

Trying to tame the fearsome 405 [updated]

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The Sepulveda Pass—three words that strike terror in the hearts of drive-time commuters everywhere. But an ambitious project funded partly with federal stimulus dollars is aiming to ease the fear factor on the 405.

It won't happen overnight. By the time it's completed in the spring of 2013, however, the project will create a 10-mile northbound carpool lane on the 405 between the Santa Monica (10) and Ventura (101) freeways. It will provide a crucial connecting link in the freeway's carpool lane system extending north from the Orange County line.

Relief can't come soon enough for the hundreds of thousands of commuters who travel through the pass each day. They currently experience 15,000 "vehicle-hours" of delay daily; Caltrans estimates that unless something is done, the congestion would hit 27,800 vehicle-hours by 2015 and 59,430 by 2031.

"Most of the commute would be at a complete standstill," says Mike Barbour, Metro's project director on the 405 work. "If we don't do this, it will be horrendous."

The work extends beyond adding the carpool lane. Workers will also realign 27 on- and off-ramps; widen 13 overpasses and structures; build some 18 miles of retaining and sound walls, and remove and replace bridges at the Skirball Center, Sunset Boulevard and Mulholland Drive. Oh, and they'll be doing some road improvements on nearby streets, too.

It's a big job—officials say the project will create 18,000 jobs during construction, although not all of those are local. For now, workers in the pre-construction phase are busy surveying storm drains and utilities, and doing the soil testing that is essential to the design process. Project officials also are working with a community advisory committee made up of homeowners and neighborhood councils to get feedback on the design process, and will continue working with the group through construction. A community meeting will be held Nov. 19 from 6:00 to 8:00 pm at the Skirball Cultural Center, 2701 N Sepulveda Blvd, Los Angeles.

Signs will be posted to let motorists know when the project is expected to begin and end. Traffic lanes will be reconfigured and a safe work zone set up behind those concrete barriers known as "k-rail." Once that's done, officials say, northbound drivers should have the same five lanes available during the project as they did before it started—and will, of course, have a new 6th lane for carpools when it's done.

"We are doing everything we can to reduce the overall construction time frame," Barbour says, adding there is an

incentive for the contractor to finish early. Barbour urges commuters to check the project [website](#) frequently for updates during construction.

The project, a partnership of the Los Angeles Metropolitan Transportation Authority ([Metro](#)) and the California Department of Transportation ([Caltrans](#)), is expected to cost \$1.034 billion, with \$189.9 million coming from the American Recovery & Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA) and the rest from state and other federal sources.

Updated, 11/10/09:

Just in time for the holiday rush at LAX, Caltrans has opened the new carpool lane on the southbound 405 from the Santa Monica Freeway to the Marina Freeway (SR-90.) The northbound carpool lane covering the same stretch is set to open before Thanksgiving.

“It’s going to definitely alleviate the flow of traffic, especially during the holidays,” when carloads of travelers picking up or dropping off passengers can take advantage of a high-occupancy lane, says Sgt. Jim Holcomb of the LAX Airport Police.

The five-year, \$167 million project—which also included work on National, Culver and Palms boulevards—makes it possible to travel via carpool lane on the southbound San Diego Freeway from the San Fernando Valley through Orange County.

Updated 12/29/09:

Night work on the 405 carpool lane project begins Jan. 12, with closures of ramps, individual lanes and the entire northbound freeway planned for various times through mid-March. The work—to lay out temporary lanes and set up protective work barriers—will take place from 7 p.m. to 6 a.m. on weekdays, with full closures slated only between midnight and 5 a.m. As the project moves forward, look for updated information on lane and ramp closures [here](#).