



First partner signs on to pursue tunnel

COMMUTING: Orange County is on board. Riverside County's group votes next, then MWD.

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By PHIL PITCHFORD
The Press-Enterprise

Commuters got a step closer Monday to finding out whether it is possible to dig a tunnel under the mountains between Corona and Irvine for a future freeway.

The Orange County Transportation Authority voted unanimously to approve an agreement with the Riverside County Transportation Commission and the Metropolitan Water District to jointly explore whether such a tunnel is feasible.

If the two other agencies approve the agreement -- the Riverside County group votes Wednesday -- geological tests could be under way by late summer or early fall, transportation officials said. The tests are viewed as crucial to answering key questions about the tunnel idea, including whether the potential path is blocked by bedrock or groundwater.

The tests would be paid for with at least part of a \$15.8 million allotment included in last summer's federal transportation bill. The Riverside County Transportation Commission is expected to pursue that money on behalf of all three agencies.

"It's something we want to do as soon as possible," said John Standiford, spokesman for the commission.

If the tests prove positive, much work will remain on the project, which is estimated to cost at least \$2 billion, and possibly as much as \$6 billion.

The agreement approved Monday by the Orange County group is a much more streamlined version than had been pursued earlier by a group of water agencies that formed a separate authority, the Riverside Orange Corridor Authority. The two counties eventually decided instead to move ahead only with legally binding agreements, not a new government agency.

Metropolitan Water District likely will vote on the proposal sometime next month, according to Wes Bannister, chairman of the district's board. At issue is whether the water agency should continue looking at a joint water/vehicle tunnel or move forward with plans it already had to build a water-only tunnel, he said.

The water agency could have its water-only tests under way by July, Bannister said. He said it is not clear how long it would take to coordinate testing with the transportation agencies, if that happened at all. But he said that even if the water agency moves forward on its own, it could do specific tests for a transportation tunnel if asked later by road agencies. Either way, MWD wants to get started, he said.

"It could be prohibitive for us to do a tunnel," Bannister said. "We just don't know until we do the testing."

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Would you use a toll tunnel to go between Orange and Riverside counties if it were built? [Comment](#)

May 9, 2006 09:46 p.m.

Use that \$6B as tax incentives to big corporations willing to relocate to the east side of the Cleveland National Forest, then the traffic problems would no longer be an issue. There are other side savings too (gas, energy, time, better air, etc.). We need some big wig CEOs to relocate their beach front homes too. Doubt it!

May 9, 2006 05:41 p.m.

Everything is in the hands of crooks and thieves.

May 9, 2006 04:18 p.m.

Heck yes, in a heartbeat

May 9, 2006 03:51 p.m.

Absolutely. Something has to be done as an alternative to the 91 parking lot.

May 9, 2006 02:29 p.m.

Yes, if I was headed in that direction, I would definitely use a toll tunnel. We have to do something about building more roads to handle traffic and as long as it is not built in an overly dangerous manner, I would use it.

May 9, 2006 02:09 p.m.

Not only is the tunnel a great idea, it is absolutely NECESSARY. How can anyone be against ideas like this? The 15 Freeway also needs to be widened. There is so much wasted land on both sides of the freeway that as I am stuck in traffic I think about all the EXTRA lanes that could replace the dirt. It's sad that we have come to this, but we did and we now have to live with it.

May 9, 2006 01:43 p.m.

Four very simple words that I hope the people that are in charge of this problem can understand, and they are... "Too Little, Too Late". But if you must use my tax money to end up doing something about this traffic mess, use my portion to get rid of the Green River Golf Course and widen the 91 without having to continue to "stick it" to the people! Thank you.

May 9, 2006 01:41 p.m.

Yes. Most definitely. However, if tax dollars were spent on building the project, then it should be free for all who pay taxes to use.

May 9, 2006 01:04 p.m.

No. Why should I have to pay to drive on the freeway especially if tax dollars are used to build it?

May 9, 2006 12:44 a.m.

Absolutely!! If it meant getting to work in the OC in a decent amount of time.

May 9, 2006 12:36 a.m.

I would not use a tunnel. This is a crazy idea considering the constant threat of earthquakes.

May 9, 2006 12:31 a.m.

Yes. I avoid using the 91 Freeway whenever possible. It's a driving nightmare. There are not even city street alternatives.

May 9, 2006 12:20 a.m.

Yes! With the ever growing population, we need new arterials to move traffic.

May 9, 2006 12:01 a.m.

YES RIGHT AWAY PLEASE.....!!!!!!!

May 9, 2006 11:29 a.m.

A lot would depend upon the toll amount. But sure, if the price reflected savings on the cost of gas, I might.

May 9, 2006 10:47 a.m.

I think all of these "toll" roads are ridiculous, the counties should be building additional roads and several routes to access travel between the two counties for free! It is sad that it costs the consumer money in gas, car maintenance, DMV costs and now just to drive on a certain road...

All that said, the traffic is so bad, any new development would be welcomed, toll or otherwise.

May 9, 2006 10:45 a.m.

We pay too many gas taxes. Our taxes should take care of the road requirements in this state. I am against all toll roads of any kind. Our highway system in California has been degrading for many years due to the state using gas taxes for give-away programs. Tolls roads represent an increase in taxes. California needs to drastically cut expenditures, go back to a part time government, reduce taxes, and restore the gas tax revenues to our highway system. It is amazing to see how our roads have degraded...

May 9, 2006 10:30 a.m.

Yes! I would be more inclined to seek employment, entertainment and shopping in the O.C. if I could avoid the '91 gridlock each day.

May 9, 2006 10:29 a.m.

Only via a very fast Metrolink train stright to Irvine. I do not think that cars should be allowed to go through it beacuse what if there was an accident? How would the rescue vehicles get there? What about the pollution inside it? Clearly, a train is the best solution. We sould take the (money) and make tax incetives for Orange County business to move out to Riverside County and then take what is left over and build a toll road over the mountian somwhere by Glen Helen and straight into the current toll system in Lake Forest, that will connect into Irvine.

May 9, 2006 10:18 a.m.

I can see no way that a tunnel through Cleveland National Forest will be anything but harmful to that environment and I'm actually very surprised that they are even permitted to consider it. Aren't these forests supposed to be protected?

May 9, 2006 10:05 a.m.

Yes, but it will never be built, too many OC folks don't want it.

May 9, 2006 10:03 a.m.

It is ridiculous to spend the funds on a tunnel. If the goal is to reduce the amount of time spent commuting, provide the proper incentives to encourage businesses to move their facilities to Riverside and create the infrastructure to support the growing economy.

May 9, 2006 10:00 a.m.

No, I wouldn't and I do travel a lot on the weekends. But the fact that it's a tunnel and we have earthquakes out here, that freaks me out, so no.

May 9, 2006 10:00 a.m.

Absolutely! Check out my website at www.buildthetunnelnow.info

May 9, 2006 09:49 a.m.

Most definitely. We are paying way too much now for the 91 Express (Lanes). The tunnel would lower the price and would save billions of dollars on wasted commute, fuel, and provide cleaner air by not having all the cars sitting in traffic with (their) fumes.

May 9, 2006 09:37 a.m.

You betcha!!!

May 9, 2006 09:25 a.m.
If you build it, we will come.

May 9, 2006 08:42 a.m.
Absolutely not!!! But I hope a lot of other people do. It will be nice to get the "freeways" back that I already pay taxes for.

May 9, 2006 07:37 a.m.
No, it's a waste of good land and good money

May 9, 2006 07:01 a.m.
It's the most logical answer to the problem. Yes, I would use it and the idea of having a water line go alongside the traffic portion (although scary if it breaks) is a great way of making it a joint project that lessens the cost.

May 9, 2006 05:58 a.m.
Yes. A very safe mode of travel. Makes great sense to tunnel.

May 9, 2006 01:57 a.m.
Yes, if the toll price isn't very high. I expect it will eventually go way up though, since it seems no one is happy with a reasonable profit anymore. It's no longer good enough for companies to just show a profit, Now they feel it's their right to make a killing! Kinda like the oil companies are doing.

May 9, 2006 00:36 a.m.
Yes, it would relieve the 91 freeway a lot!

May 9, 2006 00:02 a.m.
Absolutely. If (and that's a big "IF") the engineering was done properly to mitigate the fire danger and allow emergency/law enforcement vehicles easy access and NO TRUCKS were allowed transit! A tunnel fire is EXTREMELY dangerous! Ask the Italians and the Swiss what a simple truck full of butter can do to a tunnel. A new corridor between the Inland Empire and Orange County is DESPERATELY required just to stay even with the current demand. But what about future Inland Empire growth? The 15 (Freeway) needs to be tied into the 241 toll road in at least two places.

May 8, 2006 07:55 p.m.
No. I don't want to pay for a darn tunnel. Let the commuters and their employers pay for it!

May 8, 2006 06:24 p.m.
You bet!!!!!!!!!!!!!!
AS WITH MOST OF THE CALIFORNIA TRAFFIC AND CONGESTION...SOMEBODY SHOULD HAVE STARTED MASS TRANSPORTATION, EXPANSION OF EXISTING FREEWAY, TUNNEL TO ORANGE COUNTY-, TUNNEL FROM TEMUCULA TO ORANGE COUNTY, OIL DRILLING OFF THE COAST OF CALIF.
THIS SHOULD HAVE BEEN DONE 20 YEARS AGO -- SOMEBODY HAS BEEN ASLEEP AT THE WHEEL??????????
WHAT HAVE THE SACRAMENTO POLITICANS ACCOMPLISHED ANYWAY??????????????????