

The 57/60 Confluence Project Aims to Reduce Freeway Traffic, Increase Safety_12/1/11

By Amy Bentley 12-1-11

Faced with one of the most congested freeway interchanges in California, officials in the San Gabriel Valley have decided something must be done soon for motorists forced to crawl long the two-mile stretch of highway where the 57 and 60 freeways merge in Diamond Bar.

The 57/60 Confluence Project is the answer. Led by the City of Industry, the 57/60 Confluence Project aims to alleviate the problem of 17 traffic lanes being squeezed into 14, including carpool lanes. The "confluence" of the 57 and 60 freeways is a 2.5-mile stretch near Diamond Bar where the two freeways overlap.

The confluence connects Los Angeles, Orange, San Bernardino and Riverside counties, for a combined 2011 population of more than 17 million, and it's a key regional route for the movement of goods from Southern California's ports.

Today, more than 343,000 commercial and personal vehicles use the interchange daily. Transportation authority's agree that this vital transportation corridor will see a significant increase in traffic of approximately 377,300 vehicles per day over the next 20 years.

The confluence was never meant to handle so much traffic, as the area's population was much smaller when the interchange was built in the early 1970s.

Improving the interchange is an idea that was first raised in 1992 by Caltrans. The 57/60 Confluence Project was initiated in 2005 by the cities of Industry and Diamond Bar, who sought an engineering analysis of Grand Avenue.

From this work, the project was initiated with Caltrans to make the entire confluence area safer. "If something isn't done it's just going to get worse," said Industry Councilman Tim Spohn.

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 Avenue. In addition, 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 further 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 too, becoming higher and wider to accommodate four lanes in each direction, and with a new westbound on-ramp.

Local officials said the project addresses a critical need to alleviate punishing traffic jams and reduce accident hazards from weaving cars and trucks.

The interchange has been designated as the most congested highway segment in Caltrans' District 7 and the third most congested segment in California, according to the Caltrans Highway Congestion Monitoring Program. The accident rate in the confluence is higher than the state average.

The 57/60 Confluence Project would create 5,148 jobs, with targeted completion in less than 10 years and bring many economic benefits to the region.

The project will improve mobility so the confluence can remain a viable and preferred route for goods moving from the ports to the region and nation. This helps California remain a preferred port destination in the United States. The project also will improve commuter safety and efficiency for millions of Californian commuters and will generate thousands of new jobs during construction.

More than half of the project's estimated \$268 million cost is eligible for federal funding, while the remainder would be funded with local sales tax and state gas tax revenues. The plan is to divide the total project into three phases with three contract packages.

By completing the project in phases, it can be built in a sequence that best uses available funds from the City of Industry and the Los Angeles Metropolitan Transportation Authority.

The City of Industry has taken a leading role and has committed \$35 million in local redevelopment funding to the project to prepare for construction by 2013, so that if funds become available, the entire project could be completed in 2017.

The 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.