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Caltrans stays in building mode

No lanes, segments will be finished in '06

By Jeff Ristine
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Caltrans plans a busy slate of construction for the remainder of 2006, although its next big opening is simply its own headquarters.

Ongoing work on Interstate 15 and the county's first privately constructed toll road in the South Bay were among the highlights of an annual project briefing yesterday from the California Department of Transportation and its San Diego County partners.

No new highway segments or lanes are expected to be finished before the end of the year, although agency officials said they may begin construction on a segment of state Route 905, a six-lane freeway to link Interstate 805 and Otay Mesa.

And Joe Kellejian, a Solana Beach councilman and chairman of the influential Transportation Committee at the San Diego Association of Govern-

ments, said every freeway in the county is due for some kind of improvement in the foreseeable future.

Kellejian said the "extreme makeover" of Interstate 15 — the managed lanes being built between Sabre Springs and Escondido — will significantly reduce congestion on the freeway. When completed in late 2007 or early 2008, they will provide four lanes for high-occupancy vehicles, buses and FasTrak account holders.

"I can't wait for this project to be done," Kellejian said.

Elsewhere:

- The newly opened bypass for northbound vehicles at the I-5/805 merge — which Caltrans district director Pedro Orso-Delgado said is "the kind of project we want to do" — now carries 3,000 to 3,500 vehicles during the peak commute hour of 4 to 5 p.m., off the regular lanes to state Route 56 and Carmel Mountain Road.

- The southbound side of the bypass still is under construction, scheduled to open next year.

- If state funding is available, the four-year construction on

the main segment of state Route 905 — between I-805 and Siempre Viva Road — could begin late this year or in early 2008, project manager Pye Salazar said. The six-mile corridor will move traffic off Otay Mesa Road onto a freeway.

Greg Hulsizer of South Bay Expressway, the company building a 10-mile toll road from Otay Mesa to state Route 54, said construction is on pace for an early 2007 opening.

Orso said the agency expects to move next month into its headquarters across the street from its current two-story building at Taylor and Juan streets in Old Town.

The new office complex, which will be named for former state Sen. Wadie Deddeh, will house about 900 employees, including those who work in leased office space. CalTrans spends more than \$2 million a year on rent in Mission Valley, downtown and Kearny Mesa.

The fate of the decrepit existing Caltrans building hasn't been determined.

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