

## **Carmel Valley 56 connectors project DEIR to be released this week**

**By Karen Billing**

The draft environmental impact report (DEIR) for the Interstate 5/State Route 56 connectors project will be released on Friday, May 18. Public input is encouraged and must be sent in by July 2 on the alternatives to make the missing connections between westbound SR-56 and northbound I-5, and southbound I-5 and eastbound SR-56.

The EIR will be available for online viewing at [keepsandiegomoving.com](http://keepsandiegomoving.com) and a hard copy will be available at the Carmel Valley Library. A public meeting will be held on Wednesday, June 13, at Del Mar Hills Academy from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m.

Looking at the timeline, Caltrans I-5 Corridor Director Allan Kosup said Caltrans expects to make its decision on the preferred alternative by late 2012. The final EIR would be released in late 2013, with project construction targeted for 2020-2030 if any build option is selected.

“I don’t see this moving ahead until I-5 is widened in this stretch and right now it’s targeted for the 2020-2030 time frame,” Kosup said.

Kosup said that this is the last chance to do the connections here because once the widening project occurs, it will be too cost-prohibitive and expensive to go back and retrofit for some kind of linkage of 5 and 56.

“We’re trying to incorporate into the I-5 project, that’s really the urgency to make a decision on what (the connection) should look like,” Kosup said.

The project’s steering committee met on Tuesday for a “Cliff’s Notes” version of the DEIR findings, the group’s first meeting in almost two years. Very little has changed about the five alternatives that are studied in the document: The no-build option; a direct connector; the auxiliary lane alternative; the hybrid alternative; and the hybrid with flyover connecting eastbound Carmel Valley Road to eastbound SR-56 and the northbound portion of the direct connector.

Kosup said the goal is to develop a project that is sensitive to the community and the environment while addressing local congestion, cut-through traffic and regional connections.

“The DEIR helps us find if the benefit of the project is worth the cost and the impacts,” Kosup said. “There are no perfect alternatives, none perform the best in all the areas. We have to find the balance.”

The DEIR includes nearly 20 technical reports on key issues of congestion relief, noise, visual impacts, right of way, environment and cost-effectiveness. Kosup said that the DEIR is “deluged” with traffic information.

In initial findings, the DEIR reports that in all the alternatives but no-build, the freeway pulls about 9,000 trips out of city streets in the westbound 56 commute in the morning hours. The direct connector pulls about 12,000 trips off the city streets in the eastbound direction during the evening commute, while the same benefits aren’t seen with other alternatives.

In addition to relieving local congestion, the DEIR shows the impacts of the alternatives in travel times.

The report also looks at the “significant” proposed noise abatement program, with sound walls and the possibility of using a new type of pavement to reduce noise. The report also includes options for the Portofino Drive neighborhood above I-5 to attempt to minimize the impacts of the direct connector alternative and attempt to leave it better by increasing the usable space of yards and landscaping.

“If that alternative is selected, we definitely want to sit down with the community and figure out how to best do things,” Kosup said.

In all options the Del Mar Heights bridge will be replaced, so the report also looks at potential improvements to the bridge with bike and pedestrian lanes and plantings.

For more information or to view or download the DEIR, visit [keepsandiegomoving.com](http://keepsandiegomoving.com).