



[Comments](#) 0 | [Recommend](#) 0

While environmental studies are running late, an official says the proposed Mid-County Parkway is on schedule



[Download story podcast](#)

07:33 PM PDT on Wednesday, July 16, 2008

By **DUG BEGLEY**
The Press-Enterprise

Environmental studies for a west-central Riverside County route which officials stress is needed between San Jacinto and Corona won't be ready until late September, as the project battles opposition from its neighbors.

Preliminary environmental reports on the proposed Mid-County Parkway were initially expected last month, when officials with the Riverside County Transportation Commission authorized them in 2007. Cathy Bechtel, project development director for the commission, said changes in how noise effects are studied and extra time needed to survey the route led to the three-month delay.

"Overall, the project is still on schedule," she said.

Transportation commissioners in September approved studying the route, identifying the southernmost alternative for a road that would tie the Ramona Expressway to Placentia Avenue in Perris, then cut through a relatively undeveloped area west of Perris before connecting to Cajalco Road in Corona. The 32-mile route is expected to cost \$3.1 billion, Bechtel said.

Considered by officials as the least bothersome to surrounding properties and natural areas, the preferred alternative requires removing 270 homes and businesses, a Perris city park and fire station, and cuts an eight-lane swath through the Gavilan Hills and Lake Mathews areas south of Riverside and west of Interstate 15.

Completing preliminary environmental reports is only the beginning of the project, Bechtel said. The commission plans to hold public meetings, presumably in San Jacinto, Perris and Corona, after the drafts are made public. The commission is required to hold a public hearing on the draft during a regularly scheduled meeting as well, after a comment period of no fewer than 30 days.

Story continues below

MID-COUNTY PARKWAY: The proposed 32-mile route between San Jacinto and Corona traverses undeveloped areas, but most of the impact will be in Perris where the eight-lane parkway slices through existing commercial and residential development.



[Click to enlarge](#)

Officials then alter the draft and submit it to state and federal officials.

"We think we will have all the approvals we need in 2009," Bechtel said.

What the commission doesn't have is all the funding. Officials have set aside \$570 million that could be used on the project, but Bechtel said the parkway will likely be built in stages as funding allows.

Opposing Traffic

The project has been slow to receive support from neighbors of the proposed route. They say the path the commission favored from the outset will ruin their quiet communities and bring unwanted pollution to pristine areas of central Riverside County.

"If they suggested putting a freeway through Riverside in a residential area with expensive homes, there would be an outrage," said parkway critic George Hague. "But for some reason they think they can plow through the city of Perris."

Hague, conservation chairman of the Sierra Club's Moreno Valley group, said many residents along the route worry that building an eight-lane road through the area will only increase development there.

County transportation commission deputy director John Standiford disagreed.

Growth Demand

"I think you need this road even if there isn't a lot of growth," Standiford said.

Often projects are questioned for encouraging development, he added, but road planners are usually responding to planned development. Growth in Perris and San Jacinto continued unabated until the recent housing slowdown, Standiford said, although the Mid-County Parkway didn't exist.

"The demand is there today," Standiford said. "And it will be there in the future, too."

But residents argue there could be a better route. Cynthia Ferry, of the Gavilan Hills area, said while an east-west route is needed, the route preferred by the county transportation commission has flaws. Ferry said the

road will become a popular thoroughfare for trucks on their way to I-215 and the former March Air Force Base, but the route's slope will force truckers to constantly brake as they come through Gavilan Hills and head downhill.

"They just don't want the pollution and all the noise that comes with it," she said of residents.

Reach Dug Begley at 951-368-9475 or dbegley@PE.com

Parkway Progress

Construction can begin on the Mid-County Parkway by 2011, though a preliminary report on the project's environmental impact has been delayed three months. The schedule is as follows.

September 2008: Draft environmental reports

October-November 2008: Public hearings to discuss environmental reports

July 2009: Final environmental report

2010: Final design of project and property acquisition

2011: Construction begins

2016: Construction completed

Source: Riverside County Transportation Commission
