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I-5 project makes progress with Metro vote

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Traffic moves north and south at the Highway 14 and Interstate 5 connector in the Newhall Pass. Katharine Lotze/The Signal

The Interstate 5 project in the Santa Clarita Valley, which looks to enhance capacity and safety, is one step closer to construction following a unanimous vote Thursday from the Metro board of directors.

Board members approved a \$50 million, five-year construction support services contract with Hill International Inc. for the project, which will add new north and south carpool lanes between State Route 14 and the 5 freeway interchange and in Castaic, as well as add southbound truck-only lanes through Newhall.

The green light to bring Hill International on board means the procurement of a construction contractor for the project can commence. The company will be tasked with assisting and advising throughout the buildout of the project, which is set to begin in spring 2021.

“The I-5 is the backbone of commerce in the western U.S., and this project is the realization of many years of effort and partnership with local, state and federal stakeholders,” Los Angeles County Supervisor Kathryn Barger, whose 5th District includes the SCV, said in a statement. “I want to acknowledge the Metro project team and Caltrans for their close coordination on this project, in addition to some key local leaders who have tirelessly advocated over the years, including Victor Lindenheim and the I-5 Golden State Gateway Coalition, and the North County Transportation Coalition Executive Director Arthur Sohikian.”

The project is one of multiple I-5 corridor improvements, with 11 projects costing \$1.3 billion in the north segments and six projects in the south segments, totaling \$1.6 billion. Improvements are funded through a mix of federal, state and local sources, including the California Department of Transportation and Metro.

The board also approved a \$5 million rail corridor service development plan for the High Desert Corridor project in the Antelope Valley. The plan looks to assess a new intercity passenger high-speed rail service from Victor Valley to Palmdale along a 54-mile-long, west-east rail alignment along the High Desert Corridor, according to the plan.

Funding consists of \$1.37 million for the integration study and \$625,000 in contributions from DesertXpress Enterprises LLC and \$3 million from Measure M dollars for the right-of-way acquisition, which includes a \$1.5 million advance from Barger’s 5th District Proposition A discretionary funds, “which will ultimately be repaid by Metro through Measure M funds at a later date,” according to a news release from her office.