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## Final segment of SR-76 widening project to begin

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A map shows the plan for widening state Route 76. The final phase of the project is scheduled to start in September. Image courtesy of Caltrans

Construction on the final phase of the state Route 76 widening project is set to begin mid-September, following a 55-day delayed start once the contract is approved by Caltrans headquarters in Sacramento.

Route 76 serves North County and runs from Oceanside east through Bonsall, Pala and Pauma Valley. The three-phase Route 76 widening project is constructing a conventional highway that can eventually be expanded to accommodate six lanes.

The first portion, the Route 76 West Segment, improved the highway from Interstate 5 to Melrose Drive in Oceanside and was completed in 1999. The Route 76 Middle Segment stretched 5.5 miles from Melrose Drive to South Mission Road in Bonsall and was completed at the end of 2012.

East of Bonsall, Route 76 is mostly a two-lane highway. The 5.2-mile long East Segment is the final portion of the project.

The first phase of the east segment improved the interchange at Route 76 and Interstate 15 and was opened to traffic in August 2013. Flatiron Construction Corp., based in Colorado with a regional office in San Marcos, was the contractor on the first phase of the East Segment, as well as the Route 76 middle segment.

The second phase will develop a four-lane highway with two travel lanes in each direction, from just east of South Mission Road to the newly improved Route 76/I-15 interchange.

The project has a contract of 700 working days, which is about three years



**SR-76 East Segment Project Area**

Image courtesy of Caltrans

and two months, putting the project's completion at the end of 2017.

In June, Caltrans named Corona, Calif.-based Ames Construction the low bidder for this phase of the project. Ames' bid of \$75.2 million was the lowest among the seven bids submitted. It was also below the \$91 million construction estimate. The highest bid submitted was \$109 million.

The actual expected cost of approximately \$100 million includes support, lane closure and traffic control expenses and contingencies.

Ames should begin construction in earnest in mid-September.

"Part of the reason the contract is timed how it is -- starting in September to start clearing vegetation -- you want to do it between the September and February timeframe because that's when all the migratory birds have migrated," said

Carl Savage, acting project manager for Caltrans. "We're timing this contract to start at the beginning of that window of opportunity, so that any clearing they need to do can be done while the migratory birds are gone."

As with the other segments of the Route 76 project, the east segment will facilitate wildlife movement by constructing animal crossings and directional fencing, according to Caltrans. The project also calls for the implementation of biofiltration swales and new drainage systems to mitigate storm water runoff.

Other non-road activities include the relocation of Rainbow Municipal Water District water and sewer lines, and coordination with the San Diego County Water Authority to protect CWA pipelines that cross the highway.

“We have several project partners on this,” Savage said. “We’re working with the Rainbow water district to accomplish a rather substantial sewer relocation. That’s part and parcel with the project. We’re also working closely with SANDAG’s environmental arm in creating what they call an EMP.”

Through its Environmental Mitigation Program, the San Diego Association of Governments can mitigate the impacts of major transportation infrastructure improvement projects. The EMP was established as part of the extension of TransNet, a regional half-cent sales tax for transportation approved by voters in 2004.

The EMP has slated \$80 million to protect, preserve and restore habitat along the Route 76 corridor, which includes freshwater wetlands. Close to 1,600 acres of land has been purchased to support

habitat conservation and the San Luis Rey River Park Plan.

Some fill for the project will need to be imported, and that’s where SANDAG and the EMP comes in.

“A lot of the material we need to import into our project to help build the road is coming from areas that are later going to be created into wetlands. So they needed dirt to move, and we needed the dirt, so we kind of partnered up,” Savage said.

The rest of the fill will come from source material from the second segment of the widening project between Melrose Drive and South Mission Road, completed in 2012. It also will use fill from the Vessels property south of the San Luis Rey River. The fill will be transported to the north side of the river, which will require the construction of a temporary bridge across it.

The east segment project has a cost estimate of \$201.5 million. Funding for the project includes federal, TransNet, developer, county of San Diego transportation impact fees and tribal contributions.

Local funding from transportation impact fee payments and Indian casino agreements will account for \$30 million, while the local TransNet half-cent sales tax will account for an additional \$51.4 million. Revenue from Proposition 1B -- approved by the state’s voters in 2006 and providing \$2 billion for California’s local streets and roads -- will fund \$29.4 million. Federal programs will provide \$90.7 million.