

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Why is the proposed Interstate 5 (I-5)/State Route 56 (SR 56) Interchange Project needed?

Since 2000, the City of San Diego, SANDAG and Caltrans have been studying the Interstate 5 (I-5)/ State Route 56 (SR 56) Interchange in an effort to improve local and regional traffic. This regional interchange connects two of San Diego's most critical north-to-south and east-to-west freeways.

The proposed I-5/SR 56 Interchange Project will improve traffic operations for local and regional commuters on I-5 between Del Mar Heights Road and Carmel Valley Road and on SR 56 between I-5 and Carmel Country Road, and help relieve congestion and cut-through traffic on local streets.

2. What is the current status of the I-5/SR 56 Interchange Project?

In June 2017, Caltrans announced the completion of the project's Final Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement (EIR/EIS) and selected the Phased Connectors Alternative as the Preferred Alternative. As a result of extensive outreach and collaboration with the community, SANDAG, the City of San Diego and local, state and federal agencies, the Phased Connectors Alternative includes:

- Minimum right-of-way impacts
- No property relocations
- Maintains access to Carmel Creek Road from eastbound SR 56 via the slip ramp
- No impacts to the wetlands or endangered plant and animal species
- A phased construction solution to minimize temporary impacts to traffic, local business, and the community

Upon completion, the project would: connect westbound SR 56 to northbound I-5 and southbound I-5 with eastbound SR 56 via two-lane freeway-to-freeway connector ramps; add two lanes on westbound SR 56 and one lane on eastbound SR 56 between Carmel Country Road and El Camino Real; replace and enhance the Del Mar Heights Road overcrossing; and provide operational improvements at existing ramps and intersections within the project area.

3. What is significant about the issuance of the Final Environmental Impact Report?

This joint Final Environmental Impact Report (EIR)/Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) documents the identification of the Direct Connector (Alternative 2)/Phased Connectors Alternative as the Preferred Alternative for the project. This Final EIR/EIS provides the compliance for California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) with Coastal Act information. The Final EIR/EIS combines all of the environmental information and analyses prepared for the project into one document, including formal responses to public comments/questions that were submitted to Caltrans during the Draft EIR process, which was completed in 2012. The document also includes clarifications, corrections, or minor revisions to the Draft EIR/EIS, as needed.

Frequently Asked Questions (Cont...)

This Final EIR/EIS documents:

- 15 years of working with the community and evaluating over 17 alternatives;
- Identification of the Preferred Alternative through balancing local and regional impacts;
- Benefits of each of the build alternatives; and
- Summary of the whole of the project.

There is no funding available for Design or Construction. Per San Diego Forward: The Regional Plan, the project will not be in place until 2035. When funding becomes available, Caltrans will collaborate with local elected officials and the community to finalize project design.

4. What is a Preferred Alternative and what does it mean for this joint Final Environmental Impact Report/ Environmental Impact Statement?

This joint Final Environmental Impact Report (EIR)/Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) documents the identification of the Direct Connector (Alternative 2)/Phased Connectors Alternative as the Preferred Alternative for the project. The identification of the Preferred Alternative occurred after the public review and comment period of the Draft EIR to ensure that public opinion was included in the discussion for the identification of the Preferred Alternative. After comparing and weighing the benefits and impacts of all five feasible alternatives, the Phased Connectors Alternative best balances regional and local transportation benefits with community and environmental impacts. The selection of the Phased Connectors Alternative was based on criteria developed as a result of extensive outreach and collaboration with the community dating back to 2002. The Final EIR/EIS combines all of the environmental information and analyses prepared for the project into one document, including formal responses to public comments/questions that were submitted to Caltrans during the Draft EIR process, which was completed in 2012.

The Phased Connectors Alternative was identified as the Preferred Alternative for the following reasons:

- **Travel Times:** the best alternative for reducing cut-through traffic in the community and travel times on the freeways.
- **Community Requests:** Maintains access to Carmel Creek Road from the northbound I-5/eastbound SR 56 direct connector via the slip ramp.
- **Property Impacts:** No home relocations are required.
- **Noise:** Proposes more soundwalls than other build alternatives to address existing and future noise levels.
- **Other analyzed resources in the Final EIR/EIS:** Impacts are similar to the other build alternatives and were not enough to help differentiate the alternatives.

Construction funding for the project is not available at this time. Per San Diego Forward: The Regional Plan, funding for the project is expected in 2035. The Final EIR/EIS outlines a phasing plan that allows improvements along SR 56, such as the addition of an auxiliary lanes in both directions, to be constructed independent of the direct connectors. Caltrans will re-evaluate the traffic needs of the area once project funding becomes available.

Frequently Asked Questions (Cont...)

5. What does “phased” construction mean?

The construction of the Phased Connectors Alternative has three main phases, which will be constructed in multiple stages to reduce impacts to traffic, local business, the community, and to align phasing with anticipated funding. Pending funding, the following project elements would be built in phases:

- The addition of one general purpose lane on SR 56 in each direction between Carmel Country Road and El Camino Real;
- A westbound SR 56 to northbound I-5 direct connector ramp; and
- A southbound I-5 to eastbound SR 56 direct connector ramp.

Caltrans will examine the traffic conditions and the overall environment to ensure that the connectors are needed prior to the start of construction.

6. How was the Preferred Alternative selected?

The City of San Diego, SANDAG and Caltrans have been studying the I-5/SR 56 Interchange for over 15 years. Caltrans has performed an extensive alternatives analysis process, which was designed to solicit input from local officials and community members on the benefits, costs and impacts of the various transportation options, so that a Preferred Alternative could be identified. Since 2002, 22 project alternatives were evaluated based on criteria developed through community participation. This process was part of the Draft EIR/EIS, which was released in May 2012. After the Draft EIR/EIS was released, Caltrans held a public meeting and gathered additional public comments, which were incorporated into the Final EIR/EIS and includes the selection of the Preferred Alternative.

Of the five alternatives studied, including a no-build option, the Preferred Alternative, called the Phased Connectors Alternative, offers the most flexibility to respond to future traffic demands at the interchange and will relieve cut-through traffic on local streets.

7. Was a “no build” alternative studied in the EIR/EIS?

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

8. How were public comments incorporated into the project?

The Phased Connectors Alternative is the result of ten years of public input, and as a result, the project now includes minimum right-of-way impacts, no property relocations, no impacts to the wetlands or endangered plant and animal species, maintains access to Carmel Creek Road from eastbound SR 56 via the slip ramp, and a phased construction solution to minimize overall impacts to the community and align the project with anticipated funding.

Frequently Asked Questions (Cont...)

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

Finalizing the EIR/EIS is an important milestone for the I-5/SR 56 Project and moves it one step closer to final design, and ultimately the start of construction. However, the project is not funded for final design or construction. Once funding is identified, the project could be built in phases and include:

- The addition of one general purpose lane on SR 56 in each direction between Carmel Country Road and El Camino Real;
- A westbound SR 56 to northbound I-5 direct connector ramp; and
- A southbound I-5 to eastbound SR 56 direct connector ramp.

10. What steps will be taken to mitigate noise impacts during construction?

Up to six sound walls would be constructed as part of the project to improve the quality of life for nearby residents.

11. Will this project improve overall coastal access with the incorporation of bicycle and pedestrian elements?

Yes. As part of the I-5/SR 56 Interchange Project, bike and pedestrian improvements would be made at the Del Mar Heights overcrossing at I-5. Additionally, bikeway access along Carmel Valley Road would be maintained. Together, these improvements will help coastal connectivity by ensuring safe and continuous access to bike and pedestrian facilities and improving non-vehicular mobility in the area.

Visit the [NCC bike and pedestrian](#) page to learn more about planned improvements.

12. How will this project tie in with the North Coast Corridor (NCC) Program?

The I-5/SR 56 Interchange Project is part of the 27-mile NCC Program, which is now under construction in Solana Beach and Encinitas. The NCC Program is a balanced set of transportation, environmental, and coastal access projects to improve the quality of life for residents, create a stronger local and regional economy for the future, and enhance the coastal environment. The I-5/SR 56 Interchange Project will help to ensure a reliable and efficient travel option throughout the NCC corridor by directly linking SR 56 to I-5.