

Palomar Road construction signals sweeping change for South Bay transit

BY ANDREW DYER NEWS ON 06/15/2016



Demolition on the East Palomar Street median began in April 2016.

Grueling bus rides from the border may soon be no more than painful memories. Phase One of the South Bay Rapid project is underway.

Scheduled for completion in 2018, the dedicated bus lanes will connect the Otay Mesa border crossing to downtown San Diego. A study by the San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG) predicts riders can expect a one-way, end-to-end trip to take 85 minutes, rather than 3-4 hours. Otay Ranch Town Center to downtown San Diego will take 50-60 minutes. Only 12 stops dot the streamlined 26-mile route.

South Bay Rapid includes a six-mile exclusive bus lane in the median of East Palomar Street from Interstate 805 to Eastlake Parkway. From there, it will turn south along the east side of Otay Ranch Town Center before wrapping around the Millenia development and linking with State Route 125 to the border.

“I know a lot of people who come from the border and they have to go all the way to San Ysidro,” said Rocio Sandoval, a 22-year-old Psychology major and MTS bus rider. “I think it’s a good idea.”

Karen Peña, an 18-year-old Montgomery High School senior, said the South Bay Rapid route would be an improvement over the current bus routes.

“It’s easier because you don’t make too many stops,” she said.

SANDAG Construction Manager Eric Adams said the route would alleviate congestion on Olympic Parkway and Telegraph Canyon Road.

“We expect the ridership is going to be very high,” he said.

Construction of the first phase is already underway on East Palomar from Heritage to Olympic Parkway. Adams said drivers should expect delays.

“There’ll be some traffic impacts from time to time,” he said. “We’re working cooperatively with the Chula Vista traffic department to make sure we minimize the amount of traffic impacts along that corridor.”

The next phase of construction is projected to begin in mid-2016, said Adams, and will run along Palomar from Olympic Parkway to the Otay Ranch Town Center. It includes construction of a dedicated overpass above SR 125.

“It’s quite an extensive project,” he said.



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Another new overpass and freeway entrance ramp will be constructed at the intersection of East Palomar and I-805. An entrance ramp will drop directly into the I-805 carpool lanes. The overpass and entrance ramp will be accessible by South Bay Rapid buses, motorcycles and vehicles authorized to use carpool lanes, either by occupancy or certain zero and low-emission vehicles.

Nine transit stations line the southern end of the route from National City to the border, including park-and-ride options at East Plaza Boulevard, H Street, East Palomar and Otay Ranch Town Center.

“This is not your typical bus route, it’s not your typical bus station,” Adams said. “This is a service with a higher level of amenities to get you that trolley-like feel and comfort.”

Adams said the decision to build dedicated bus lanes instead of laying down trolley tracks was made years before he was involved with the project.

“(There is) a process called alternative analysis and, through that process, it was determined that a bus route would be the most cost-effective mode of transit to serve that community,” he said.

All sections of the South Bay Rapid project are slated to be open in 2018.

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