

Some hope given to those who endure traffic bottleneck at 57/60 interchange in Diamond Bar

By Mediha Fejzagic DiMartino, Staff Writer
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DIAMOND BAR - When Gabriel Solis lost his job in Santa Fe Springs, there was one thing he was sure he would not miss - his commute through the interchange of the 57 Freeway and the 60 Freeway.

"It was a headache," said the Diamond Bar resident. "It would take me 30 minutes to drive two miles. After nine years, I just couldn't stand the traffic."

Faced with the seventh worst traffic bottleneck in the nation, local officials said something must be done for motorists crawling along the two-mile stretch of the road where the 57 and 60 freeways merge.

Led by the city of Industry, the 57/60 Confluence Project promises to solve the problem of 16 lanes of traffic being squeezed into 12. The improvements include creating a bypass lane to reduce the need for motorists to cross several traffic lanes as they exit or enter the freeway at Grand Avenue.

"If something isn't done it's just going to get worse," Industry Councilman Tim Spohn said.

The project calls for construction of an eastbound bypass ramp, which would run under the 57 Freeway and take traffic exiting the 60 directly to Grand.

A new eastbound loop on-ramp would connect Grand to the 60 and eliminate the need for left turn lanes.

The existing westbound off-ramp at Grand would be widened and relocated about 100 feet north.

Plans also include construction of a new 2,500-foot auxiliary lane on southbound 57 as it merges with the 60. The third lane would eliminate the bottleneck that is currently created when the southbound 57 drops from three lanes to two.

The Grand overpass would get a face-lift as well - it would get higher and wider to accommodate four lanes in each direction. It also would feature a new westbound on-ramp.

The project would create 5,148 jobs, with targeted completion in less than 10 years.

Some have linked plans to improve the interchange with a plan to build an NFL stadium at a site just to the west, but officials say the "interchange improvement was first raised in 1992 by Caltrans, when the Los Angeles Raiders and the L.A. Rams were both playing in NFL stadiums in and around Los Angeles."

"There is no doubt it needs to happen," said Chino Hills Councilman Art Bennett, who commutes through the bottleneck every day. "We need it with or without the stadium."

Besides the seventh place ranking in the nation bestowed by the American Transportation Research Institute, an entity that monitors freight-significant highway locations, the interchange has been designated as the No. 1 highway congestion segment in Caltrans' District 7, and the No. 3 congestion segment in the state, according to the Caltrans Highway Congestion Monitoring Program.

The interchange's issues are nothing new to the area's transportation agencies - it's listed as a high-priority, short-term project in the Action Plan approved by all six counties. It is also in the Metropolitan Transportation Authority's Long Range Transportation Plan, but the funds will not be available until 2029, which is too long to wait, say officials, who would prefer to complete the project by 2016.

Improvements to the interchange will have a positive economic impact, Spohn said.

Every year, more than 120million vehicles go through the two-mile interchange - 20 percent of them trucks moving goods from Los Angeles and Long Beach ports. Transportation authorities expect an increase in traffic of 377,300 vehicles per day over the next 20 years.

More than half of the project's \$258 million price tag is eligible for federal funding, while the remainder would be funded with local sales tax and state gas tax revenues.

Currently, the city of Industry has committed \$35 million in local redevelopment funding to the project. MTA's contribution would be an additional \$8.75 million for the construction of the westbound off-ramp at Grand.

Together with MTA and Diamond Bar, the city of Industry also is seeking project funding and potential listing on the next federal reauthorization of the Transportation Act, which most likely will not be voted on until the new Congress convenes in January.

mediha.dimartino@inlandnewspapers.com