

PURPOSE AND NEED



Interstate Route 5 / State Route 56 Interchange Project

INTRODUCTION

Effective July 1, 2007, the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) assumed all the United States Department of Transportation (USDOT) Secretary's responsibilities under National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) pursuant to Section 6005 of the Safe Accountable Flexible Efficient Transportation Equity Act - A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) codified at 23 U.S.C. 327(a)(2)(A). Caltrans assumed all of the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) responsibilities under NEPA for projects on California's State Highway System (SHS) and for federal-aid local streets and roads projects under FHWA's Surface Transportation Project Delivery Pilot Program, pursuant to 23 CFR 773. Caltrans also assumed all of FHWA's responsibilities for environmental coordination and consultation under other federal environmental laws pertaining to the review or approval of projects under the Pilot Program. For purposes of carrying out the responsibilities assumed under the Pilot Program, Caltrans is deemed to be acting as the FHWA with respect to the environmental review, consultation, and other action required under those responsibilities. Caltrans is the lead agency under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

Caltrans, now as the lead federal agency, in cooperation with the San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG) and the City of San Diego, are preparing a Draft Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report (DEIS/DEIR) for a transportation project located on Interstate Route 5 (I-5) and State Route 56 (SR-56) in the northern portion of the City of San Diego. The proposed project would begin north of Carmel Valley along I-5 at post mile (PM) 32.9 (kilometer post (KP) 28.4) and continue to PM 34.8 (KP 31.5) north of Del Mar Heights Road. Along SR-56, the project would begin at PM 0.0 (KP 0.0) at El Camino Real and continue to PM 2.5 (KP 4.0) east of Carmel Country Road.

The DEIS/DEIR for this project will be completed pursuant to the NEPA and the CEQA and will be used for project compliance with federal and state laws and regulations.

OVERALL PROJECT PURPOSE STATEMENT

To maintain or improve the existing and future traffic operations along the I-5 and SR-56 corridors between Del Mar Heights Road, Carmel Valley Road, and Carmel Country Road, (see Project Location Map), in order to improve the safe and efficient local and regional movement of people and goods, while minimizing environmental and community impacts for the planning design year of 2030.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this project are to:

- Maintain or improve future traffic levels of service in 2030 over the existing and forecasted level of service.



- Maintain or reduce off peak and peak hour delay for SR-56 traffic moving to & from the north on I-5.
- Maintain or reduce peak hour congestion at the El Camino Real/56 ramp termini.
- Maintain or reduce freeway related traffic bypassing the congestion by traveling through local communities during the peak hour.
- Maintain or reduce congestion on I-5 and SR-56 mainlines during the peak hour.
- Provide a facility that is compatible with future transit and other modal options.
- Follow the Regional Transportation Plan, Mobility 2030 – The Transportation Plan for the San Diego Region, SANDAG, April 2003 (2003 SANDAG RTP) where feasible and be in compliance with Federal and State regulations.
- Maintain the facility as an effective link in the intra-regional and inter-regional movement of people and goods.
- Avoid and minimize impacts to human and natural environment.

BACKGROUND

Interstate 5 and Interstate 15 (I-15) are principal north-south arterials for the western United States, linking the Mexican border in the south to the Canadian border to the north. Regionally, I-5 and I-15 serve as a commuter link for North San Diego County with significant intraregional, interregional and international traffic. Located in Central San Diego County, SR-56 serves as an east-west corridor for I-5 and I-15. SR-56 was completed in three phases with the final phase opening to traffic in 2004 as a four-lane facility.

A project to reduce congestion along I-5 from the I-5/Interstate 805 (I-805) interchange to Del Mar Heights Road was completed in phases beginning in 1995, with the final phase completed in April of 2007. This project entailed the addition of high occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes in the northbound (NB) and southbound (SB) directions, a four-lane SR-56 bypass in the NB and SB directions, and the construction of NB to eastbound (EB) and westbound (WB) to SB freeway-to-freeway connectors. Traffic projections prior to the North City Future Urbanizing Area phase shifts indicated that connectors were not warranted, limiting construction to the WB to NB and SB to EB freeway-to-freeway connectors. Drivers traveling SB on I-5 or WB SR-56 must use Carmel Valley Road and El Camino Real to travel on EB SR-56 and NB I-5, respectively.

In 1996 and again in 1998, the citizens of San Diego voted to phase shift the relatively undeveloped section of the North City Future Urbanizing Area from “future” to “planned” urbanizing. This phase shift and the associated developments will increase the population and traffic demand in the region utilizing the SR-56 facility.

NEED

Currently, local streets and the surrounding communities experience increased demand and congestion during peak hours from I-5 and SR-56 traffic. The current network forces drivers to exit the freeway to travel between SB I-5 to EB SR-56 and WB SR-56 to NB I-5. This causes congestion at the El Camino Real and Carmel Valley Road intersection. A recent widening to the westbound SR-56 off-ramp has improved current operations, but will need to be evaluated with future traffic projections. During peak hours, in order to avoid traffic congestion at the I-5/SR-



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56 interchange, drivers use alternate routes including El Camino Real, Carmel Valley Road, and Carmel Creek Road causing increased traffic on surface streets near the project area.

The increased congestion negatively impacts the surrounding communities by increasing the traffic through neighborhoods. Continued regional development and inter-regional travel will further increase traffic volumes and reduce traffic operational quality.

This project proposes improvements between the Del Mar Heights Road interchange and SR-56 along I-5 and between Carmel Country Road interchange and I-5 along SR-56. The project may include improvements to the surface streets, the addition of auxiliary lanes along SR-56 and I-5, interchange improvements, or new freeway-to-freeway connector ramps.

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