

Project History

Improvements to the Interstate 5 (I-5) corridor were initiated in the late 1990's when the San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG), which includes representatives from the 18 cities and the County of San Diego, commissioned the North Coast Transportation Study. The study, which was approved in 2000, was initiated to address existing congestion as well as to serve the anticipated 1 million of additional people expected to make the county home by 2030. This growth is anticipated to increase the volume of traffic in the corridor by 35 percent. The study concluded that additional commuter rail (Coaster) service, a bus rapid transit system and improvements to I-5 will all be needed to keep traffic congestion from getting worse. In 2004 the I-5 improvements were included as one of the key corridors to be partially funded by the extension of the half-cent sales tax (Transnet) program approved by two-thirds of the County's voters. The Environmental Document and Project Report are part of the Transnet Early Action Program (EAP).

Project Status

Once the region has identified a corridor for improvements, the next step is completion of an Environmental Impact Report/Statement (EIR/EIS). The purpose of the study is to identify project alternatives that meet the project need and purpose, quantify natural (such as biological and wetlands) and community related (such as noise, traffic and visual) impacts, identify ways to avoid or reduce the impacts and identify mitigation strategies where an impact cannot be avoided. The document will ultimately select a preferred alternative that will move into final design. The EIR/EIS was initiated in 2001 and addresses improvements from just south of the I-5/I-805 merge in Sorrento Valley to Harbor Drive in Oceanside. The EIR/EIS is currently studying two primary transportation alternatives.

- Alternative 1: Construct 4 Managed Lanes
- Alternative 2: Construct 4 Managed Lanes in the corridor plus one additional general purpose lane in each direction from 5/805 to SR-78.



The I-5 freeway leads motorists through diverse land use areas and sensitive habitats. The Del Mar Fairgrounds, dense residential neighborhoods and the San Dieguito Lagoon can all be seen from the freeway.

The Managed lanes under study could be similar to the existing lanes in the median of I-15 in the Mira Mesa area, where carpools and transit riders could use the lanes at no cost and solo drivers could use any excess capacity for a fee.

The technical studies to identify the impacts of these improvements are currently underway and should be complete in middle of 2006. The current schedule would call for selection of a preferred alternative in 2008, with construction beginning as early as 2009.

North Coast I-5 a Unique Resource

Any improvements to I-5 in this area need to account for not only its importance as a transportation corridor for commuters, goods movement, and recreational users, but also the corridor's striking coastal location, its impact on adjacent coastal lagoons, and its proximity to homes and communities. It is this combination that has earned this segment of highway the nickname "Gateway to San Diego." Construction of a project of this magnitude provides a unique opportunity to not only address the transportation problem but to also protect and enhance the lagoons, improve east-west pedestrian/bicycle access and provide an opportunity to reflect the character of each coastal community in the design of the project.

This newsletter is intended to provide residents and motorists along the I-5 corridor with information about upcoming freeway projects. The periodic newsletter will provide general information about work in the corridor along with updates as the work progresses. A project web page is being developed and more information about the web page will be included in the next edition of the North Coast Courier.



Among the most challenging aspects of improving I-5 will be identifying ways to lessen impacts to all the varied neighborhoods, farmlands, industrial areas and environmentally sensitive habitats.

How can you help?

Community involvement will be a critical part of making this project a success. About a dozen community meetings have already been held and more are coming. Once the technical Studies are complete in middle 2006 a series of public meetings will be held to not only provide the study findings but also to provide an open dialog with project team regarding those impacts and potential minimization and mitigation strategies. In parallel with the ongoing technical studies, Caltrans is working with each of the local agencies to determine what opportunities this project provides to improve the corridor's aesthetics, natural resources, and sense of community.

FAQ

What are managed lanes?

The concept of Managed Lanes is to provide certain types of users priority (free flow) service. In addition to managing demand, Managed Lanes can also include moveable barriers to manage capacity. These principles are being utilized on I-15 to provide priority service to transit and carpools. Solo drivers will also be allowed on the lanes for a fee.

Why is there no light-rail consideration in this project?

The I-5 North Coast Project is the freeway portion of the San Diego Association of Government (SANDAG) I-5 North Coast Corridor Study. The SANDAG study recommended improvements to the Coaster commuter rail service and the expansion of a bus rapid transit service.

I-5 is congested now, why can't anything be done sooner? Why does it take so long?

The I-5 project is on an aggressive schedule to complete the environmental document in 2008. While the corridor project is being developed, a project to extend the existing HOV lanes to Manchester Avenue and improve the interchange at Lomas Santa Fe Drive is expected to begin construction in Summer 2007.

Will any sound walls be constructed?

A noise study is developed as part of any capacity increasing freeway project. The noise study is used to determine any areas that will require the construction of a noise barrier. The noise study is expected to be completed late in middle 2006. A series of community meetings are anticipated to present the results. Until the study is complete there is no way to anticipate where any new noise barriers will be constructed. More information explaining how noise studies are developed will be included in a future edition of the North Coast Courier.



How to get more information?

For general information about the project, please call Tom Nipper at 619/688-0282 or email tom.nipper@dot.ca.gov.