching the end of the acceleration lane.

Sometimes a short acceleration lane combined with heavy traffic will force you to stop. When that happens, be sure to leave enough room ahead so you can accelerate up to the speed of freeway traffic as you merge. Wait until there is a gap large enough for you to reach cruising speed without interfering with oncoming vehicles. Then signal your entrance and accelerate as rapidly as you can to blend in with the traffic flow.

Don't Drive Too Fast or Slow

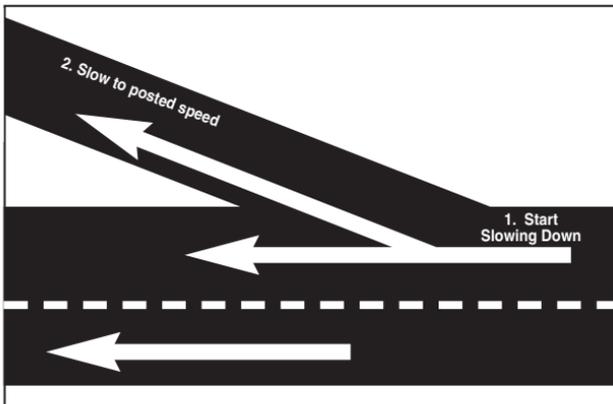
Once on the freeway, you should maintain a steady speed and keep up with the flow or traffic. Where designated as permissible by federal law and as weather conditions permit, vehicles may travel 75 mph on freeways/rural interstates, and 65 mph on freeways/urban interstates, unless otherwise posted. Since it's dangerous to drive slow when other traffic is going fast, a minimum speed may also be posted. If you can't or don't want to drive at the posted speed on a freeway, choose another kind of road to travel on.

Changing Lanes

Most of the time you should drive in the far right or center lane of the freeway. The left lane is for higher-speed traffic and passing. During rush hours, you should avoid the right lane to allow room for drivers entering the freeway. Always signal for at least five seconds before making a lane change or exiting a freeway.

Leaving the Freeway

Getting off a freeway can be a simple maneuver if you know which exit to take, and follow the signs marking the lane for that exit.



Leaving a Freeway

Follow these steps:

- If you are not already in the correct lane, about a half mile before the exit, signal and move into the lane nearest the exit. Signal, then move into the deceleration lane provided to let you slow down without interrupting the flow of traffic.
- An exit speed may be posted. Adjust your speed accordingly as you drive through the ramp.

- As you leave the ramp and enter another thoroughfare, you may be driving in more complicated, dangerous traffic than on the freeway. Be alert and adjust to the new conditions and slower speeds.

Study Questions

1. Why are minimum speeds posted on some freeways?
2. What is the purpose of a freeway acceleration lane?
3. What should you do if you miss your exit off of a freeway?
4. How do you enter a freeway with a very short acceleration lane?
5. How long should you signal for when changing lanes on a freeway?