

## Caltrans releases four alternatives to fully connect I-5, SR-56

By CARLOS RICO, The Daily Transcript

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The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) has released four improvement options to allow motorists direct access to northbound Interstate 5 and eastbound state Route 56.

Presently there is no direct connection for drivers who want to get onto northbound I-5 via SR-56 and to eastbound SR-56 via southbound I-5. Motorists have to get onto Del Mar Heights Road via city streets like Carmel Country Road, Carmel Valley Road and El Camino Real to merge onto northbound I-5.

Because of this, four plans have been developed by Caltrans staff that include a direct connector ramp, an auxiliary lane, a hybrid connector lane or a hybrid connector lane with flyover bridge.

For the next 45 days, the public will have a chance to view the four alternatives in the I-5/SR-56 Interchange Project Draft Environmental Impact Report, which Caltrans released Friday, and provide feedback.

Caltrans also has the option of keeping the status quo and not making any changes.

Caltrans corridor director Allan Kosup said now was the time to develop alternatives to fully connect I-5 and SR-56.

“It’s now or never,” he said. “Local congestion has gotten to the point where we need to look at alternatives to reduce commute times. ... Thirty years ago there was no demand for a northbound connector.”

The first alternative would connect westbound SR-56 to northbound I-5 and southbound I-5 with eastbound SR-56 via two-lane freeway-to-freeway connector ramps. Cost is estimated at \$250 million to \$270 million.

The second option would add one auxiliary lane on southbound I-5 between Del Mar Heights Road and Carmel Valley Road, and provide operational improvements on westbound SR-56 from Carmel Country Road to El Camino Real and at existing ramps and intersections within the project area. Cost is estimated at \$95 million to \$115 million.

The third plan would bond westbound SR-56 to northbound I-5 via a two-lane freeway-to-freeway connector ramp; add one auxiliary lane on southbound I-5 between Del Mar Heights Road and Carmel Valley Road; and add two lanes on westbound SR-56 and one lane on eastbound SR-56 between Carmel Country Road and El Camino Real. Cost is estimated at \$160 million to \$180 million

The last option would connect westbound SR-56 to northbound I-5 via a two-lane freeway-to-freeway connector ramp; connect eastbound Carmel Valley Road to eastbound SR-56 via an onramp connector; add one auxiliary lane on southbound I-5 between Del Mar Heights Road and Carmel Valley Road; and add two lanes on westbound SR-56 and one lane on eastbound SR-56 between Carmel Country Road and El Camino Real. Cost is estimated at \$205 million to \$225 million.

All four alternative plans call for replacing and enhancing the Del Mar Heights Road crossing.

Kosup said as a staff, Caltrans has no preference on the four alternate plans.

Caltrans has a public meeting scheduled for 6 p.m., June 13 at the Del Mar Hills Academy where people can ask Caltrans staff questions and give their input.

If everything goes according to plan, Caltrans will indentify the preferred option later this year, and a final plan, with necessary changes and full designs, will be released toward the end of 2013. Construction would start in 2020, when all of the funding is expected to be committed. Kosup said construction could start sooner, if more funding becomes available.

The construction process would take approximately two and a half years to complete, according to Kosup.

Funding will come from the half-cent TransNet sales tax, and approximately \$15.8 million will come from a combination of city of San Diego and federal funds.

The public can view the four alternative connection plans and the environmental impact report at [KeepSanDiegoMoving.com](http://KeepSanDiegoMoving.com)