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National Park Service cameras recorded this bobcat east of the I-405. Photo courtesy of National Park Service and California Department of Transportation.

## Metro and Caltrans I -405 Sepulveda Pass Widening Project team take precautions to protect wildlife during 405 construction

By Rich Morallo  
*Community Relations Volunteer Coordinator*

(March 16, 2010) At nightfall the stealthy bobcat loped down the mountain trail past Sepulveda Boulevard.

Creeping along the top of the dirt embankment under the 405 Freeway, the cat traveled west wandering on the opposite side of the busy interstate highway that, in the early 1960s, cut through the bobcat's natural roaming lands.

After a few days, the bobcat tired of its journey and backtracked, returning to the relative safety of Sepulveda Ridge with its thick vegetation and tall grass.

Liz Suh, a  
California



Department of Transportation associate environmental planner, points to known animal crossing area on map.

**Protect and preserve**

The bobcat isn't alone.

The Metro and Caltrans I-405 Sepulveda Pass Widening Project team is actively designing plans to ensure the bobcat and hundreds of other animals in the wilderness can roam freely and safely in their natural wild lands of the Santa Monica Mountains.

"Taking care of our natural resources - the animals, trees and the natural wild lands - is part of our stewardship," said Liz Suh, a California Department of Transportation associate environmental planner.

Suh is part of the project team managing the construction of the northbound High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) lane on the segment of the San Diego Freeway (I-405) that runs between the Santa Monica Freeway (I-10) and the Ventura Freeway (U.S. 101).

Over the course of the next four years, the project will remove and replace three major bridges and widen 13 others spanning over several LA City streets, and reconstruct 25 freeway access ramps at a cost of \$1.034 billion.

"We're working closely with the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, the National Park Service, the Getty Center and other organizations to help keep the animals safe and unrestricted in their travels," said Kristin Fusello, another Caltrans associate environmental planner.

"We're being proactive in our efforts to maintain the native wildlife habitat of our region," said Fusello.



National Park Service cameras recorded this grey fox west of the I-405. Photo courtesy of National Park Service and California Department of Transportation..

"We are planning an eight-foot high culvert for the bobcat and the coyotes, raccoons, possums and other animals crossing near the Getty (Museum) View Trailhead," said Suh, adding that a projected on-ramp will be built over the wildlife pathway there.

The freeway widening project is still in the design phase and has provisions to ensure animals can reach their natural habitats on either side of the new on-ramp, she said.

**Over the bridge and to the woods...**

Near the Getty View Trailhead – located at the mid-point of the 10-mile freeway segment being widened – crews will alter the steep slope of the Sepulveda Boulevard Undercrossing and modify a fence near the freeway to make crossing easier for the area's wildlife.

Other fences near access ramps may be modified in the future to guide the wildlife toward the culvert tunnel under the new ramp, according to Suh.

Work is also underway to minimize the impact of the construction work at two other locations where animals cross - Skirball Bridge and Bel Air Crest.

Animals now scurry along the far side of the concrete Skirball Center Drive Bridge, which they share with both cars and pedestrians, a couple of miles north of Getty View Trailhead.

A perimeter fence is planned that will funnel the wildlife to the new overpass along a 10-foot wide travel path on the south side of the structure.

In addition, a three-foot high concrete wall on the east side will direct the animals to the bridge to keep them from having to cross busy Skirball Center Drive. More fencing will direct them both to and from the Sepulveda Trail area.

South of the Skirball Bridge at the Bel Air Crest Undercrossing, animals scurry behind the huge freeway pillars.

Fencing will be positioned to facilitate animal movement and crews will maintain the slope, in addition to preserving the crossing zones, while plans are also in the works to create "stepping stone" areas where animals can pause and watch the cars go by as they ponder their route across the busy I-405.

"Our plans include planting native vegetation such as trees, shrubs and ground cover in some places along the freeway, that would allow cover for the animals as they journey toward their destination," said Suh.

Both Metro and Caltrans, she said, "want the animals to travel freely and safely around the freeway and we are making plans to comply with all of the environmental requirements and monitor these animal crossings during and after construction."