

Freeway extensions vital to growing area of South County

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Progress is being made on important freeway extensions that will ease traffic congestion and make the eastern portion of South County more accessible to residents and commuters.

South Bay Expressway, the new name for the southern extension of State Route-125, is a two-stage project that consists of 12.5 miles of new highway connecting State Route 54 near the Sweetwater Reservoir to State Route 905 in Otay Mesa near the International Border.

The project is divided into three segments. The first two segments are the Gap — a 3.2-mile publicly funded section of highway running from SR-54 to San Miguel Road in Bonita, and the Connector — an interchange involving the reconstruction and expansion of an existing section of SR-54 where it intersects with the new South Bay Expressway.

The remaining 10 miles of express tollway running to SR-905 near the Otay Mesa border are being developed by California Transportation Ventures Inc. (CTV). The tollway will utilize electronic toll-collection technologies, which allow vehicles equipped with FasTrak electronic transponders to drive through toll plazas at normal highway speeds.

South Bay Expressway will initially open as a four-lane highway with interchanges at SR-54, the future San Miguel Road, East H Street, Otay Lakes/Telegraph Canyon Road, Olympic Parkway, future Birch Road and Otay Mesa Road/SR-905.

FUNDING

The new South Bay Expressway is being designed and constructed through a public-private financial partnership between the state of California and CTV, a private consortium selected by Caltrans in 1990.

The southern portion of the project, estimated to cost \$635 million, will be financed by CTV through a combination of funding sources and is operated as an express toll road from SR-54 near Sweetwater Reservoir to SR-905 (Otay Mesa Road). Once open to traffic, CTV will operate and maintain the toll road portion of the project. After 35 years, CTV will turn the toll road back over to Caltrans.

The financing structure of South Bay Expressway is unique and includes bank loans, a \$140-million federal

loan facility provided by the U.S. Department of Transportation under the TIFIA program (Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act of 1998) and private equity capital.

Additionally, area developers have dedicated right of way valued at \$48 million to the South Bay Expressway project.

South Bay Expressway was one of the first five projects selected for credit assistance through TIFIA, which was authorized under the 1998 Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21), and represents the first privately funded project to qualify for and receive support from the TIFIA program.

TIFIA authorizes financing through which the Department of Transportation provides credit assistance rather than grants to public and private sponsors of major surface-transportation projects.

In addition, the northern end of the South Bay Expressway project, estimated to cost an additional \$138 million, will be fully funded through local financial support committed by San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG).

The SANDAG funding is dedicated to construction of the Gap and Connector sections of the project, un-tolled links that will connect the tolled section of South Bay Expressway to the existing San Diego freeway network.

In 1996, the California Transportation Commission (CTC) approved advanced priority funding for South Bay Expressway under a new program specifically established to fund projects that would have statewide significance.

The commission determined that the SR-125 corridor met the criterion for statewide significance by facilitating the movement of people and goods into and out of the state, and accommodating border infrastructure needs for San Diego and the surrounding border communities.

The SR-125 corridor also has international significance as part of a comprehensive network designed to support increased trade resulting from the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

The city of Chula Vista has also played a role in the development of South Bay Expressway by facilitating a land-dedication program required for the project right of way. Further south, community leaders are working to secure

the necessary funding to extend SR-905 from I-805 to the future SR-125 junction west of Brown Field.

However, right-of-way acquisition costs have soared. As recently as 2001, the projected funds needed for the remaining sections was \$67 million. The projected cost is now \$145 million. That figure would include \$135 million for right-of-way acquisition and \$10 million for utility relocation.

Several San Diego legislators -- Denise Moreno Ducheny, Christine Kehoe, Shirley Horton and Juan Vargas, have emphasized the importance of acquiring the right-of-way before anything else is done so the project doesn't become even more expensive.

The officials say the money for the right-of-way acquisition is there now, but won't be enough if the prices get much higher.

Putting the importance of a freeway network in the South Bay in perspective, Pedro Orso Delgado, California Department of Transportation district director, said that \$30 billion worth of goods are transported across the border into California each year. He said about 20 percent stay in San Diego or Imperial counties, 21 percent remain in California and the rest are distributed around the country.

SOUTH BAY EXPRESSWAY PROJECT STAGING AND TIMELINE

Final project design and construction began in 2002.

The project will be built in two phases with an anticipated grand opening scheduled for Fall 2006.

PHASE 1

Construction of an initial six-lane freeway from SR-54 to Jamacha Boulevard, also known as the "Gap."
Construction of the interchange between SR-54 and SR-125, also known as the "Connector."

Phase 1 began in Summer 2002. The estimated completion date is Summer 2006.

PHASE 2

Construction of approximately 10 miles of four-lane highway from south of SR-54 near the Sweetwater Reservoir to SR-905 near the International Border.

This section will be operated as a state-of-the-art toll road.

The groundbreaking for Phase 2 took place in 2003, with completion anticipated for Fall 2006.