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Tolls to Buy Time, Convenience on 10-Mile-Long South Bay Expressway Route 125 Will Provide Alternative To 905 Gridlock

By Brad Graves
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The scene outside Greg Hulsizer's Otay Mesa office is a work in progress. In an expanse of freshly moved earth, brand-new tollbooths guard an unfinished highway that stretches north and out of sight.

This is the South Bay Expressway. Hulsizer and the other people overseeing the \$635 million highway project hope to open the road this summer.

The highway, known as state Route 125, traverses 10 miles from Otay Mesa, through the recently built eastern suburbs of Chula Vista to the area near Sweetwater Reservoir, where it meets up with state Route 54 and an existing segment of Route 125.

The highway's developers prefer the "Expressway" moniker, emphasizing that the toll road will be fast. They envision the four-lane highway as a way for people to avoid the cheek-by-jowl congestion of state Route 905 and Otay Mesa Road.

The road should open in late summer.

"Everybody's waiting for it," said Delfino Ortiz, owner of San Diego Truck Driving School on Otay Mesa. For truckers, the highway should be a timesaver. "As you know, time is money," Ortiz said.

Hulsizer, who is chief executive of South Bay Expressway, said it costs truckers \$75 for every hour they wait in traffic. The figure comes from focus groups interviewed by his organization.

Trans-border traffic headed for the Inland Empire will use the South Bay Expressway, Hulsizer said, adding that traffic headed for Los Angeles and Long Beach may also see it as an attractive route.

Steve Zisser says it will change the commuting habits of most people at his office. The Zisser Group is a legal and consulting business serving the import-export community.

Most of the 12 employees live north of their Otay Mesa office. To get home, they must make what Zisser calls "the big U-turn," heading west to Interstate 805, going north, then heading east again to their homes. The expressway will offer a more direct route.

Cindy Gompper-Graves takes a big-picture view of the highway's benefit.

The chief executive of the South County Economic Development Council sees a highway for border freight traffic — and a conduit for local traffic.

The toll highway will offer drivers a convenient way to get to the new Otay Ranch Town Center mall, and an "urban core" planned near the mall.