



## Route 76 now four lanes between Interstates 5 & 15

More than 100 transportation officials and others gathered Tuesday morning to commemorate the completion of the Route 76 straitening and widening project which now connects Interstate 5 and 15

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It's taken more than two decades of intermittent highway construction, but motorists now can drive from Interstate 5 in [Oceanside](#) all the way to Interstate 15 in [Fallbrook](#) along a four-lane split highway with a lifesaving barrier in the middle.

The roughly \$400 million state Route 76 improvement project has transformed the highway from a once curvy two-lane road — clogged by rush-hour traffic and occasionally scarred by head-on collisions — to a wider, straighter thoroughfare.

On Tuesday morning, state, federal and regional transportation officials will celebrate the completion of the last leg of the project with a dedication ceremony just north of the highway at Pala Road.

San Diego County Supervisor Ron Roberts, chairman of the San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG), said Monday the improvement project “eases the movement of people and goods throughout our North County communities and demonstrates SANDAG’s commitment to enhancing the county’s transportation network.”

Crews recently wrapped up the final five-mile stretch — from South Mission Road in Fallbrook to Interstate 15 — months ahead of schedule at a cost of \$201 million. That phase began in 2013 with the complete reconfiguration of the I-15 interchange. All work that remains is extensive landscaping of the highway using drought-tolerant plants.

The entire state Route 76 corridor project was divided into three segments: west, middle and east. The western segment through Oceanside was completed in 1999. The second phase, stretching from Melrose Drive to South Mission Road, was finished in 2012 at a cost of \$171 million.

“Now that it is a bigger roadway, there’s more visibility and less curves that people have to deal with,” California Highway Patrol Officer Jim Bettencourt said. “Hopefully traffic will flow through there much better than on a two-lane road.”

Bettencourt said the concrete barrier between east and west traffic will prevent head-on collisions and the wider roads and shoulders will improve traffic safety and ease congestion by giving motorists experiencing car trouble room to pull off the road.

The highway was first built in the 1930s and over the decades has been the site of several fatal crashes. Bettencourt said it wasn’t necessarily because the road was unsafe, but because people would drive too fast, or while they were intoxicated, or would try to unsafely pass slower vehicles by crossing over double-yellow lines.

State Route 76 is a vital artery linking coastal North County to inland communities, including Southwest Riverside County. As the population has grown — and Indian casinos have proliferated east of Interstate 15 — traffic on the two-lane road has skyrocketed.

Traffic along the most recently completed five-mile stretch today averages more than 20,000 daily vehicle trips, a number that is expected to more than double by 2030, state transportation officials have said.

The ambitious improvement project was a joint effort by the California Department of Transportation and SANDAG, the region’s transportation coordinating agency. Funding

for the work came from a variety of sources, including the regional TransNet half-cent sales tax, federal funds, developer fees, county transportation fees and contributions from local Native American tribes.

The project also included the expansion of the Park & Ride at the intersection of the highway and I-15. The parking lot has doubled in size and now features charging stations for electric vehicles.

Designed into the project were a number of environmental features including bioswales, which are landscape elements that remove pollution from surface runoff via a drainage course with gently sloped sides that are filled with vegetation, compost or riprap.

Wildlife under crossings and directional fencing have been built into the highway at various key points along the highway to allow wildlife safe passage between areas of natural habitat.

Throughout the project, Caltrans has been working closely with the county, which has been buying land and slowly developing a park along the banks of nearby San Luis Rey River.

The regional park one day will be 1,700 acres and 9 miles long, beginning in Oceanside and ending near I-15, The dream is to offer active and passive recreational opportunities along 20 miles of trails, while preserving the river corridor.

The reconfiguration of the highway required the acquisition of adjoining parcels of land along the route, nearly 1,600 acres in all, before construction began. Some of the land will either become part of the regional park or will buffer it.

Highway 76 actually continues as a four-lane highway for another mile and a half east of the interchange. A separate construction project, paid for by the owner's of a rock quarry several years ago, paid for that work.

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