

AT LONG LAST, ROUTE 56; [1,2,6,7 Edition]

The San Diego Union - Tribune. San Diego, Calif.: Jul 22, 2004. pg. B.8

Abstract (Document Summary)

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Full Text (322 words)

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Just after George Maharis and Martin Milner made their last trek on television's popular "Route 66," California decided it was time to build Route 56. That (for the youngsters) was 1965. This week, after 40 years, \$220 million, explosive residential development, unnumbered incidents of road rage and completion of a last "missing piece," the east-west highway linking I-15 and I-5 opened.

That's good news for an anticipated 20,000 drivers a day, who have San Diego City Council members Brian Maienschein and Scott Peters, among others, to thank. It's pretty good news, too, for drivers on surface streets that now are less congested.

It's less-good news for motorists who want to head off 56 to I-5 north or come off I-5 south to take 56 east: The other last missing piece is ramp access in those directions. Who would have thought, 40 years ago, there'd be a need for it?

Not Caltrans, which notes that forecasts of traffic and development during Route 56 planning stages suggested no need for these ramps -- and that even now the dominant commute runs from Route 56 to southbound I-5.

But Carmel Valley residents are already saying we told 'em so and expecting the previous backup simply to shift to other streets. "It was totally irresponsible to approve a freeway without those connectors," says Jan Fuchs, chairwoman of land use for the Carmel Valley Planning Board. Caltrans is working toward those connectors, maybe under way by 2010, maybe with funds Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger hopes to get from Indian tribes in exchange for more slots and dedicate to transportation improvements.

Don't bet the townhouse. The statewide list of must-have transportation improvements is hundreds of miles long and billions of dollars short. Meantime, however, commutes will ease for thousands of motorists, for a while. And after years of delay from funding and environmental problems, even this last 41(1)2-mile stretch between Rancho Penasquitos and Carmel Valley is no small feat.

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Document types: EDITORIAL;

Column Name: NORTH COUNTY OPINION

Section: OPINION

Text Word Count 322

Document URL: