

“Commuters’ O.C. Crawl to worsen”

TRAFFIC: A study says drive time into the county will slow dramatically.

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By Heather Lourie

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Traffic coming into Orange County from Riverside, Los Angeles and San Bernardino counties could slow by more than half in the next 20 years, and in some places hit a parking-lot crawl, according to a regional transportation study to be released next month.

The projections - based on population and employment growth - come as no surprise to city planners, who are predicting Orange County's population will increase by 22 percent, to 3.24 million people, by 2020. The study, however, is the most detailed analysis to date of what motorists coming into Orange County from points east will face if no road improvements are made.

Among the findings:

- Traffic on sections of the westbound Riverside (91) Freeway is expected to move at 10 mph during rush hour by 2020. The average now is 20-25 mph.
- Travel time from Diamond Bar to Santa Ana, Chino to Costa Mesa and Corona to Anaheim will increase as much as 48 percent during peak hours.
- The duration of the morning rush “hour” will increase from about four hours to between six and seven hours.

Significant job growth in Orange County and affordable housing in the Inland Empire are contributing to the surge in congestion, said Ellen Burton, principal transportation analyst for the Orange County Transportation Authority. "It's an imbalance that impacts transportation."

The two-year study, expected to be presented to the OCTA board July 10, recommends four primary solutions. They include creating greater price incentives for car-poolers on the 91 Express Lanes, building more on- and off-ramps to that private toll road and widening sections of the Orange (57) Freeway.

Inland Empire commuters say the situation is already bad. "It takes away from my family," said Joe Vargas, who lives in Corona and works in Anaheim.

"I'd love to be a soccer coach, but I can never depend on being home on time."

But the cheaper housing in Corona and his family's ties to the community will keep him there, he said, adding that more time in his car will mean more opportunities to listen to Books on Tape.