

From www.TollroadNews.com -- Posted Fri, 2007-11-23 22:44

San Diego's South Bay Expressway opened Monday

The South Bay Expressway (SBE) in the eastern part of the San Diego area opened Monday (Nov 19) after ceremonies the prior Friday. The tollroad 15km (9.3mi) long has had what is described in local reports as "light to moderate" traffic this week. Forecasts have been that average daily traffic will settle early in the range 30k to 40k.

The local press has been very positive about the new road, quoting people happy they can get places they want to go, much quicker and with less strain. The cash toll to go the length of the road will be \$3.75 or 25c/km (40.3c/mile).

The transponder toll (FasTrak brand) will be \$3.50 or 23.3c/km (37.6c/mi) when transponder tolling begins January 13. Cash tolling is free for two weeks - to December 3.

For now motorists with a transponder account are traveling free as an opening promotion. The road extends from CA54 and CA125 in Spring Valley/Bonita area at its northern end to CA905 (Otay Mesa Rd) near the Otay Mesa border crossing into Mexico.

It has five intermediate interchanges in an area of dense new suburban development and provides north-south connectivity for local as well as long distance traffic. Major structure is a long bridge over the Otay Mesa river valley on piers 30m (100ft) high.

Opening ceremony speeches

At the opening ceremony Expressway CEO Greg Hulsizer said: "This is a great day for residents across San Diego. They've waited a long time for this road and we're excited about putting the fun back in driving by providing a fast, reliable, scenic commute."



Lemon Grove Mayor Mary Sessom, and chair of SANDAG, the area association of governments said: "The success of this unique partnership means a better quality of life for residents in our region. This new expressway will significantly cut commutes and allow people to have more time for family and friends."

Steve Allen of Macquarie, owners of the 35 year toll franchise who have funded \$635m of the \$840m road said: "South Bay Expressway is a real life example of the power of public-private partnerships and the role that private investment can play in accelerating the delivery of needed infrastructure to communities."



Otay Mesa River bridge near south end of South Bay Expressway

16 years to get built

Allen must have been thinking of another Macquarie project? The concession for SBE was finalized in 1991. The 16 years it took to get built is hardly an advertisement for the private concession model.

As Genevieve Giuliano of USC was quoted in the LA Times: "It's not like they figured out some magic to make controversial decisions and get things done quickly... It has taken a lot of effort, a lot of work..." And she might have added, a lot of time.

14 years of tussle

First the project was mired in six years of not-in-my-backyard issues that were eventually resolved with a dogleg routing and major efforts to mitigate the noise and visibility of the road, plus gaining local support by funding horse trails and ballfields. Then there was another seven years of obstructionism by US government agencies - notably the US Fish and Wildlife Service and the US EPA.

More than \$20m was eventually committed to environmental improvements to win permits. That included funding of original research into habitat of a rare butterfly, purchase of 405ha (1,000 acres) of wild lands for a permanent reserve plus wildlife and habitat protection programs.

Parsons Brinckerhoff through a subsidiary California Transportation Ventures signed the original concession in 1991 and developed the project through to 2004 showing great perseverance. Local officials in the San Diego area, and in the city of Chula Vista which it traverses, strongly supported the project throughout.

Gary Gallegos the CEO of SANDAG the local association of governments is quoted: "We had a tremendous challenge



trying to get this done. I've got years of scar tissue to show for it."

"This is the way" - US Gov rep Barrett

Representing the US Government at the ceremonies deputy secretary of transportation Thomas Barrett said:

"California also has been a leader in using innovative tolling and pricing approaches for HOT lanes on San Diego's I-15 and exp

ress lanes on Orange County's SR 91. Now, you are showing the way again.

"The new South Bay Expressway is a prime example of the public-private partnership and innovative financing that the USDOT, under Transportation Secretary Mary Peters' leadership, has been urging states to pursue.

"Secretary Peters has been traveling the nation, talking to local and state planners about how public-private partnerships provide a way to bring congestion relief years sooner than would otherwise be possible with traditional financing methods.

"The South Bay Expressway accomplishes this by using private capital to turn a 'long-needed but how can we possibly pay for it' highway project into a reality.

"It is a user-pay road – a toll road rather than a taxpayer-funded road. It is financed, built, operated and maintained with tolls that will be electronically collected – from the people who choose to use it to save time and reduce stress in their daily lives.

"According to Secretary Peters, if we want to make a lasting impact on drivers' commutes, we must ensure that this road is the first of more to come, and not just a footnote to what was once tried. California can and should lead the nation, connecting this road to many more like it and showing commuters across the country that you can successfully cut congestion."

Concession may go from 35 to 45 years

Macquarie, the concession holders want to extend the concession beyond the 35 years of toll rights they presently have. Local governments want to relax restrictions in the toll concession on expansion of parallel roads. Negotiations on that are expected to start shortly. The state has already legislated to allow a 10 year extension of the concession period subject to local support, so the makings of a deal are there.

-----/

Other relevant web pages from HonoluluTraffic.com:

South Bay Expressway, San Diego County, CA, USA, Road Traffic Technology

http://www.roadtraffic-technology.com/project_printable.asp?ProjectID=3451

\$800 million Innovative Public Private Partnership for 12.5 mile 2-stage project, connects SR-54 and SR 905, forecasted to carry nearly 200,000 vehicles per day.

Tollroad to open in San Diego County amid expectations, Los Angeles Times, 11/17/07

<http://www.latimes.com/news/local/la-me-tollroad17nov17,0,679573.story?page=2&coll=la-home-local>