

Daily Breeze

Caltrans taking public comment for another month on massive VT Bridge project

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With construction still about a year away, Caltrans officials are urging the public to weigh in on what will be a massive project to install a new bridge road deck on the Vincent Thomas Bridge in San Pedro.

With the extended [90-day public comment period](#) ending July 15, Caltrans engineers conducted an in-person informational hearing on Thursday, June 13, at Peck Park in San Pedro, drawing a number of suggestions centered around the alternative construction and closure schedules the agency is still weighing.

Members of the public can also provide written comments via the website — virtualeventroom.com/caltrans/vtb — or via email, caltransvtb@virtualeventroom.net.

“There’s a month left to hear from the community,” said Jason Roach, Caltrans’ senior environmental planner. [Construction is scheduled to begin](#) in fall 2025 and be complete in 2027.

Construction staging options, which will determine how long the entire project will take and how much of the bridge will be closed, have yet to be determined.

The options are:

- Single-stage construction: Potentially the fastest construction option, this calls for the full closure of the bridge and with a total construction time of 16 to 41 months (depending on deck type — orthotropic, pre-cast or cast-in-place for longest time period) with motorist detours and work being done 24/7.
- Two-stage construction: This would require partial closures of the bridge, with one lane open in each direction during each stage and potentially reduced speeds and narrowed lanes, multiple weekend full closures, and overnight full closures. It would require installing a temporary support/bracing system. Construction would take approximately 25 months.
- Three-stage construction: Requiring a partial closure with one lane open in each direction, this alternative would also require installing a temporary support/bracing system. One lane would be open in each direction for each stage with multiple weekend full bridge closures and full overnight closures required. Construction would take about 32 months.
- Nighttime bridge closure: With this option, the bridge would be fully open during daytime traffic hours (6 a.m. to 7 p.m.). Work would again require installing a temporary

support/bracing system and full closures of the bridge every night from 7 p.m. to 6 a.m. Construction would take approximately 48 months.

“A single-stage, full closure for 16 months with pre-cast deck type (construction) would be the fastest and most cost-effective construction staging option,” according to Caltrans planning documents. “This option would result in greater impacts to traffic than a partial closure.”

Both the two-stage and three-stage construction staging options (with partial closures), Caltrans’ documents say, “would impact traffic the least. However, the two-stage option would be 25 months, and the three-stage option would be 32 months.”

While there will be environmental impacts, including to air quality, from each of the options, Caltrans officials said, they will be short-term and only last for as long as the construction does.

“We’re looking to improve the bridge with as little impact as possible,” Roach said.

Several commenters at the Peck Park meeting, which drew about 100 people, favored a “bite-the-bullet” approach — closing the bridge completely in exchange for a faster construction time.

“Knock this out as soon as possible,” said John Bagakis of San Pedro. “Let’s get over it and have one miserable year.”

Several others said that even now, with one lane closed on the bridge, traffic still backs up for miles.

Maria Matthews of San Pedro said more bridge space is needed to provide for the heavy traffic. She said also that emergency lanes are needed — and that bike paths might be a way to connect the area to Long Beach.

Her suggestion was to build a second bridge — with each being for one-way traffic.

But Caltrans materials say there is no current need for a new or bigger bridge (which would take years to plan and build) because the [Vincent Thomas Bridge is structurally sound](#), meets current and projected traffic volumes, and also accommodates ships that use the harbor. Port of Los Angeles Executive Director [Gene Seroka, in May 2023](#), said a new bridge would cost about “\$6 billion in U.S. dollars in today’s money.”

The bridge deck, though, has “reached the end of its design life,” Caltrans documents state, “and the deck replacement is the best available option.”

The [bridge opened in 1963](#).

Others raised concerns about the need to repair many of the detour roads being eyed once work begins and how there appears to be a cumulative effect growing from several other nearby road projects during the same construction time, a prospect Los Angeles councilmember Tim McOsker has called a coming “Harbor-geddon.”

“We want to make sure we give ourselves as much of a chance as we can without relying on” only a few detours and getting repairs made to some of them before the bridge construction begins, McOsker said.

Wilmington could take the brunt of the detours and traffic impacts, several speakers said.

If needed work on some detours doesn’t get done, including Alameda Street, which is in “rough shape,” McOsker said, “we’ll have a problem.”

Among other issues brought up during the meeting were:

- Accommodations for port workers, cruise ship passengers and big-event crowd surges.
- Compensation for losses suffered by local businesses, especially if the bridge closes full time (Caltrans said a claim process will be established).
- Planning for upcoming events, including the full opening of West Harbor in 2025 and World Cup in 2026.
- The need for early detour signage and coordination with Google Maps and other apps.

Caltrans is working with both ports to minimize impacts to goods movement “to the extent feasible,” a Caltrans information sheet said.