

Freeway Work Ready to Begin

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By Laura Petersen

After years of drivers battling traffic and stoplights at the Lomas Santa Fe Drive and Interstate 5 interchange, there is light at the end of the tunnel. Several significant transportation projects in Solana Beach will begin construction this year.

Construction of two freeway auxiliary lanes between Lomas Santa Fe Drive and Via de la Valle, one in each direction, will begin the first week of March; Caltrans project manager Arturo Jacobo said.

After a creative bidding process, construction was recently awarded to Sim Harris. The contractor expects to be able to complete the \$10 million project in August, half the time originally estimated, Jacobo said.

Caltrans hopes the southbound lane, if not both lanes, will be completed even sooner, before the 2007 Del Mar race meet opens at the end of July, Solana Beach city engineer Chandra Collure said.

Once the project is complete, there will be another lane on the outside edges of the freeway, between Via de la Valle and Lomas Santa Fe Drive. Drivers will enter the freeway in a dedicated lane that travels the full distance between the two interchanges, rather than in a short merge lane. This eliminates the need to merge with faster moving cars, which slows traffic. If drivers are not immediately exiting, they will have more time to merge at freeway speeds. "We've not had any good linear roads that run along the freeway going from one place to another," said Deputy Mayor Joe Kellejian. "This will create that."

In September or October, construction will begin on the second major \$52 million project. Two carpool lanes in the middle of Interstate 5 will be added from Via de la Valle to Manchester Avenue, and the Lomas Santa Fe interchange will be redesigned. Construction on the two parts will occur simultaneously, and take a year and half to complete by summer 2009.

The redesigned Lomas Santa Fe interchange will eliminate left turns onto the freeway by adding two cloverleaf onramps, one for each direction. The light for left turns onto northbound I-5 will be taken out. That alone will cut down the light cycle by one-third, from 180 seconds to 110 seconds, Collure said. The onramps will have holding space for vehicles, clearing the through lanes on Lomas Santa Fe. As part of the interchange project, the freeway bridge going over Lomas Santa Fe Drive will be widened from about 150 feet to about 270 feet, by adding about 60 feet on each side. The new bridge will require lighting underneath almost 24 hours a day, Collure said.

The bridge widening is in preparation for regional plans to widen portions of I-5 to 14 lanes, including 10 general purpose lanes and four managed lanes, which are physically separated lanes for carpools, transit and paying single drivers, with direct access ramps on and off the freeway.

"A complete managed lane system from the border to Camp Pendleton — that's the vision," said Allan Kosup, Caltrans corridor director. The two carpool lanes, also called High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) lanes, built by 2009 will later become part of the larger managed lane project.

Managed lane access ramps are planned for five locations between Carol Canyon Road and Oceanside. The idea has been initially discussed of adding a sixth location at Via de la Valle to connect the managed lanes directly to the Del Mar Fairgrounds.

"In the years to come, this will be something we will investigate," said Becky Bartling, fairgrounds deputy general manager. To accommodate the wider freeway, part of Lomas Santa Fe will be lowered. Also, part of Ida Avenue will be realigned and narrowed, to allow for the hillside to be filled in, to support the freeway. Construction on Ida Avenue will begin in March.

To allow for the cloverleaf northbound onramp, the northbound offramp will be pushed farther east. This means part of Marine View, from San Andres to Lomas Santa Fe, will be closed beginning in March or April, Collure said. However, vehicles will be able to enter the Vons shopping center through a driveway on Marine View and still turn onto San Andres.

A third project to add a landscaped median and a stoplight on Lomas Santa Fe in front of the Vons shopping center will begin in March or April and be completed by June. Vehicles will still be able to make left turns in and out of the driveway near Blockbuster. The median and light will improve traffic flow and safety, Collure said. During peak holiday shopping hours, 400 cars will move through the improved intersection.

During construction at the Lomas Santa Fe interchange, freeway and street lanes will not be closed during peak hours, from 6:30 a.m. to 9:30 a.m. and from 2:30 p.m. to 6 p.m., Jacobo said. "If they have to close a lane, we've told them they have to work at night," Collure said. "If you look at Lomas Santa Fe, almost 12 hours a day its peak." A draft environmental report for the regional managed lane project is expected late summer, Jacobo said. However, Caltrans plans to host community workshops in each city along the freeway in April, to discuss noise studies with the public.



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