



# Inland News

## Experts see big downside to growth



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11:43 PM PDT on Wednesday, July 11, 2007

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The Press-Enterprise

Highway gridlock will be unavoidable if Southern California businesses and commuters don't dig deep into their pockets in coming decades to pay for new roads, tunnels and rails, said a regional planning agency's top planner.

"It will be a nightmare," said Hasan Ikhata, director of planning and policy for Southern California Association of Governments, which includes Riverside and San Bernardino counties and Inland cities.

He estimates the six-county region will need to spend \$140 billion by 2035 on new roads, freeways, bridges, public transit, truck lanes and even tunnel under the Cleveland National Forest to avoid gridlock.

The state Department of Finance this week projected that by 2050, Riverside County will have the state's second-largest county population, and San Bernardino County will rank seventh for a total Inland count of 8.3 million, more than double today's 4 million residents.

"If you have that growth and you don't do the kind of major infrastructure improvement we're talking about you will see single digit speeds on the freeway," Ikhata said.

There's no sure picture of what life might be like in 2050 if the region doubles its population, said Robert Cervero, a professor of city and regional planning at UC Berkeley.

### **Packed Like Europe**

Riverside and San Bernardino and other cities could come to resemble densely packed European and Japanese cities, where residents park cars in tall structures rather than ground-level parking lots, commuters crowd buses and trains and families live in smaller homes that are much closer to their neighbors than today's big lot tract home neighborhoods.

"It means making a sacrifice," Cervero said. "If you want to reduce congestion, it means giving up a lot of private living space."

The average commute time of Inland residents is about 29 minutes, but people could get so fed up with long

commutes cutting into their family time that they move to other areas.

"It will always be self-correcting," he said. "If the average commute bumps up toward an hour, they will say California's not that great, and they'll move to Boise, Idaho."

But not enough people will move away to avoid having to deal with steep population growth because about three-quarters of the new arrivals will be children born to current residents, said Ikhrata.

### **Burden on Users**

He predicted that local, state and federal governments are unlikely to increase the main sources of transportation-building money -- sales and gasoline taxes, local and state construction bonds and federal transportation funds. Future increases, he said, must come from users who are willing to pay more to save travel time.

Riverside and San Bernardino counties have half-cent sales tax measures to raise money for transportation projects through much of the next 35 years. Riverside County's Measure A expires in 2039, while San Bernardino County's Measure I expires in 2040.

Transportation agency officials say that neither sales-tax measure is expected to raise all the money each county will need for transportation improvements.

One major unknown is the cost of materials and construction. Costs have jumped as much as 50 percent in four years on many projects, said John Standiford, spokesman for the Riverside County Transportation Commission.

California voters last year approved Prop. 1B, the \$19.9 billion transportation bond, "and we thought that was a lot of money," Standiford said. But some transportation experts said at the time that the existing problems already would cost more than \$100 billion to fix, he said.

"Push it out a few years, and the problem is exponentially worse," Standiford said.

But much is unknown looking that far into the future, he said.

"We don't even know if travel patterns will be the same or if people are still going to be going the same places they are now," Standiford said. "And I don't know if we can predict certain technological advances."

Most transportation experts think the state traffic crunch can be fixed only with investment of private money, said Cheryl Donahue, spokeswoman for San Bernardino Associated Governments. Possibilities include toll roads that allow private companies to invest in the transportation system, then make a profit from the tolls.

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## **How Far \$140 Billion Goes**

Here's what \$140 billion in transportation spending could buy.

**\$30 billion:** Truck lanes on the 710, 60 and 15 freeways

**\$10 billion:** Railroad grade crossings and expanded capacity on existing rail lines

**\$21 billion:** New high-speed cargo and passenger rail system from seaports to Inland area

**\$3 billion:** Tunnel under Cleveland National Forest connecting Riverside and Orange counties

**\$1.6 billion:** Highway 138 corridor linking the High Desert and north Los Angeles County

**\$3 billion:** Closing the 710 freeway gap between Pasadena and Los Angeles

**\$71.4 billion:** Maintaining existing system, and building planned projects through 2030

Source: Southern California Association of Governments

Additional possibilities for alternative transportation projects in the Inland area include:

Another route, either adjacent to or above Highway 91, to get drivers between Riverside and Orange counties

Toll lanes on Highway 91 between Orange County and Interstate 15. The lanes would be linked to the existing 91 Express Lanes.

Toll lanes on Interstate 15 between Highway 74 in Lake Elsinore and the San Bernardino County line. The lanes would be linked to the toll lanes on Highway 91.

Toll and/or reversible lanes on Interstate 15 through the Cajon Pass

Expanded bus systems, with more express bus routes

Bus rapid transit systems that resemble above-ground subways with buses on roads instead of trains on rail tracks

Expanded Metrolink service Hemet/San Jacinto, Murrieta/Temecula, Lake Elsinore and the Coachella Valley

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