

## Toll highway taking shape

### South Bay Expressway on track to open in June

**By Tanya Mannes**  
STAFF WRITER

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CHULA VISTA – Workers have begun laying pavement for the South Bay Expressway, a toll road that will form a long-awaited shortcut through the eastern portion of the city.

After three years of work, the 12½-mile road is taking shape as a wide dirt path snaking from state Route 54 in Spring Valley to state Route 905 near the U.S.-Mexico border.

Crews have built a customer service center at the road's southern tip that will be the hub providing service to commuters. Now the road itself is emerging, with black pavement spreading farther down the route each day.

The South Bay Expressway, which will be the southern portion of state Route 125, is on track for a June 2007 opening.

Mayor Steve Padilla said the road is “a critical piece of transportation infrastructure” that will help the economy thrive.

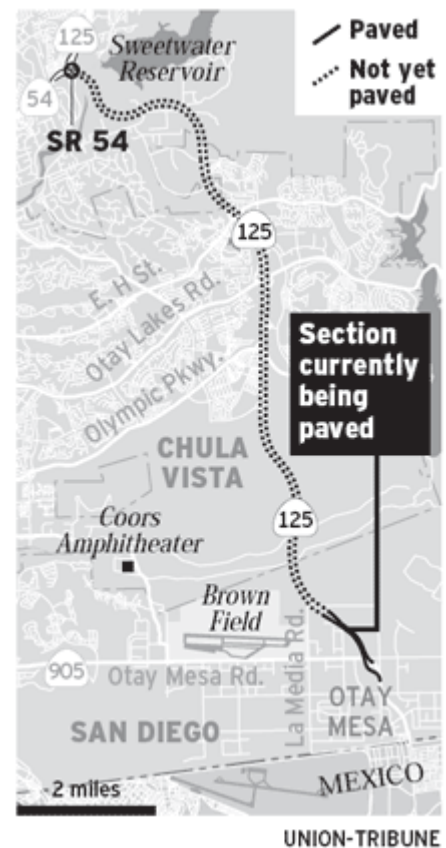
“It's not coming on line as soon as we would have liked, but it is what it is and we are very glad it's coming,” Padilla said.

It will serve an explosion of development in eastern Chula Vista, including the Otay Ranch Town Center – an upscale mall that opened last week – and six new housing communities.

Greg Hulsizer, chief executive officer of the private company that's building the road, said the expressway and the development will support each other.

“You can't have development without the transportation facilities to support it, and you can't have a toll road without the traffic to support it,” Hulsizer said.

Hulsizer is the chief executive officer of South Bay Expressway, formerly known as California Transportation Ventures. The company won a California Department of Transportation contract in 1990 to build the road but was stalled by regulatory and court battles.



Construction began in September 2003.

During the past year, the company also has faced delays caused by shortages of materials and skilled labor, Hulsizer said.

Under a 35-year franchise agreement, South Bay Expressway is constructing the road and will manage it, including setting the tolls. The company hopes to recoup its investment and ultimately make a profit from the tolls.

After 35 years, the road will become the property of Caltrans.

The toll prices are expected to be announced in January. The maximum price is expected to be about \$3.50 to \$4.00 for the full 12.5-mile stretch, with shorter trips costing less. Different rates will apply to commercial vehicles.

Hulsizer said most users – 75 percent to 80 percent, based on statistics from similar roads – are expected to use an electronic FasTrak pass with which tolls are automatically deducted from an account. The other option for drivers is to pay cash at on-ramps going north and off-ramps going south.

The South Bay Expressway will be the fourth toll road in California. All the others are in Orange County. Tollers are also required to use certain bridges, including the Golden Gate Bridge, and to use express lanes on Interstate 15.

The highway will be the third stretch of road connecting the north and south regions of the county. The others are Interstates 5 and 805.

Drivers who wish to avoid tolls won't have to use the South Bay Expressway. All Chula Vista destinations are accessible through other roads.

Councilman Steve Castaneda, who owns a transportation and land-use consulting firm, said having the road is essential for quicker and better access to eastern Chula Vista.

However, Castaneda said it's difficult to predict how residents and commercial drivers will react to having to pay tolls.

“We need to operate it the best we can and hope the community will use it,” Castaneda said.

The city of Chula Vista is considering an agreement in which it would partially “buy down” tolls with a subsidy for the first year. Details of how that would work are being negotiated.

The total cost of the project is estimated at \$820 million, with funding from federal sources, private and federal loans, investor equity and the San Diego Association of Governments. It also includes land rights of way that were donated by Chula Vista developers.



LAURA EMBRY / Union-Tribune

Frameworks positioned over newly paved highway lanes on the South Bay Expressway will hold cameras and antennas for drivers who use FasTrak passes. Employees constructing a toll plaza could be seen from the traffic operations center in the South Bay Expressway building in Chula Vista, where traffic data will be routed to the Caltrans management center.

South Bay Expressway Ltd. Partnership is part of the Macquarie Infrastructure Group, based in Sydney, Australia. The company manages 14 major roads around the world.

The tollway includes a bridge across the Otay River Valley, the largest portion of the project. It will have on-and off-ramps at San Miguel Ranch Road, East H Street, Otay Lakes/Telegraph Canyon Road, Olympic Parkway and Birch Road. Future interchanges, called Rock Mountain and Lone Star, will open when the areas are more developed. The interchange at state Route 54 will not include a toll plaza.

The road will provide access to new neighborhoods on the city's east side: Lomas Verdes, Otay Ranch, Rolling Hills Ranch, Rancho San Miguel, Sunbow and EastLake.

Years from now, the highway is expected to extend to the U.S.-Mexico border.



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Landscapers Artemio Rodriguez (left) and Jesus Marquez dug holes for plants surrounding the operations center at the southern tip of the South Bay Expressway in Chula Vista.

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