

Thursday, Oct. 7, 2010



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Riverside Press-Enterprise

The I-215 South Corridor Economic Summit is back for 2010 after a year's hiatus. The one-day summit, scheduled for Oct. 14 at the Pechanga Resort & Casino in Temecula, brings together representatives from business, government and education to discuss challenges and solutions to economic development along the Interstate 215 corridor.

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San Diego Metro Weekly

The U.S. Department of Transportation has released \$20.2 million in stimulus funds to SANDAG and the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) to pay for an interchange between State Route 905 and Interstate 805, completing a freeway connection between the Otay Mesa Port of Entry (POE) and the rest of the highway system.

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Los Angeles Times

The cost of riding New York City's subways, buses and commuter rails is going up again, the third fare increase in three years.

News Articles

1. Party For End Of I-5 Construction Cost Thousands

By Teri Sforza

Orange County Register

There was a time, some moons ago, when contractors vying to build an Orange County toll road were required build the cost of a party into their bids.

The gala — exhaustively detailed in three pages of the bid specifications for the first segment of the Foothill tollway — would have 500 guests, who'd nosh on pastries and coffee beneath a festive tent, then enjoy a catered brunch. There'd be professional photographers and videographers to record the road's groundbreaking all for posterity. The food alone would cost upwards of \$18,000, a caterer said at the time — and the contractor could tack on 10 percent of the party's cost for himself, for his troubles.

Who'd pay? Commuters using the toll roads, of course, one way or another. A quick bit of watchdog reporting by the Orange County Register on this odd contract clause put the kibosh on that fiesta 20 years ago. But the memory lingers, and it made the ears of some old-timers tingle when they saw pictures of a surfboard-laden, cherry red car bursting through a dedication banner held by smiling state senators and congresswomen last week, at a fiesta marking the end of construction on Interstate 5.

That party cost a bundle, little birdies whispered in The Watchdog's ear, and it was paid for by the public relations firms working on the project!

Well, our sources have been known to be a bit hyperbolic. It turns out that the ceremony marking the end of the I-5 Gateway project — a \$335 million, four-year endeavor to widen two miles of I-5 in northernmost OC — was not built into any construction contract, and contractors were not required to pay for it, Orange County Transportation Authority spokesman Joel Zlotnik tells us.

They did, however, voluntarily foot the bill for the celebration, which featured state Sen. Lou Correa, U.S. Rep. Loretta Sanchez and other local elected officials holding an oversized ribbon as the classic surf-board laden car zoomed down the new Beach Boulevard on-ramp.

Cost of the party: \$12,379, Zlotnik said.

Cal Trop, the construction management firm, paid \$1,580 for the souvenir coins that were given out, commemorating the project.

Here are other major sponsors and what they kicked in:

FCI, \$1,500, construction contractor

TRC, \$1,500, engineering and construction firm

Arcadis, \$1,500, environmental and engineering firm

URS, \$1,500, engineering firm

MTS, \$1,500, design firm

Tsomas, \$1,500

Ninyo & Moore, \$1,000, geo-technical and environmental services

Toledo Public Affairs, \$500

Faubel Public Affairs, \$450

Zlotnik said that the money was spent employing local firms. The bigger vendors included:

Big Top Rentals, Anaheim, \$4,653

Suzanne's Catering, Huntington Beach, \$1,950

Sign-a-Rama, Buena Park, \$853

Flowers of Orange, \$233

The project — the last funded by the original Measure M— came in on time and on budget, Zlotnik said. The celebration was paid for entirely through sponsorship, and guests were not only electeds eager to glad-hand and get their pictures in the paper, but the locals who have been put out by four years of construction in their back yards — the auto dealers, lumber stores, amusement park and tourist attraction workers.

“It’s important to raise awareness of a project like this so the public can see their tax dollars put to work, and see the projects paid for by Measure M,” Zlotnik said. “And the cost isn’t coming out of their pockets.”

Zlotnik objected to us referring back to the toll road mishap in this story; it was another agency (the Transportation Corridor Agencies, not OCTA), and happened many moons ago, he said. We duly note that, but that’s the context in which “transporatation celebration” arose for this particular story.

Average Joe will celebrate the completion of construction by driving down the on-ramp on the way to work, our little birdies told us.

Just one question. Did anyone save us a cupcake?

2. Crews Repair Katella Avenue Sinkholes

By Alejandra Molina, Sean Emery & Bruce Chambers
Orange County Register

ANAHEIM – Crews have filled in a pair of sinkholes along Katella Avenue that forced the temporarily closure of westbound lanes of the heavily-trafficked street.

The sinkholes by Easy Way and Ivanhoe Street, which were first reported at 10:24 a.m. on Wednesday, were filled in by rock by about 3 p.m., Anaheim Fire Department Spokeswoman Maria Sabol said.

"None of these are caused by a water main break of any kind," Sabol said. The sinkhole on Easy Way measured about 30 feet by 10 feet and is 20 feet deep, Sabol said. The other sinkhole was 20 feet by 20 feet and is 20 feet deep. Traffic on Katella was already down to two lanes in each direction thanks to a storm drain construction project, Sabol said. The sinkholes forced city crews to split a pair of eastbound lanes on Katella for both eastbound and westbound traffic between Euclid and Brookhurst.

3. CSULB Encourages Campus Community To Use Rideshare Services

Students can find carpool partners by joining zimride

Daily 49er

Rideshare Week runs until Friday, and Cal State Long Beach wants students and faculty members to take advantage of the Rideshare opportunities available to them. The nationwide event is aimed at encouraging the public to use alternative forms of transportation in order to reduce gas emissions.

Popular with the CSULB community is the U-Pass program, which offers students with a CSULB ID free rides on the Long Beach Transit system. CSULB's Rideshare website also recommends that students try other alternative means of transportation, such as walking, carpooling, Zimride and bicycling.

Zimride is an online social networking program that locates nearby people you can carpool with. To log in, students can use their Facebook account so they can see whom they will be carpooling with.

The university's Rideshare website has information on bicycle routes, bus routes by Long Beach Transit as well as Orange County Transit Authority and LA County Metropolitan Transit Authority.

4. San Juan Approves Downtown Hotel

By Brittany Levine
Orange County Register

A hotel appears on its way to downtown San Juan Capistrano following unanimous City Council approval of Plaza Banderas, a mixed-use development including a 124-room hotel, retail space and a restaurant.

The council approved the project on a "first reading" Tuesday night. It is scheduled to formally adopt the decision Oct. 19. Cities are required in many cases to have two weeks between a preliminary decision and final adoption as a sort of buyer's remorse period.

The hotel, planned for Ortega Highway and El Camino Real on the site of the former Mission Inn, is being developed by Gretchen Stroscher Thomson, whose family has owned the land across from Mission San Juan Capistrano since the 19th century. See a map by clicking the "Graphics" tab above.

Thomas Merrell, a consultant for development company Stroscher G3 LLC, introduced a new concept at the council meeting that may increase the project's land area. The Stroscher family owns about 4/10ths of an acre on Ortega Highway that the city currently has the power to use as a public thoroughway due to an easement. The developer would like to add that land to the hotel site if the city no longer needs

it. Tuesday's decision does not bind the city to give up the easement; it will have to work that out later, Merrell said.

City leaders have long dubbed a downtown hotel as a keystone to redevelopment of the Historic Town Center, which leaders say is necessary to boost the city's pocketbook, which has been looking slim lately as the city faces a structural budget deficit.

The 74,973-square-foot project has stirred controversy over downtown parking and traffic.

Construction of the hotel would have significant effects on neighboring San Juan Elementary School, according to a letter to the city from the Capistrano Unified School District. It will replace parking that parents use at nearby city lots and increase traffic, noise and dust, according to Ron Lebs, deputy superintendent. Traffic to the school from students living outside San Juan is expected to grow because of the school's open-enrollment Two-Way Language Immersion Program, and in the next two to three years about half the traffic is expected to be from other cities, officials say.

Plaza Banderas is set to be built just before the California Department of Transportation begins construction on parts of I-5 that run through San Juan. Thomson has said she wants to finish the hotel by 2012. Caltrans is likely to begin construction about a year later.

"This is a traffic and circulation hot spot," Lebs said as the council meeting edged toward midnight. "This will be aggravated by additional construction of the proposed Caltrans project and the eventual construction of this project." City Manager Joe Tait said: "We can make it work with the school district. It can happen and it will happen."

Merrell suggested that 22 parking spaces could be created behind the hotel along Spring Street. Some city leaders pointed to that as possible relief for the school. But Lebs said that would work only if a sidewalk is created, too.

The current parking design for the hotel contains 185 spaces, about 50 less than required by city code. City staff has said the hotel would encourage people to walk to nearby shops and restaurants, relieving pressure on parking elsewhere in downtown, so an exception could be made. But at a recent Planning Commission meeting, some commissioners questioned the shortage of parking. The City Council didn't address the issue Tuesday.

The project is expected to generate \$360,000 in tax revenue in its first year. That's about half of what Thomson projected last year when the hotel was planned for four stories and 140 rooms. It is now three stories and 124 rooms.

Thomson says she expects \$400,000 in bed taxes by the second year and \$500,000 by the fifth year.

Thomson says her family will not run the hotel and that she plans to find a manager for it. She says her company is courting national chains and independent managers. Large hotel chains charge about 8 percent to use their name, said Jeff Grether, owner of the Best Western Capistrano Inn at 27174 Ortega Highway, currently San Juan's only hotel. A management contract can cost an additional 6 percent, he said. "A new hotel won't turn a profit for five years," Grether said. He has raised concerns about Plaza Banderas' tax-revenue projections, saying it will face tough competition from beach-close hotels in Dana Point. His 108-room hotel brings in about \$250,000 in bed taxes for the city.

Thomson and Grether say they don't consider each other competition because they appeal to different markets. Plaza Banderas aims to attract higher-end clientele. The design of the Plaza Banderas Hotel is expected to change in the next two weeks with a look the developer promises will meld better with San Juan. The current design has been described as looking too much like typical developments in nearby cities such as Aliso Viejo. Residents have said they want a hotel that highlights San Juan's Spanish architecture and emanates a sense of romance. "I've used this word before and I'll use it again: The hotel has to be exquisite. We'll accept nothing less," Councilwoman Laura Freese said.

The Planning Commission and Architectural Committee will be tasked with reviewing the new design.

5. Council Adopts Anti-Graffiti Ordinance

Law holds parents or guardians responsible for their children's acts, and requires them to pay the costs of the damages to the city.

Daily Pilot

After months of city staff and department collaborations, research and debate, the City Council on Tuesday approved a new graffiti ordinance, one that is designed to tighten the belt on taggers and vandals.

The ordinance was adopted after a 3-to-1 vote, with Mayor Allan Mansoor voting against it. Councilman Eric Bever was absent.

Much of the vandalism in Costa Mesa is committed by taggers, who are usually minors, Officer Jason Chamness said. The graffiti ordinance holds parents or guardians responsible for their children's acts, and requires them to pay the costs of the damages to the city. It also allows the city to go after vandals to recover the victims' costs.

"One thing that I like is the whole idea of cost-recovery," Councilwoman Wendy Leece said. "In other words, the expense involved in repairing the vandalism and making the families, or the parents, responsible for that, sends a very strong message."

The new ordinance is in alignment with Assembly Bill 576, which went into effect in January. It also follows tighter restrictions by other cities throughout Southern California, including Santa Ana, West Covina, San Bernardino and Escondido, said Chamness, who works with the Police Department's gang unit.

The ordinance will also give the police chief the authority to reward those who provide credible tips of graffiti vandalism. It requires community service and gives utility companies 48 hours to remove graffiti from their facilities and equipments. "I think that the staff really did a good job working collaboratively and trying to address all of the concerns of the different members of the community," Councilwoman Katrina Foley said during the meeting. "It is a tough issue and it's important for our community. So, I appreciate all of the really hard work that you all put into this."

The new ordinance goes hand-in-hand with the Tracking and Automated Graffiti Reporting System (TAGRS), a free program developed by the Orange County Sheriff's Department. The program tracks and shares graffiti monikers throughout the county; it has already helped the city go after vandals and recover some of its costs.

"I want to thank Officer Jason Chamness and others in the Police Department for the outstanding job they did, and finally finding a method that works," said John Feeney, a resident who closely followed the progress of the ordinance.

6. San Clemente Streets To Get 'Share The Road' Insignia

By Fred Swegles
Orange County Register

Some San Clemente streets will soon get a new pavement marking known as "sharing arrows," or "sharrows," to remind motorists and bicyclists to share the road. "Sharrows do not confer any additional rights to cyclists," said Pete van Nuys, executive director of the Orange County Bicycle Coalition, "(but) merely confirm their right to use the regular travel lane when needed to promote safety." Akram Hindiye, city traffic engineer, said the first sharrows will appear on Ola Vista between Avenida Santa Barbara and Avenida Valencia wherever a bike lane isn't striped and curb parking is allowed.

Sharrows reduce confusion, van Nuys said. He offers these tips:

- Cyclists should stick to the bike lane, where one exists, except if going the same speed as other traffic or passing other bicyclists in the lane or needing to avoid potholes, cars turning right or other hazards.
- Bicyclists going straight through an intersection must pull out of the bike lane, while motorists are required to move into the bike lane to make a right turn.

BIKE SAFETY 101

Pete van Nuys invites sign-ups for a "Traffic Skills 101" class set for 6 to 9 p.m. Oct. 15 and 8 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Oct. 17 in San Clemente's North Beach area. The fee is \$35. Sign up [here](#).

For more information, contact van Nuys at petevannuys@cox.net or 949-492-5737.

7. TEMECULA: I-215 Economic Summit Returning

By **Tiffany Ray**

Riverside Press-Enterprise

The I-215 South Corridor Economic Summit is back for 2010 after a year's hiatus. The one-day summit, scheduled for Oct. 14 at the Pechanga Resort & Casino in Temecula, brings together representatives from business, government and education to discuss challenges and solutions to economic development along the Interstate 215 corridor.

The annual event, organized by Riverside-based TMG Communications Inc., got its start several years ago but was canceled for 2009, another victim of the recession. "It just felt awkward to try to ask people to sponsor an event for economic development when there was no economy," said Aaron Knox, president of TMG. There are more sponsors for this year's summit than there were in 2008, Knox said, but they are contributing less. Knox also is expecting economic troubles will keep attendance down this year from the typical crowd of 800-1,100 in previous years because "there are a lot fewer people left in business," he said.

But organizers are pushing forward despite a tough market. "We have to start having discussions about economic recovery," Knox said.

Rick Bishop, executive director of the Western Riverside Council of Governments and emcee of the summit, said the region has "tremendous challenges and opportunities ahead," and he hopes the event will help foster future economic development. Despite the tough economy, the population of the Inland region continues to grow, and that growth will present opportunities, Bishop said. "We just need to seize that and be positive."

Topics on tap for this year's summit include mass-transit plans, higher education, federal financial and health care reform, and business development. Speakers and

panelists include David Stewart, dean of the UC Riverside School of Business Administration; Bruce Christian, president and CEO of Loma Linda University Medical Center in Murrieta; Riverside Mayor Ron Loveridge; Amro Albanna, chairman and CEO of Avisio Inc.; and former U.S. Rep. Bill Thomas, vice chair of the federal Financial Crisis Inquiry Commission.

"The whole idea is to get stakeholders communicating," Knox said. TMG this year also launched a lunch series in which guest speakers provided updates on plans for high-speed rail in California, Riverside County efforts to boost exports, and other topics. Luncheons were held in varying locations with attendance limited to 100 people. All four luncheons hit capacity, Knox said.

Reach Tiffany Ray at 951-368-9559 or tray@PE.com.

IF YOU GO

What: The I-215 South Corridor Economic Summit

When: 7:30 a.m.-3 p.m. Oct. 14

Where: Pechanga Resort & Casino

Cost: \$150

Information: www.i215now.com or call Arleth Gutierrez at 1-877-505-5048.

8. \$20.2 Million Federal Stimulus Grant To Fund Construction Of SR 905 To I-805 Interchange

San Diego Metro Weekly

The U.S. Department of Transportation has released \$20.2 million in stimulus funds to SANDAG and the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) to pay for an interchange between State Route 905 and Interstate 805, completing a freeway connection between the Otay Mesa Port of Entry (POE) and the rest of the highway system.

"This project will not only put people back to work, it will improve safety and mobility," SANDAG Chair and Escondido Mayor Lori Holt Pfeiler said. "It also will boost our local economy by improving the flow of people and goods between the United States and our biggest trading partner, Mexico."

"My focus has been and continues to be ensuring that California gets the maximum benefit from the Recovery Act. With the help of billions in Recovery Act dollars, we're putting people to work and building better roads, bridges, and transit for Californians," said Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger. "This project is a great example of how quickly and effectively we are getting Recovery Act dollars out on the street."

In February, the U.S. DOT announced that the region had been selected to receive the funding, one of 51 Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery (TIGER) grants - which are part of the overall American Recovery and Reinvestment

Act (ARRA) economic stimulus program. Since then, U.S. DOT, SANDAG, and Caltrans have been working to finalize the agreements. Now that they are complete, the funds will be distributed and construction will start.

"This is a terrific example of what the Recovery Act is all about: putting people to work forging a stronger transportation infrastructure," said U.S. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood in a statement. "Through this Recovery grant, we are helping to improve the safety and efficiency of one of America's largest ports of entry, which in turn will greatly improve the quality of life for San Diego area residents."

Currently, Otay Mesa Road - a six-lane surface street - is the only access to the U.S.-Mexico POE at Otay Mesa, which is the region's only commercial POE. Approximately 68,000 vehicles a day use Otay Mesa Road, with traffic expected to triple by 2030.

"This stimulus grant award is a testament to the region being ready when the opportunity presented itself," said Caltrans District Director Laurie Berman. "Caltrans and SANDAG did their homework in applying for these funds, and now we're ready to literally put this money to work by sustaining and creating jobs."

Construction already is underway on two separate projects that will bring SR 905 the 6.5 miles from the Otay Mesa POE to I-805 at a cost of \$432.8 million (including \$74 million in ARRA funds). Those projects are expected to be complete in 2011 and 2012. This new \$20.2 million TIGER grant will fully fund the next phase, the completion of access to the Otay Mesa POE's intermodal connector. The connector is an area that allows shipments to be loaded on and off nearby rail cars without disrupting area traffic and will greatly reduce traffic congestion from commercial trucks.

9. NYC Transit Agency Board Votes For Another Fare Increase, Sharp Rise For Monthly Passes

By Deepti Hajela
Los Angeles Times

The cost of riding New York City's subways, buses and commuter rails is going up again, the third fare increase in three years.

The Metropolitan Transportation Authority board approved fare hikes Thursday, following increases in 2008 and 2009, and ahead of another planned hike in 2013.

The fare increases by the nation's largest transit agency are the latest attempt to close an \$800 million budget gap. They would hit commuters across the region, from those riding city trains and buses to those taking the suburban commuter railroads.

"We clearly understand that riders are frustrated and we are sensitive to that," MTA

spokesman Kevin Ortiz said Wednesday. But MTA officials have said the agency needs to close budget gaps that the state government couldn't plug.

The cost of the unlimited-ride monthly Metrocards is rising nearly 17 percent, the largest of the fare increases approved by the MTA.

The price of monthly unlimited Metrocards, currently \$89, will rise by \$15. Other fare classes also will increase, although not as steep. The \$2.25 one-way subway and bus fare will stay the same except for single-ride tickets, which will increase to \$2.50.

Iris Hernandez has some decisions to make because the increase is about to add \$180 to the yearly commuting costs that she and her husband already pay.

"We'll have to change, spend less at home or make some personal changes so we have the money, but he has to use it," Hernandez, of West New York, N.J., said of the monthly subway and bus passes her husband buys to get to work.

Transit advocate Gene Russianoff of the Straphangers Campaign said the multiple fare hikes coming so quickly after one another was unprecedented.

He said the agency had been hit by funding cuts from the state but that the MTA hadn't done enough to try to get additional funding from the state and federal governments.

Russianoff also pointed out that the fare hike was being voted on just months after the MTA slashed service.

"It's going to be a hardship," he said.

Jenna Tarshis, who uses a monthly Metrocard to commute to her office job, was resigned to the increased costs for her daily subway rides.

"I understand they have to pay for things, and I don't want my service to be decreased, but at the same time, it's not a good time in the economy to be raising prices for people to get to and from work," the 24-year-old Tarshis said.

"It's not like I'm making a ton of money to be spending the extra," she said. "And there's nothing I can do, I'm not going to take a cab across town every day."