

CORONA: Event celebrates start of Highway 91 project



DAVID BAUMAN/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Officials holding shovels participate in the groundbreaking ceremony for 91 Project Fast Forward in Corona on Wednesday, Dec. 11. The project will extend eight miles of toll lanes that will begin in the Corona area.

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BY SUZANNE HURT | STAFF WRITER | December 11, 2013; 03:16 PM

Transportation officials gathered in Corona Wednesday, Dec. 11, for the ceremonial ground breaking on a \$1.3 billion project to widen Highway 91, creating more than 16,000 jobs and making "the Corona crawl" a thing of the past.

Assemblywoman Bonnie Lowenthal, D-Long Beach – who chairs the Assembly Transportation Committee – said political partisanship initially set up a road block to the project.

But Wednesday, a dozen federal, state and local dignitaries gathered within view of the highway to applaud the partnerships that won funding and approval for the Inland area's first toll lanes by widening the freeway between the Orange County line and Interstate 15 in Corona.

The four-year road construction project will add two toll lanes and a general-use lane in both directions for an eight-mile segment. Also, eight new overpass bridges will be built, 13 will be widened and two replaced.

"The project emphasizes the importance of partnerships, which is what's needed to build big

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during the event, attended by 60000 people a ton on top of the North main Corona Metropolitan Station parking garage. "These kinds of partnerships are both a core and a key element for building California's future."

The project will be the largest tackled by the Riverside County Transportation Commission, which is chaired by Corona Mayor Karen Spiegel. Barriers will be erected and restriping will begin in January. Road construction isn't expected to begin until spring.

Following the remarks, the 12 speakers grabbed shovels and dug into a pile of dirt on the garage roof as the Corona High School Madrigals sang "God Bless America" and Highway 91 traffic sped by in the distance.

On Main Street, drivers approved of the highway widening, but expressed concerns about construction impacts.

Melissa Lozano, 19, said her family is looking for a new apartment because their building near a highway exit may be torn down for the project. She and sister Lorena, 18, will have to leave home earlier to get to North-West College in Riverside each day, she said.

Leaving a Circle K gas station, Gary Brents said highway shoulders that are narrowed or eliminated during construction pose risks to first-responders and tow-truck drivers like him.

"These highways are highways I work on," he said.

Paw Spa owner Donna Kennedy Clark said once work is complete she anticipates an easier commute for her husband, who moved in after their engagement even though he had to leave for work at 5 a.m. for Orange County.

"That's how you know someone loves you," she said.

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