SR 76 Middle Project
Construction Update #4

Winter 2011

Construction Enters New Year Right On Schedule

As you have likely seen, 2010 was a busy year between Melrose Drive and South Mission Road on State Route 76 (SR 76). Construction crews hustled day and night to start construction and then ended 2010 on track with the anticipated schedule to complete construction by December 2012. This newsletter highlights the progress we've made and what's ahead in 2011, introduces another one of our team members, and describes how the project is preserving the community's rural character in the project area.

Construction Progress in 2010: Construction began in January 2010 with site preparation. Then, crews were on to bridge building, rock blasting and dirt hauling to create an improved SR 76. Here are some highlights:

- Crews have moved enough dirt to fill Qualcomm Stadium over 6 times. These dirt hauling operations are 90% complete.
- Over 1.5 million pounds of steel and 9 support columns have been constructed for the San Luis Rey River Bridge. Construction of the bridge is 33% complete.
- Wildlife corridor improvements are 30% complete. These corridors enable wildlife to move between different areas of habitat.

Construction crews also implemented sustainable practices. Through these practices, our crews prevented storm water pollution with visual, chemical and sediment monitoring programs, and combed all of the fill dirt back into the project area to make way for the new road.

All of these practices will continue to be implemented in 2011 as crews construct the new SR 76.

View of San Luis Rey River Bridge construction progress.

What's Next in 2011? By early Spring 2011 we anticipate completing:

- Large-scale cut-and-fill hauling operations throughout the project area in both directions.
- Constructing the San Luis Rey River Bridge and Ostrich Farm Creek Bridge.
- Paving new lanes where traffic will be shifted while the new alignment is built.
- Installing the new roadway drainage system.

Thank you for your continued patience in this new year as we continue to make progress on your roadway improvements. Please read on to learn about the project's environmental mitigation efforts.

Drilling equipment used to construct Ostrich Farm Creek Bridge.

Rush Abrams: Associate Environmental Planner/Biologist and Animal Lover

Rush Abrams mitigates environmental impacts during construction. A key area of focus for her work is to help crews make wildlife crossings a reality.

Rush Abrams shows a recently completed wildlife crossing in the SR 76 Middle Segment.

How long have you been with Caltrans? I am a relative newcomer: I've only been working with Caltrans for five years.

What are some of the positions you have held with Caltrans? The SR 76 project is my first big project with Caltrans. I am working as the Associate Environmental Planner/Biologist for the SR 76 Middle and East segments, as well as other smaller projects. It's a real benefit to focus my efforts on the SR 76 highway projects. Plus, I am familiar with the area because I used to live in Oceanside.

What is your role with the project? Prior to the start of construction, my role was to find ways to minimize and avoid impacts to the environment while construction was taking place. Since construction started, it has been my responsibility to monitor construction to make sure environmental impacts are limited.

What is your favorite component of the project? Through our mitigation efforts, we preserve, restore and create wetlands. We can transform an old piece of land that was unkempt and overgrown into a new wetland by introducing native wetland vegetation. This idea of preserving or creating wetlands is an integral component to the project because it creates sustained consistency for the local wildlife.

Badgers use an animal crossing from another project to get from one side of the road to the other.

What roles do wildlife crossings play in environmental mitigation? Wildlife crossings are placed along the animals' typical migratory paths. This type of crossing offers a safe walkway for animals underneath SR 76. The main purpose of the wildlife crossings is to prevent the highway from fragmenting habitat and creating barriers to wildlife movement.

What design considerations are made for the wildlife crossings? Wildlife crossings can vary in size and distance for different species. It's important that the wildlife crossing's entrance is large enough for the animal to enter and offers enough light at the end of the crossing so the animal feels safe to use it.

Why are wildlife crossings important? Roads and highways fragment habitat and create barriers to wildlife movement, both of which isolate animal populations. Highways also cause an increase in animal-vehicle collisions. Prior to construction, we conducted a one-year road kill biological study on a single, one-mile stretch of SR 76. Unfortunately, during that year, we found over 1,000 animals killed by vehicles in this section alone. Our hope is that the wildlife crossings will sharply decrease these numbers and preserve the existing wildlife.

How many wildlife crossings are being constructed? A total of 5 wildlife crossings are being constructed in addition to an equestrian crossing.

When you're not working what do you like to do? My hobbies include hiking, running, biking and reading. I also enjoy spending time with my partner, Joleen, my dog, Keeper, and two cats, Tazmania and Nova.

Question of the Quarter

Why are plants being removed from the riverbed?

As part of mitigation efforts included in the SR 76 Middle Segment project, work has begun to restore 136 acres along the corridor to open habitat dominated by native vegetation. Several thickets of arundo, a harmful, non-native grass, were removed to prevent the formation of dense root thickets that are difficult for the endangered arroyo toad to burrow through. And several tamarisk trees were removed to prevent the formation of dense strands that choke out native plants. Replacing arundo and tamarisk trees with native vegetation also reduces the risk of wildfires since native riparian areas typically block fires. This $2.2 million restoration effort will continue over the next five years. Eventually, these sites will be restored and dozens of acres of native willow and cottonwood trees, shrubs and sandy soils will make ideal homes for native species of toads, gnatcatchers and songbirds.