

SAN DIEGO BUSINESS JOURNAL

South Bay to Finally Get Its Expressway

Transportation: Projects Across the County Aimed At Easing Daily Commute

■ BY BRAD GRAVES

The commute changes slowly, so 2006 does not promise sweeping relief from traffic congestion.

What it promises, mostly, is little changes in the way San Diego County residents get to work and back home. And big change is on the way to the southern part of the county.

Construction crews are working to finish a 10-mile toll road by the end of the year. The new section of state Route 125, also known as the South Bay Expressway, runs north and south from Sweetwater Reservoir to the Otay Mesa border crossing. On the way, the \$635 million road passes through the eastern section of Chula Vista and its sprawling EastLake communities.

The cost of traveling the route will be announced three to five months before its opening, said Greg Hulsizer, the chief executive of California Transportation Ventures, Inc., the private Otay Mesa-based company that has the franchise for the road. The company is also building an interchange and short segments of publicly funded roadways at the north end of the project.

Smaller, publicly funded highway projects are also planned for 2006.

At the Interstate 5-805 merge, new north-bound lanes should help the evening com-

mute, said Richard Chavez of the San Diego Association of Governments, or Sandag.

On Interstate 15, right lanes that extend from on-ramps to offramps will open.

Also, the westbound stretch of state Route 52 between Santee and Tierrasanta will get a third lane in the summer when the California Department of Transportation draws new stripes, Chavez said. Additional pavement for the stretch will follow in 2006 or 2007, he said.

2005 was a big one for public transit, as the San Diego Trolley opened Green Line service along the Interstate 8 corridor, notably to traffic-plagued San Diego State University. On the drawing boards is a trolley extension from Mission Valley to University Towne Centre and UC San Diego, which is several years in the future.

Nostalgia may be back in 2008, as the transit agency spruces up trolley cars from the middle of the 20th century. It's a private, volunteer effort, said a transit agency spokesman. The agency took delivery of some historic, streamlined streetcars (known as Presidents' Conference Committee or PCC cars), which are expected to run in a loop Downtown following their refurbishing.

A yearlong experiment that lets buses travel on the shoulders of congested freeways began in December. Buses from Metropolitan Transit System's Route 960, which connects UTC with the Euclid Avenue trolley station, have the right to travel on the shoulder from

Interstate 805 and Nobel Drive to state Route 52 and Kearny Villa Road.

Also this year, the transit system is contemplating wholesale changes to its bus routes, said system spokesman Rob Schupp. Expect to hear more about the changes, which the transit agency calls "COA" (for comprehensive operational analysis). Draft plans for the change are available for review. Go to the system's home page at www.sdcommute.com, then look for the term COA.

During 2006, the North County Transit District will continue work toward a December 2007 opening of its Sprinter rail service between

Oceanside and Escondido. Running roughly parallel to state Route 78, Sprinter trains will serve 15 stations in Oceanside, Vista, San Marcos and Escondido, running a total of 22 miles. Passenger cars with onboard diesel engines will carry commuters east and west, with stops at Palomar College and Cal State San Marcos.

Commuters who go in and out of Orange County may have some relief several years down the road, though that relief could come to the chagrin of surfers. In December, an Orange County agency approved a final environmental impact report for the southern portion of state Route 241, a toll road that will join Interstate 5 just south of the Orange County line. The interchange will be in the area of a popular surfing spot called Trestles.

Economic Trends 2006