

For city drivers, a connection is made | Route 56's linking stretch will open to traffic tomorrow; [2,3 Edition]

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Abstract (Document Summary)

3 PICS; 1. San Diego Mayor [Dick Murphy] emceed yesterday's celebration of the completion of the connecting stretch of state Route 56, which included a parade of vintage convertibles. 2. Hundreds of cyclists and pedestrians enjoyed riding or walking on a state highway without worrying about traffic yesterday. The new stretch has been completed after 39 years of planning. 3. FINDING A NEW ROUTE -- Laura Dalupan (right), her twins, Jerrod and Shawna, and hundreds of others tried out the new stretch of state Route 56 yesterday. The corridor will open to vehicles tomorrow morning. (B- 1); Credit: 1,2,3. Laura Embry / Union-Tribune photos

Full Text (739 words)

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After 39 years of anticipation, the waiting comes down to a single day.

With loving glimpses down an empty road, San Diego County celebrated the imminent kickoff to a spanking-new segment of state Route 56 with a festival on the highway median yesterday and a collective sigh of relief.

"We've been waiting for this to open for a long time," said Don George, who brought his 7-year-old twins, Olivia and Anna, to the ceremony at the Rancho Penasquitos end of the project.

"What's really nice about this is, we'll only be 10 minutes from the beach," added George, who would use the highway to get to work tomorrow if not for an out-of-town trip.

Officially opening to rush-hour traffic tomorrow, the \$220 million segment completes a new link between Interstates 15 and 5 -- and between the eastern and western communities of San Diego -- first penciled onto highway planning charts in 1965.

Mayor Dick Murphy, who emceed yesterday's celebration, characterized Route 56 as "one of the most anticipated freeway projects in San Diego history" and said it addressed "the No. 1 issue affecting quality of life" -- traffic congestion.

The California Department of Transportation projects the new segment will draw 40,000 to 50,000 vehicles daily at first, taking 20,000 or more vehicles off local streets and roads. By 2020, the highway is expected to carry as many as 120,000 vehicles a day, some using space in the middle that has been set aside for a future high-occupancy vehicle lane.

Lined up in vintage convertibles, Murphy and other dignitaries punched through a white curtain in a slow-moving parade to mark the ceremonial opening of the freeway segment.

Right behind them, hundreds of cyclists and pedestrians enjoyed the singular opportunity to ride or walk on a state highway without worrying about traffic. About one-third of a mile of the new segment was open in each direction for the event.

Nicholas Lindeman, 5, rode his Incredible Hulk scooter for a short way on the freeway; other children were spotted on tricycles and skates or in wagons.

Caltrans officials don't have a firm time for opening the highway to regular vehicular traffic tomorrow, but said they are shooting for 5 a.m., or nearly an hour before sunrise. The agency needed some time after yesterday's ceremony for last-minute work, including the removal of concrete barriers.

For some, the moment can't come soon enough.

"I remember being told in elementary school that by the time I was in high school, I'd be taking state Route 56 to the beach," said City Councilman Brian Maienschein, credited as one of the prime movers on the project. "It's been a long process."

Tony D'Agnese, who attended the ceremony with his wife, Carol, and their sons Luke, 3, and Max, 9 months, said he expects his commute to Sorrento Valley to become "a little more convenient."

The family also started giving relatives in Los Angeles simplified driving instructions to their Rancho Penasquitos home.

Bill Farrell, who has been waiting for the freeway "since we moved in seven years ago," plans to be on the road by 7 a.m. tomorrow, bound for Torrey Pines Mesa.

Farrell had been using Black Mountain Road and Carmel Valley Road for his commute. The savings from the new route will be "10 to 15 minutes -- I already calculated it," he said. OHe also expects to use a bike path along the Route 56 corridor once or twice a week.

Even Rancho Penasquitos residents who don't expect to use the highway daily were on hand. Lori Hansen and her family of four from Carmel Valley were among the celebrants; Hansen said they're looking forward to the shortcut to visit friends in Rancho Bernardo and to shop in Mira Mesa.

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[Illustration]

3 PICS; Caption: 1. San Diego Mayor Dick Murphy emceed yesterday's celebration of the completion of the connecting stretch of state Route 56, which included a parade of vintage convertibles. 2. Hundreds of cyclists and pedestrians enjoyed riding or walking on a state highway without worrying about traffic yesterday. The new stretch has been completed after 39 years of planning. 3. FINDING A NEW ROUTE -- Laura Dalupan (right), her twins, Jerrod and Shawna, and hundreds of others tried out the new stretch of state Route 56 yesterday. The corridor will open to vehicles tomorrow morning. (B- 1); Credit: 1,2,3. Laura Embry / Union-Tribune photos

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