



## Slow progress frustrates freeway commuters

INTERSTATE 215: Residents say construction is not keeping up with the area's population growth.

10:00 PM PST on Sunday, November 12, 2006

By **ROCKY SALMON**  
The Press-Enterprise

Residents living near the Interstate 215 corridor from Murrieta to Moreno Valley often have a harder time reaching the freeway than actually driving on it.

With new homes going up in Menifee, Sun City and Perris, the interchanges and arterial roads surrounding the congested four-lane freeway are quickly becoming locked in traffic.

"I don't see any construction workers or detour signs," said Susan Torres, 24, who lives in Perris. "It's getting to be too much."

Officials are banking on millions of regional developer fees, called Transportation Uniform Mitigation Fees, to help ease motorist frustration.

The fees are taxes levied on new building by the county. The funds generated go toward improving traffic flow and transit on major arterials and interchanges. Those TUMF fees can't be used for actual freeway construction.

As potential TUMF projects funnel through the county and regional agencies, a bigger picture emerges of what those improvements are. About 12 projects will affect motorists who use the I-215, either by providing parallel routes to the freeway or allowing better traffic flow on the interchanges.

The I-215 corridor, which begins as two lanes each way in Murrieta and curves through the rapidly growing communities of Menifee, Sun City and Perris before opening up to three lanes in each direction, is receiving 12 projects that are expected to improve the traffic flow in the corridor.

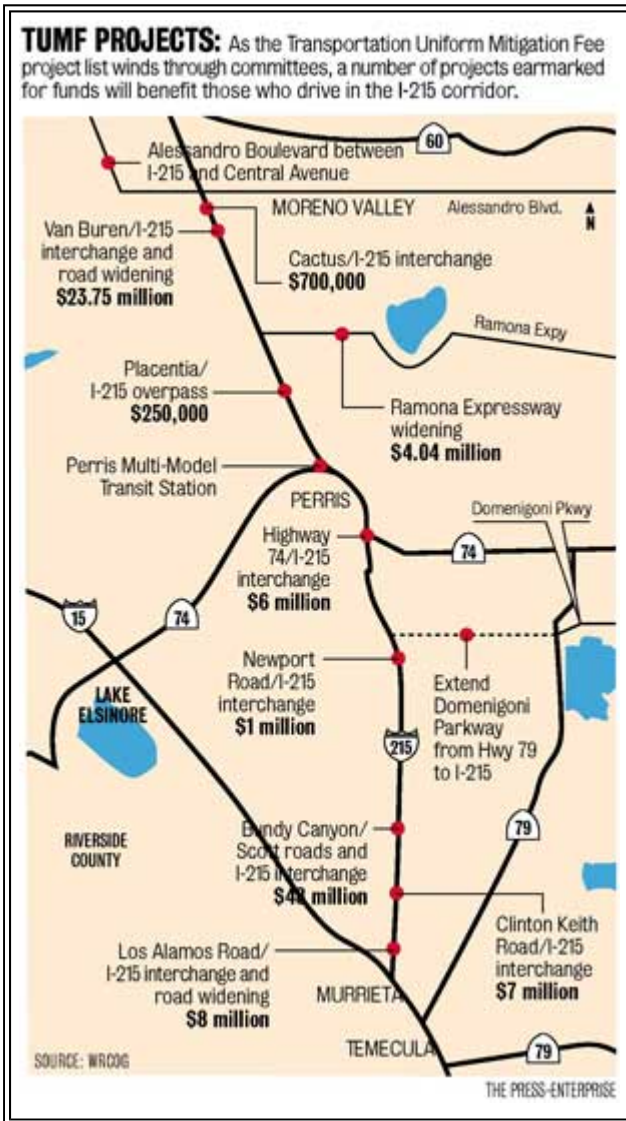
In 2002, about 120,000 cars per day used the stretch of I-215 near Scott Road. In 2004, that number topped 168,000, according to the California Transportation Department.

Transportation experts said those numbers will rise quickly as more than 140,000 more homes and



Frank Bellino / The Press-Enterprises  
Construction crews work on the Los Alamos Road overpass and offramps for Interstate 215 in Murrieta.

millions of square feet of commercial and industrial space build up along the corridor.



Supervisor Jeff Stone asked county staff and Caltrans to look at temporary options to ease congestion until future construction began, which included restriping the lanes to add a lane in each direction.

Caltrans officials said alternative options were not plausible and instead are trying to speed up the first phase of construction along I-215.

Construction isn't expected to begin until 2010 at the earliest. The first phase would add lanes in the median and the remaining phase, not expected until 2015, would widen the freeway to its ultimate width, which is yet to be decided.

Money for that project is expected to come from Measure A and state funds, said Riverside County Transportation Commission officials.

In the meantime, officials hope development fees set aside for interchange construction and improved parallel roads will ease congestion.

Money is set aside for widening Ramona Expressway, for improved interchanges at Scott Road and Highway 74, and for a new transit station in Perris.

"Traffic in Perris is relatively free compared to what they have in Temecula," said city engineer Habib

Motlagh. "But some of the interchanges are becoming a problem with the new development. TUMF gives us the seed money to get these projects going."

Greg Carr said any construction would help. He said people who moved into a new housing development near his Menifee home have affected him.

"At first the local streets started to slow down," the 35-year-old tile setter said. "Then the big streets got swamped. Now it takes 15 minutes to get onto the freeway. Then you get stuck in even worse traffic. It starts off so small but it becomes so big so quickly."

He often grabs lunch in Murrieta off of Los Alamos Road and can see the large sign touting the new interchange work paid for by Measure A and TUMF funds.

"You gripe and gripe about traffic," he said. "It's nice to see some work. Now if only they could fix the actual freeway. We are all going to get on the freeway quicker. And then get stuck there longer."