



Highway 46 corridor workshop set for tomorrow

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Residents interested in the future of Highway 46 East will have the chance to weigh in with Caltrans tomorrow at a public workshop.

Caltrans is working with local agencies on an ongoing major transportation study called the Highway 46 East Comprehensive Corridor Study. The public is invited to join them in an active discussion regarding the study tomorrow night.



The study covers Highway 46 East from Highway 101 to Jardine Road and is the focus of the workshop. A related plan called the Corridor Study Management Plan covers the entire Highway 46 East route.

Wednesday, there will be a special focus on that five-mile section from Highway 101 to Jardine Road, Caltrans officials said.

Intersections at Buena Vista Drive, Golden Hill, Union and Airport roads will also be focused on. Caltrans said those intersections are in need of a common community vision for the highway's future.

The corridor study is scheduled for completion fall 2008.

“Highway 46 East and US [Highway] 101 are, by far, the two most important state routes in the county,” Caltrans District Director Richard Krumholz said in a statement. “The intersection of these two routes, in the city of Paso Robles, is a key juncture for interregional, regional and local travelers.”

Congestion on the rise

During heavy weekend travel times, excessive delays are caused by traffic backing up on Highway 46 East from Highway 101 to Golden Hill Road and beyond. Travel forecasters predict that traffic could double in the area in the next 20 years, Caltrans said.

Some motorists divert off the highway onto the local road system to avoid it. Currently, the average daily traffic on Highway 46 East, east of Airport Road is about 19,400.

During the summer with an influx of visitors from the Central Valley and beyond trying to escape the heat, that figure increases. During summer months, the average daily traffic on Highway 46 east is 22,900, according to Caltrans.

Semi tractor-trailers comprise about 20 percent of the annual average daily traffic.

Caltrans' project to widen Highway 46 East to four lanes, meanwhile, is proceeding. The first phase is a \$35 million construction project will widen a five-mile section from Airport Road east to Geneseo Road.

Caltrans expects that project to commence in April and be completed in summer 2010. There may be lane closures, and if they occur they will happen in the nighttime hours between 8 p.m. and 6:30 a.m., according to Caltrans.

Attend the workshop

A first workshop will focus on defining the transportation challenges of connecting the travelers to, across and along Highway 46, according to Caltrans. A second workshop will identify potential solutions and the third will conclude the study.

"We welcome the public's input and local perspective on this important eastern gateway to the community," said Larry Newland, Caltrans project manager for the corridor study. "We want our planning to be consistent with both the community's values and vision."

Addressing future growth along the corridor requires a cooperative strategy to ensure that the highway and the local road network can work together safely and efficiently, according to Caltrans.

"We want to get sustained benefit from our transportation investment," Newland said.

The first of three public workshops is scheduled from 6 to 8 p.m. Wednesday at Paso Robles Library/City Hall Conference Center, 1000 Spring St.

Caltrans plans to provide a number of opportunities for input. For more information, contact Newland at 549-3103 or e-mail larry_newland@dot.ca.gov.

A Web site focusing on the future of Highway 46 is under construction, www.46eastforthefuture.org.