



## Frequently Asked Questions

### ■ PURPOSE AND NEED

#### 1. Why is the I-5 Express Lanes Project needed?

The coastal resources, regional attractions and vital connections in the Interstate 5 (I-5) North Coast Corridor (NCC) generate a variety of transportation needs that cause significant congestion on I-5. As one of only two north-south transportation corridors in Northern San Diego County, the NCC is an economic lifeline the region as a whole. On average, I-5 alone serves more than 700,000 daily trips, including commuters, goods movement, local trips, visitors and recreation users.

The I-5 Express Lanes Project is needed to keep pace with expected population and economic growth in the North Coast Corridor. The project's main purpose is to improve mobility, reduce congestion and offer new transportation options that focus on moving people rather than just cars.

The I-5 Express Lanes Project is the result of a planning process that began approximately 20 years ago and has addressed a variety of options to relieve congestion within the busy corridor. Several operational studies and analyses show a need to improve the I-5 freeway in the North Coast Corridor.

#### 2. What is the significance of the Final EIR/EIS for the project and how has the public been involved in the environmental review process?

The release of the Final EIR/EIS for the I-5 Express Lanes Project certifies a regionally significant project in partnership with resource agencies, local and state officials, and the community. It also finalizes plans for the Express Lanes only project which provides the best balanced solution for the environment and focuses on moving people, not just cars.

The document completes the planning process for the highway component of the North Coast Corridor Program, a balanced transportation plan which includes highway, rail, transit, environment and coastal access improvement projects.

Public involvement is an integral part of the planning process. Since 2004, Caltrans and SANDAG have held several public meetings to answer questions and gather feedback from community members. In addition, several presentations have been made to local communities and planning groups, homeowners associations and chambers of commerce.

The Final EIR/EIS includes responses to over 5,000 comments received from community members, public agencies and various stakeholders during the Draft Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement (DEIR/EIS) review period. Key areas of interest by the public include noise, mass transit, Right-of-Way impacts, mitigation, and lagoon impacts.

#### 3. Does the project provide the best solution for the short- and long-term?

Improvements to major transportation routes require extensive planning and must consider both short- and long-term solutions. The I-5 Express Lanes Project is the result of more than 20 years of planning and public input. The project will increase capacity to relieve both existing and anticipated future congestion through 2050.

Express Lanes provide flexibility to adapt to changes in traffic demand daily, weekly, monthly and yearly. As changes in demand, land-use and technology take place, the Express Lanes will provide the flexibility necessary to adapt.

The project is just one component of the North Coast Corridor Program, which offers a balanced transportation system to provide travelers with choices for the future while enhancing the quality of life for residents.

## ■ PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

### 4. **What has changed since the initial Draft EIR/EIS was released in 2010?**

The Final EIR/EIS incorporates updated project design data and refined studies. Upon further analysis included in the Supplemental EIR/EIS released in 2012, and collaboration with resource agencies, other refinements since the original Draft EIR/EIS was circulated include, but are not limited to:

- Affirms the 8+4 with buffer option as the preferred alternative;
- Deletion of previously planned Direct Access Ramps, which allow motorists direct access to the carpool lanes without having to merge across general purpose lanes, at Oceanside Boulevard and Cannon Road;
- Redesigned Manchester Avenue Direct Access Ramp from an overpass to an underpass to minimize project footprint and visual effects;
- Confirms the projects included in the Resource Enhancement Program which will protect, restore and enhance natural habitat at several locations in the North Coast Corridor;
- Caltrans concluded that by lengthening the highway bridges over the San Elijo, Batiquitos and Buena Vista lagoons, tidal flow and the overall health at each of those lagoons could be improved.
- Incorporates North Coast Corridor design guidelines so projects are consistent with community character and local aesthetics;
- Inclusion of the 27-mile North Coast Bike Trail, which closes gaps in the existing bike trail network and will complete and continuous trail from La Jolla to Oceanside adjacent to I-5;
- Refined 8+4 with buffer option resulting in nearly 50 percent fewer Right-of-Way impacts; and
- Addresses California Senate Bill 468, which focuses on project phasing and coordination to minimize impacts to the environment and the community during construction.

### 5. **How is the I-5 Express Lanes Project funded?**

The I-5 Express Lanes Project is funded through a combination of federal, state and local resources. The project is part of the TransNet Program, the voter approved, half-cent sales tax initiative that helps fund transportation projects in the region. Since the project will be constructed in phases over the next few decades, regional priorities will factor into short-and long-term funding opportunities.

## ■ PROJECT ALTERNATIVES

### 6. **What is the 8+4 with buffer and how was it chosen as the preferred alternative for the project?**

The 8+4 with buffer option for the I-5 Express Lanes Project will add two Express Lanes in each direction on I-5 from La Jolla Village Drive in San Diego to Harbor Drive in Oceanside. The Express Lanes will be separated from the general purpose lanes by a painted, striped buffer.

Following the circulation of the Draft Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement (EIR/EIS) in 2010, a refined 8+4 buffer option was identified as the locally preferred alternative in the August 2012 Supplemental Draft EIR/EIS. The locally preferred alternative has the smallest footprint (and therefore fewest environmental and Right-of-Way impacts) and represents the best balance of I-5 transportation benefits when considered with project costs and impacts. In addition to having the smallest footprint, the locally preferred alternative meets transportation needs and objectives by prioritizing the movement of people rather than just cars.

### 7. **Why doesn't the I-5 Final Environmental Document include mass transit elements?**

The I-5 Express Lanes project is just one component of the planned \$6.5 billion North Coast Corridor (NCC) Program, which includes highway, rail, transit, environmental protection and coastal access improvements. The San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG) and Caltrans have collaborated to develop the NCC

Program to provide a balanced transportation system to create more choices for travelers while enhancing the quality of life for residents.

The NCC Program provides a comprehensive transportation and resource enhancement solution for the corridor. Planned improvements such as the I-5 Express Lanes provide flexibility for future transit services such as Bus Rapid Transit and highway express buses. Adding Express Lanes to I-5, double tracking the coastal rail line and improving local and regional bike and pedestrian trails are part of the NCC Program’s system solution to focus on moving people rather than just cars. For more information on the NCC Program, please visit [KeepSanDiegoMoving.com/NCC](http://KeepSanDiegoMoving.com/NCC).

**8. What is the difference between an Express Lane and a carpool lane?**

The I-5 Express Lanes Project will add two Express Lanes in both directions on I-5 from La Jolla Village Drive in San Diego to Harbor Drive in Oceanside. Express Lanes maximize the person-carrying capacity of the highway by prioritizing carpools, vanpools, and buses. Solo drivers using FasTrak® will be able to access the Express Lanes. Revenue generated from the FasTrak® system will fund transit projects with the North Coast Corridor (NCC), which spans 27 miles from La Jolla to Oceanside.

The Express Lanes will offer a congestion-free travel option and provide flexibility to adapt to changes in land use, demand and technology. Express Lanes can be actively managed to adapt to daily traffic demands, ensuring the lanes remain congestion-free.

High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV), or carpool lanes, permit only vehicles carrying two or more people, solo drivers are not permitted to use carpool lanes at any time.

**PROJECT MITIGATION AND IMPACTS**

**9. Will there be environmental impacts, and if so, what measures have been taken to mitigate the impacts?**

The project’s Final EIR/EIS includes avoidance, minimization, mitigation and environmental enhancement measures that have been comprised into a comprehensive Resource Enhancement Mitigation Program (REMP). Compilation of the I-5 Express Lanes projects and others associated with the North Coast Corridor Program into a single mitigation and enhancement effort ensures the most accurate assessment of potential impacts is being made. Addressing impacts on a corridor-wide basis provide a greater regional benefit than mitigating on an individual project basis.

Key mitigation measures include the facilitation and funding of the 491-acre San Elijo Lagoon Restoration Project and the nearly complete 100-acre restoration of native habitat in the San Dieguito Lagoon. The NCC Program has been tailored to the unique needs of the corridor and as a result, lagoon enhancement efforts are part the comprehensive solution to address transportation and environment projects concurrently to provide the best balance of benefits.

For more information and a complete list of environmental enhancements, please visit [KeepSanDiegoMoving.com/NCC](http://KeepSanDiegoMoving.com/NCC).

**10. Are soundwalls included as part of the I-5 Final EIR/EIS? What other noise mitigation efforts are being considered?**

In an effort to study the noise impacts to residents and businesses along I-5 in the project area, Caltrans studied 82 soundwalls that could be constructed as part of the I-5 Express Lanes Project. Noise abatement measures that are determined to be “reasonable” and “feasible” and the time of final design and approved by the majority of shielded property owners are incorporated into project plans and specifications. Criteria such as a minimum impact threshold and costs determine whether a soundwall is “reasonable” and “feasible”.

Caltrans is researching other noise abatement measures such as “Next Generation Concrete Surface”. A recent pilot project showed significant reduction in vehicle-generated noise on the freeway by using the Next Generation Concrete Surfacing technology. The technology creates a smoother, quieter surface and a corresponding reduction in road noise. This is being considered as part of the I-5 Express Lanes Project.

## 11. Why does Caltrans need to acquire property for the I-5 Express Lanes Project?

To the greatest extent possible, it is Caltrans' intention to avoid and/or minimize impacts to properties that are near highway improvement projects. However, property impacts may be unavoidable and acquisitions may be required to implement highway improvements. The preferred alternative for the I-5 Express Lanes Project, 8+4 with buffer alternative, has the smallest impact footprint of all the build alternatives included in the Draft EIR/EIS.

Since the release of the Draft EIR/EIS for the project in 2010, the 8+4 with buffer alternative has been refined, resulting in a near 50 percent reduction in the number of residential relocations.

Where a property acquisition is required, pursuant to the federal and California constitutions, just compensation is paid to the property owners.

## 12. Will the project block coastal views and conflict with community character?

Preserving and protecting coastal views is a high priority of the project. A number of mitigation measures are planned to address project visual, aesthetic and community character concerns. Where sound and retaining walls are being considered, reducing wall height will be examined to maintain views where applicable. Other mitigation measures include the use of transparent materials in soundwall design to retain desirable views.

The North Coast Corridor Design Guidelines, included in the Final EIR/EIS for the I-5 Express Lanes Project, provide design concepts for architectural features, including structures, retaining walls, noise walls and lighting. Additionally, landscape design concepts will preserve biological and visual resources where feasible.

Following the release of the Draft EIR/EIS, and in response to public comment, several photo simulations were developed to provide the public with renderings of what the project will look like once completed. A number of the photo simulations show how visual resources will be protected and preserved. For more information or to view the photo simulations, please visit [www.keepsandiegomoving.com/Libraries/Lossan-doc/SAN\\_I5\\_Visual\\_Simulations\\_ALL.sflb.ashx](http://www.keepsandiegomoving.com/Libraries/Lossan-doc/SAN_I5_Visual_Simulations_ALL.sflb.ashx).

## 13. Will the project impact the coastal lagoons?

The I-5 in the North Coast Corridor crosses six coastal lagoons. Following the circulation of the Draft EIR/EIS, additional studies were conducted to identify the optimal highway bridge lengths. Bridge lengthening allows for increased water flow at lagoon, improving overall lagoon health. After the studies were completed, Caltrans released a Supplemental EIR/EIS in 2012. The Supplemental EIR/EIS focused on bridge lengthening to improve lagoon health. Bridges and San Elijo, Batiquitos and Buena Vista Lagoons will be lengthened as a result.

Improving the health of the coastal lagoons is a critical component of the I-5 Express Lanes Project and the North Coast Corridor Program. Mitigation and resource enhancements included in the North Coast Corridor Program are part of the Resource Enhancement Mitigation Program, or REMP. The REMP provides a comprehensive plan to address potential impacts and develop solutions to protect, preserve and enhance the coastal environment in the North Coast Corridor.

## 14. Won't additional lanes worsen the air quality?

Increasing capacity on I-5 in the North Coast Corridor will reduce congestion and focus on moving people rather than just cars. Emission factors are largely related to vehicle speeds. Typically, as vehicle speeds increase, air pollutants decrease. Therefore, by adding Express Lanes and improving the overall highway system, travel times would improve and vehicle speeds would increase and overall emissions would be reduced. By reducing congestion, vehicle hours traveled (VHT) would decrease in the corridor, further reducing the impact on air quality in the region.

The Express Lanes provide flexibility to be managed to ensure a congestion-free travel option. In addition, the lanes could provide access to Bus Rapid Transit and highway express buses. This prioritizes moving people rather than just cars and reduces the overall number of vehicles on the road.

## ■ NEXT STEPS

### 15. When is the project slated to start?

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The project will be constructed in phases over the next few decades. Phase 1 (2015 – 2020) will extend the existing High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) lane, or carpool lane, in each direction from Manchester Avenue to State Route 78 (SR 78). Additional work activities during this phase include the replacement of the San Elijo Lagoon highway bridge; construction of the Manchester Avenue Direct Access Ramp and multi-use facility; and other improvements such as soundwalls and bike and pedestrian trails.

Phase 1 also includes the addition of two Express Lanes from La Jolla Village Drive to the I-5/I-805 merge and the construction of a Direct Access Ramp at Voigt Drive.

### 16. What strategies are in place to minimize traffic delay during construction?

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Managing traffic during construction is an important factor in Caltrans' project planning. A Transportation Management Plan (TMP) is a method used to minimize traffic delay during construction. TMP activities include a robust public outreach effort to inform motorists about pending lane closures or other impacts that might cause an increase in traffic; freeway signage to help direct traffic; and a 24-hour information hotline with real-time traffic updates.

Additional strategies include a Transportation Demand Management (TDM) program which includes vanpools and other employer-based incentive programs to promote alternative transportation methods to minimize traffic during construction.