



I-5/SR 78 Interchange Project

Frequently Asked Questions

Project Overview

1. Why is this project needed?

The project is needed to improve traffic operations through the Interstate 5/State Route 78 (I-5/SR 78) interchange. The goal is to improve travel times and reduce congestion through the interchange for local and regional commuters, enhance High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) and transit connectivity between SR 78 and I-5, and protect the community and environment in the project area.

The congestion caused by the existing traffic signal at the intersection of SR 78 and Vista Way backs up to the east past the Jefferson Street overcrossing during the morning commute. This, in turn, causes motorists to find other paths to southbound I-5 including U-turns on Vista Way west of I-5 and continuing south on Jefferson Street to Las Flores southbound I-5 on-ramp.

Regional growth in the area is expected, and this will result in an increased demand for reliable transportation through this interchange. As traffic volumes increase in the I-5 and SR 78 corridors, congestion also will increase on the mainline segments and the freeway-to-freeway connectors.

2. How will this project tie in with the North Coast Corridor Program?

The proposed improvements at the I-5/SR 78 interchange are part of the North Coast Corridor Program. Therefore, the I-5/SR 78 Interchange Project will be coordinated with enhancements on I-5 while considering how the future carpool lane system will link on I-5 and SR 78. The first phase of the I-5 Express Lanes Project is slated to begin in summer 2016 and includes extending the carpool lane on I-5 in each direction from Lomas Santa Fe Drive to SR 78. Later phases include the addition of a second carpool lane in each direction from La Jolla Village Drive in San Diego to Harbor Drive in Oceanside.

Process

3. What is the current status of the I-5/SR 78 Interchange Project?

Currently no decision has been made regarding the improvements that will ultimately be built. Caltrans is developing initial interchange improvement concepts and scenarios in an effort to develop project alternatives, which will be studied during the formal environmental review process over the next four to five years. At a public workshop held in January 2015, the team solicited preliminary feedback from the public to begin the process of developing alternatives that will balance project objectives with community impacts. At this time, no funding has been identified for construction of the I-5/SR 78 Interchange Project.

4. What are the next steps in the process?

Caltrans plans to hold a public scoping meeting to formally kickoff the project's environmental review process in early 2016. At that meeting, the public will be able to view project alternatives that could be studied as part of the environmental review process. The public scoping meeting initiates a 30-day public review and comment period. Caltrans will then begin the process of studying and analyzing the project and its impacts. Caltrans anticipates the release of the draft EIR/EIS in 2018-2019, when another public meeting will be held.

5. When is the Preferred Alternative selected and who makes that decision?

After the public scoping meeting, Caltrans is required to perform an alternatives analysis that will be designed to inform local officials and community members on the benefits, costs, and impacts of the various transportation options, so that a Preferred Alternative can be identified. This process is part of the draft EIR/EIS, which is anticipated to be released in 2018-2019. After the draft EIR/EIS is released, Caltrans gathers additional public comments and incorporates them into the final EIR/EIS, which includes the announcement of the Preferred Alternative.



6. Will a “no build” alternative be studied in the EIR/EIS?

Yes. The California Environmental Quality Act requires every project to study a “no build” option.

7. I submitted a written comment at the January 29, 2015 public workshop. How will that comment be considered during the analysis of the project?

The public workshop on January 29, 2015 was held to gather preliminary feedback from community members about project scenarios and help Caltrans identify additional ideas about how the I-5/SR 78 interchange could be improved. Caltrans has gathered the written comments and is evaluating those ideas, where feasible.

Over 130 comments were submitted. These included opinions on the scenarios presented at the workshop, to suggested improvements on Caltrans freeways and local streets within the cities of Carlsbad and Oceanside.

These ideas and concepts are being considered by the project team and could potentially modify the current set of project scenarios.

8. Will the public have additional opportunities to comment on the project?

Yes. There will be several more opportunities for public comment during the project’s process. Community members can submit formal comments/questions during the environmental review process in 2016. Those comments/questions will be formally included in the draft EIR/EIS, which is slated to be released in 2018-2019, when there will be another public meeting.

9. When is the interchange project scheduled to be constructed?

Completing the environmental review process is an important step in the project’s overall development. Currently, this project is slated to be constructed in 2030, but that could change due to funding priorities.

Access to Interchanges and Roadways

10. As part of the I-5/SR 78 Interchange Project, how will access to local roadways and interchanges, such as Vista Way, the Cassidy Street on-ramp, and the Las Flores Street on-/off-ramp be impacted?

Caltrans is currently refining project scenarios based on public feedback and will release formal project alternatives as part of the Notice of Intent/Notice of Preparation (NOI/NOP) scoping process later this year. Access to local roadways and nearby interchanges will be studied as part of the draft EIR/EIS process. Depending on the features included in each alternative, the evaluation process will determine if access to local roadways and nearby interchanges are impacted. Members of the public will have the opportunity to comment on local roadway impacts along with other aspects of the alternatives.

11. Many residents are concerned about speeding and the volume of traffic along Vista Way. What is Caltrans doing to adequately address those concerns?

Vista Way is a surface street under the jurisdiction of the City of Oceanside. As part of the I-5/SR 78 Interchange Project, Caltrans will work with the City of Oceanside to address potential traffic issues along Vista Way near the interchange.

12. Will any local street overcrossings, such as California Street and Cassidy Street, be closed as part of this project or the North Coast Corridor Project?

No. There are no plans to close any local street overcrossings near the I-5/SR 78 interchange. The North Coast Corridor Project will replace and enhance several local street overcrossings in North County. These overcrossings provide critical east-west connections to serve the local communities and improve coastal access; therefore maintaining and improving them is an important component of the overall transportation plan.



Visual and Environmental Impacts

13. What is the height of the proposed freeway direct connector fly-over presented in the scenarios?

The structure for the fly-over presented in the scenarios would begin approximately half way between California Street and Cassidy Street. The driver would then travel over Cassidy Street and curve to the left to join SR 78 eastbound. To clear Cassidy Street, the structure needs to be approximately 30 feet above the existing bridge. Specific details will be available once the project alternatives are released at the scoping meeting in early 2016.

14. How will the project affect the lagoon?

The project alternatives will explore a range of options to best balance the traffic benefits and potential environmental impacts. The environmental review process requires a wetlands avoidance alternative be studied. Lagoon and other environmental impacts will be detailed in the alternatives analysis process. Project plans for the interchange will be coordinated with the Buena Vista Lagoon Enhancement Project.

Multi Modal Transportation Options and Coastal Access

15. Will the project include mass transit elements?

Express Lanes are planned for I-5 over the next few decades and will prioritize carpools, vanpools, and buses. The widening of SR 78 is currently planned for the 2030 timeframe and will include Express Lanes in the median.

16. Will this project incorporate bicycle and pedestrian elements, and how will the project improve overall coastal access in the area?

There are a number of bicycle and pedestrian improvements planned in Oceanside and Carlsbad as part of the North Coast Corridor Program. The I-5/SR 78 Interchange Project alternatives will explore opportunities to improve bicycle and pedestrian mobility in the area; however, it is an interchange that connects two heavily traveled freeways and public safety is a primary objective for Caltrans. That being said, Caltrans will study various concepts that could include bike and pedestrian improvements in the project area.

Improving coastal access is a critical component of the North Coast Corridor Program. Several local street overcrossings in Carlsbad and Oceanside will be replaced and improved with new bicycle and pedestrian paths in phases over the next few decades.