



Dramatic, wide-open vistas — and a new, four-lane divided expressway — now greet travelers on State Route 14 north of the Lancaster/Palmdale area. Long envisioned by area officials, the project to revamp the four-mile stretch recently finished, and planning for the next stage of work is underway.

First Link of Safer Mojave Route Finished

State Route 14 Part of a Three-Stage Project Improving Access to Eastern Sierra

Recent travelers on State Route 14 in Kern County, a major freight and tourist corridor on the eastern side of the state, are now riding on a new stretch of highway in the rolling desert landscape that's a welcoming passageway to the beautiful Eastern Sierra. This corridor runs north from the Los Angeles/Lancaster area, connects with U.S. Highway 395, and brings local, national and international travelers as well as freight through the area that includes eastern Kern, Inyo and Mono counties.

The recent ribbon cutting for the first segment of the Freeman Gulch Project marked completion of the first of three projects planned to address critical voids between existing sections of four-lane divided expressway.

The completed segment converted what had been a two-lane highway into a four-lane expressway. It covers four miles, and improves safety for the traveling public by separating opposing traffic, removing passing restrictions, controlling and limiting access points, and providing adequate shoulder widths to allow drivers to regain control of errant vehicles without leaving the paved shoulder area.

In addition, the new shoulders provide much-needed areas for emergency and disabled vehicle parking, providing a safe refuge for vehicles until help arrives.

The former two-lane highway had become outdated for today's driving conditions. The mix of traffic and differences in posted speed limits — 65 mph for passenger vehicles and 55 mph for commercial and recreational vehicles — created congested conditions as cars slowed behind larger vehicles, leading to driver frustration and potentially unsafe passing maneuvers.

Segment two will upgrade 6.2 miles of two-lane conventional highway to four-lane expressway. This segment is currently in design, with construction expected to begin in 2020. Segment three will close the final gap and upgrade the last 7.1 miles of conventional highway to four-lane expressway, completing the long-anticipated vision for an Eastern Sierra Corridor.

This project that lies within Caltrans regional District 9 was made possible due to a unique partnership. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was reached in 1999 and updated several times over the next 15 years

Project Spotlight



to leverage resources from three counties with a shared interest in transporting people and goods safely, and upgrading this corridor. The MOU covers several projects that are all recognized as mutually beneficial to all participants, and the agreement stipulates the funding structure for each project with the percentage and type of funding contributed by each participant. The State has committed just over \$5.5 million toward this \$37.4 million project. The agreement among Kern, Inyo and Mono counties and the State fully funds this project.

Caltrans regional District 6 based in Fresno and District 9 that oversees Eastern Sierra highway projects from its Bishop base carried the first segment of the Freeman Gulch work through to completion.

The project team faced extreme temperatures, high winds and encounters with the Mojave Green rattlesnake. The project was in a sensitive environmental area that presented several significant challenges.

The project site was within or near the habitat of 21 regulated species, and required nearly eight miles of exclusionary fencing to be cleared by biologists and installed before work could begin.

In addition, 60 days were planned to review the entire site prior to the preparation work ahead of construction. This was accomplished through coordination and communication between the contractor and Caltrans staff.

Granite Construction was the prime contractor on the first segment of the Freeman Gulch Project and completed the work on time and under budget.

When commitments are made among agencies on projects such as these that benefit residents, visitors, businesses and the goods movement industry, Caltrans fulfills a primary goal of providing safer roads and improving mobility while protecting the traveling public.

Lt. John Williams of Mojave California Highway Patrol said, "We are optimistic that through Caltrans' dedication to this project, in collaboration with the CHP, this project will help in reducing collisions and make the area a safer place to travel."

Ahron Hakimi, Executive Director of Kern Council of Governments, noted, "Great project, long overdue, it shouldn't take a generation for projects like this that saves lives, helps reduce congestion and helps move goods and people."

Caltrans District 9 Director Brent Green said, "I appreciate our local partners as well as the taxpayers, who recognized the importance of bringing this project to fulfillment." **MM**

Source: *Cindy Azima, Deputy District Director, Administration; Florene Trainor and Christine Knadler, public information officers, Caltrans District 9*



A pipeline to route water from the highway is installed as part of the Freeman Gulch project. The desert area is prone to flash flooding.