



I-215-74 Interchange Opens



Dignitaries from the City of Perris and partner agencies prepare to cut the ribbon

Perris officials joined Riverside County and regional transportation representatives Wednesday to cut the ribbon on the new \$29 million interchange at Interstate 215 and Highway 74 (Fourth Street), a milestone that will remake Perris Downtown, spur future economic development and improve traffic flow for commuters from Corona to Temecula.

"This is truly a red-latter date in Perris history," said Mayor Daryl Busch during remarks to the audience of 100. "We have taken an intersection that was a bottleneck for traffic and have turned it into a marvelous gateway to our City. It has been a long time coming and I am pleased to be able to participate in the ceremony that opens this important arterial in our City."

The audience included Perris City Councilmembers Joanne Evans and Mark Yarbrough, City Manager Richard Belmudez, Riverside County Supervisor Marion Ashley, top officials from the Riverside County Transportation Commission and representatives of the Western Riverside Council of Governments. Those agencies, along with Caltrans and the Federal Highway Administration, partnered to make the new interchange a reality.

Representatives from Assemblyman Paul Cook, R-Yucca Valley; Kevin Jeffries, R-Lake Elsinore and State Senator Bill Emmerson, R-Hemet, also attended.

Busch credited Measure A, Riverside County's half-cent sales tax for transportation improvements, with helping make the project possible. The project also made use of sales tax revenues and federal stimulus dollars. Ground broke on the new interchange in June 2010 and construction was completed four months ahead of schedule.

Inclement weather forced the ribbon-cutting ceremony indoors to the Bob Glass Gymnasium on the Perris City Hall campus. But wind and clouds and showers could not dampen the enthusiasm of the moment. Mayor Busch used his iPad to show an aerial view of the interchange to the indoor audience, a move that brought smiles and cheers from the audience.

Riverside County Supervisor Marion Ashley said the old interchange became inadequate to handle its daily traffic volume many years ago. The new interchange will accommodate growth for years to come, he said.

"This is the Rolls Royce of interchanges," said Riverside County Supervisor Marion Ashley. "It creates a whole new gateway to the City. It is way beyond anything we could have ever imagined. This is a great day for the City of Perris."

Anne Mayer, RCTC executive director, praised Mayor Busch, the City Council and City administrators for their tireless advocacy on behalf of the Perris-based projects. She said the new interchange marked the first time that commuters did not complain about construction-related delays. Even the work-in-progress was seen as a better alternative than the previously existing interchange.

Speaker after speaker said motorists will notice several major improvements immediately. The new interchange eliminates the five-point intersection at Redlands Avenue and Highway 74. It also realigns and widens off-ramps from north and southbound I-215, widens the Highway 74 bridge over the freeway from two to eight lanes and replaces 12 traffic-clogging stop signs with five traffic signals.

Construction also included the widening of Redlands Avenue and creation of sound walls and retaining walls and an eight-foot wide sidewalk on the north side of the bridge. The project will be aesthetically pleasing as well as functional. The exterior fascia includes a pattern of wrought-iron fencing and brickwork similar in color to that of the historic Depot Building. Decorative Victorian-era lights will illuminate the bridge and add to the historic feel the City has worked hard to create in its Downtown.

The scope of the work was massive. The project includes 185,000 yards of imported dirt, 22,500 tons of asphalt concrete, 5,000 cubic yards of concrete and 850,000-pounds of rebar. Work continues on striping, installing some traffic signals and landscaping, all which should wrap up in March.

Moreno Valley City Councilwoman Robin Hastings, who also the WRCOG chair, said the entire region will benefit from work done in Perris. Already construction has begun on a new interchange at I-215 and Ramona Expressway and new freeway lanes are planned or under construction from Murrieta to Riverside—right through the Perris Valley.

Metrolink service through Perris is scheduled to begin in the next several months. The key to all the success, Hastings said, is that the region works together to obtain funding that benefits everyone.

"Collectively, we work together," she said.

Perris Mayor Pro-Tem Al Landers said completion of the interchange and bridge "puts use ahead of the curve as other development takes place in the area." That other development includes plans for a shopping center adjacent to the interchange.

"It's going to achieve a complete transformation of the whole area," Landers said. "I am so glad we did it."

Landers noted further that the entire "Perris corridor" of I-125 is undergoing a massive expansion with new lanes in each direction going in from Murrieta to Riverside. Perris will benefit from better traffic flow north and south of the City, Landers said. He thanked Perris residents for their patience during the traffic delays caused by the construction. The wait will be worth off the inconvenience, he said.

"Perris has all the elements of a great city," he said. "This project will enable us to let people know what Perris has to offer." Perris City Councilman Mark Yarbrough called the I-215/Highway 74 makeover "truly a shovel-ready project" and municipal officials took advantage of that to obtain federal stimulus dollars. He said drivers from all over western Riverside County—from Corona to Temecula, Lake Elsinore, Wildomar and Murrieta—who travel through Perris will benefit from improved traffic flow and shorter commutes. Yarbrough noted that the new interchange is nearby many Downtown businesses, City Hall and the police and fire stations.

"The impact will be even bigger than we anticipated," Yarbrough said. "The Perris corridor is finally getting the upgrades it deserves. This City Council has been forward-thinking and pro-active as it pursues improvements for our community. We've been in touch with the City's needs and we've been able to meet them."

Perris City Councilwoman Joanne Evans said the interchange is the latest in a string of accomplishments begun or completed in Perris in recent months. Those include the just-opened Big League Dreams sports complex, a new teen center set to open later this month, a new family apartment complex under construction and a senior apartment complex set to break ground in the near future.

"When everything is finished, you'll see a whole new city," Evans said. "The new interchange will truly open up Perris. Congestion will be stopped. It's a good, good thing."

Perris City Councilwoman Rita Rogers said completing the new interchange is "another big feather in the cap" for the City. She said the project has been in the works for years and it's "great to see it finally completed."

"It will create a whole new entrance to Downtown Perris," Rogers said.

The Riverside County Transportation Commission and its project partners began reconstruction of the 74/215 interchange in Perris in mid-2010. RCTC, the agency responsible for transportation in Riverside County and the administrator of Measure A, Riverside County's half-cent sales tax for transportation improvements, completed environmental studies in 2007 and final design in late 2009. In addition to improved traffic flow, the new interchange will reduce public safety, police and fire response times.

The project also will accommodate the future widening of I-215 in this area.



Perris Mayor Daryl Busch uses his iPad to show an aerial view of the new interchange at Interstate 215 and Highway 74. Inclement weather forced the ribbon-cutting ceremony indoors.



Riverside County Supervisor Marion Ashley addresses the crowd of 100; new interchange is "Rolls Royce."



Recent construction work includes putting up traffic signals.



Construction crews blacktop the new Highway 74 (Fourth Street) Bridge over Interstate 215.