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Big transportation projects connect hot spots of activity

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State Route 125 in the south and the Sprinter in the north will help knit different parts of the county together later this year -- a county filled with hotspots of activity.

The biggest single-ticket item in the South Bay (largely privately financed) is the upcoming completion of the 11-mile state Route 125 toll-way segment (called the South Bay Expressway) from SR 905 at the border to the Spring Valley area. The toll-way, being built at a projected cost of \$637 million, will make Otay Mesa more accessible. Completion is slated for sometime this fall.

Otay Mesa, an industrial center since the 1980s, didn't really explode with residential projects until a decade later. Then with such projects as **Pardee Construction Cos.**'s Dennery Ranch/Ocean View Hills, thousands of homes were built in this border community and more are on the way.

Otay Mesa was not originally designed with smart growth concepts in mind, but has developed into a mixed-use area with industrial, residential and some retail uses coupled with the more heavily industrialized areas around Brown Field.

While lots of land still remains on the mesa, readily developable property is in short supply. It also doesn't help that much of the sewer infrastructure is not yet in place on the eastern part of the mesa.

Route 125 will provide area residents with better access to the Otay Ranch development in Chula Vista that once consisted of about 19,000 acres before it began to be parceled out amongst homebuilders at the end of the 1980s and early 1990s.

Otay Ranch, which is being developed in a series of villages with 28,000 residential units at build out, was very much conceived with mixed-use in mind.

While Otay Ranch may not offer as many industries as Otay Mesa, it has an upscale employer in the 67,000-square-foot Sharp Rees-Stealy medical office building that at last check had more than 200 employees. Smart growth seems to work in this case where an estimated 65 percent of the center's workers live within Otay Ranch, with some others living in neighboring EastLake.

Both Otay Ranch and EastLake stand to benefit from the recently completed Otay Ranch Town Center development completed by **General Growth Properties** late last year. Tenants at the center -- which is walking distance for many Otay Ranch residents and employs hundreds of people -- include Macy's, REI, Apple Computer and P.F. Chang's China Bistro, among others.

McMillin Land Development is planning the Eastern Urban Center on 214 acres on Otay Ranch. The mixed-use plan for 3,000 housing units and 3.4 million square feet of commercial in office, civic, retail and hotel elements may be destined to become a hot smart growth spot in the years to come.

Thousands of units are also in the works in National City, and if the Chargers end up on the port property, many more units would be needed in other parts of the city to support the development. Chula Vista, too, is being eyed for a possible stadium, both inland near the Olympic Training Center and along the bay front.

A bit to the north in downtown San Diego, some 10,000 housing units are either under construction, planned or approved. Still, **Centre City Development Corp.** officials don't foresee a problem, since few sizable projects will come online prior to 2009 once the current crop of about 3,000 units are completed.

Downtown San Diego has scores of restaurants and a new Albertson's supermarket to join the Ralphs, but with little but The Monarch School, families aren't yet expected to be part of the urban lifestyle.

Mission Valley began to come into its own as a residential community nearly two decades ago, with projects like **The Douglas Allred Co.**'s River Run. The area now has easy access to the trolley and shopping, restaurants and entertainment.

The newest big plan in the works on the little remaining land is Quarry Falls, a **Sudberry Properties** master plan with 4,780 residential units, 600,000 square feet of office, as much as 500,000 square feet of retail and a High

Tech High school. Projects like this seem to prove that dense-pack living is an acceptable way to go, at least in Mission Valley.

Perhaps the biggest question now in the valley is what will happen to the Qualcomm Stadium parking lot now that the Chargers are going somewhere else. These lots could potentially hold thousands of housing units plus other uses, but the site is also plagued with an enormous gas plume beneath the ground.

Over on Point Loma, the hot spot is **Corky McMillin Cos.**' Liberty Station. With everything from shopping to housing to high schools to dance studios, the former Naval Training Center site is one of the most eclectic sites in the city.

Trader Joe's and Vons are among the new arrivals in The Marketplace, a 150,000-square-foot shopping center by **C.W. Clark Inc.** at Liberty Station that also includes Starbucks and Cold Stone Creamery.

Liberty Station has become an extension of upscale Point Loma, with many of its homes in the \$1 million to \$2 million range.

In the North County, construction continues to move forward on the 22-mile-long Sprinter line that will extend from Oceanside to Escondido, and link bedroom communities with employment centers all along the route.

Each of the cities -- Oceanside, Vista, San Marcos and Escondido -- are developing mixed-use projects in their downtowns. Oceanside, for example, has seen explosive residential growth in its downtown, particularly within a few blocks of the coast. Oceanside may not have the cache of Liberty Station's Point Loma address, but a \$1 million to \$2 million price tag isn't uncommon for these coastal units.

Oceanside's residential has grown so quickly, in fact, that Jane McVey, the city's Economic Development and Redevelopment director, has had to work hard to safeguard her industrial land. That industrial land has also been under pressure from other entities, such as churches, that want the property for their own purposes.

Further inland, with a couple of exceptions, Vista's business parks are largely built out, and much of the housing is already spoken for, but there is still a plan to transform a mix of substandard uses, such as bars and light industrial, into a uniform multicultural vision. This plan, which would focus on the North Santa Fe Corridor, would feature housing, retail and restaurants.

Further east, officials at California State University, San Marcos are hoping the university will be a magnet for new business development, much in the way the University of California, San Diego is for the biotechnology industry.

The city of San Marcos continues to plan for this future both with residential housing for new workers and with new planned business park development.

A few projects in the works will emphasize both mixed-use and proximity to California State San Marcos. To the northwest of the campus, **H.G. Fenton Co.** plans to develop 750 condominiums and 580,000 square feet of office/industrial space.

The Creekside master plan nearby is planned for 1,725 condominiums, 525 apartments, 1.1 million square feet of shops and 600,000 square feet of office space.

Density is the key to making downtown Escondido a hot spot for development. Thousands of new condominiums are eventually planned, along with new retail opportunities. The Sprinter Rail Line will be a major focal point of this effort. While Escondido's downtown will be redeveloped over the coming years and decades, the Sprinter is slated to be up and running by the end of the year.