

Cities, State Team Up For 57/60 Freeway Fix_9/13/09

By James Wagner
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Imagine this ominous proposal: Cross six lanes on a major freeway interchange, all while dodging cars and driving fast enough to keep up with traffic.

It's a daily reality for nearly 343,000 drivers who use the confluence of the 57 and 60 freeways.

To fix it, Caltrans and the cities of Industry and Diamond Bar are partnering to revamp two miles of the freeway merger, which is one of the busiest in the county, officials said. "Weaving across lanes is always a problem for freeways," said Wei Koo, an engineer at WKE Inc., a firm hired by Industry. "But this one is particularly bad." With the proposed improvements, officials are hoping to reduce weaving, improve safety and alleviate traffic at the Grand Avenue interchange. To do so, the agencies are seeking the public's input on three options which feature, among other things, a dedicated bypass lane to avoid busy portions of the interchange and widened onramps and offramps.

Last year, the confluence averaged about 100 accidents, many of which were sideswipe collisions, according to statistics from project officials. To improve traffic entering the freeways from Diamond Bar, the Grand Avenue bridge may be widened for easier flow, officials said. The confluence had long been identified as a troubled intersection but it wasn't until 2005 that Industry and Diamond Bar started working on a plan to fix it, officials said. Caltrans joined later.

Industry, which is leading the local efforts, is contributing \$35 million and taking over the environmental review process of the study. Officials hope the federal government will fund 60 percent of the \$250 million project. Whatever is left over would be funded by local agencies, including Los Angeles County. At a recent scoping meeting, residents repeatedly questioned whether the project was on the fast track because it would benefit an NFL stadium project proposed for a 600-acre plot west of the Grand Avenue exit.

Officials denied any link between the stadium and the confluence improvement, saying this project started before the stadium was proposed in 2008. The scoping process of the project, where the public is asked to weigh in, ends Friday.

A draft environmental impact report is expected no later than early 2011. Officials estimate the project could be slated for a final environmental approval by fall 2011. They also hope it will fix a majority of the congestion and danger caused by the freeways. "We believe that it will address most of the problem in the confluence," said Ana LeNoue, president of Avant Garde, a consulting firm hired to manage the project's outreach. "It's going to address about 75 percent of the weaving problems."