

**DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION**

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR  
P.O. BOX 942873, MS-49  
SACRAMENTO, CA 94273-0001  
PHONE (916) 654-5266  
FAX (916) 654-6608  
TTY 711  
www.dot.ca.gov



*Flex your power!  
Be energy efficient!*

February 27, 2012

Board of Supervisors  
Riverside County  
County Administration Center  
4080 Lemon St.  
Riverside, CA 92501

Dear Supervisors:

As you are likely aware, an overnight construction lane closure on westbound Interstate 10 (I-10) in Beaumont resulted in massive congestion and hours-long delays for thousands of motorists on Sunday, February 12, 2012.

Over the past two weeks, California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) management has conducted a thorough investigation, including interviews with our construction and maintenance staff, as well as with the contractor, to develop a more complete picture of the events that led to this situation. I want to share with you our findings and have attached a synopsis of events for your review. I also want to assure you that we are holding individuals appropriately accountable, strengthening our construction and maintenance protocols to ensure that similar occurrences cannot occur in the future, and enhancing the tools at our disposal to manage future unplanned traffic incidents in this sensitive area.

Our review indicates that this incident's primary cause was the construction project staff's decision to extend the duration of the approved lane closure by several hours without obtaining proper clearance. This serious error in judgment was compounded by a subsequent failure to notify either Department management or public information office staff once the closure began to adversely impact traffic.

These actions by some of our employees were unacceptable, and I want to personally apologize to you and those of your constituents who were adversely affected by this incident. I also want to assure you that the Department is already taking steps so this type of incident is not repeated anywhere on California's roadways: These steps include all of the following:

1. **Employee Accountability:** The employees involved were immediately reassigned from the project and will be held accountable. The District Director and the Deputy District Director of Administration are working to ensure that this matter is resolved appropriately and that the mistakes made by personnel during this incident will not be repeated.

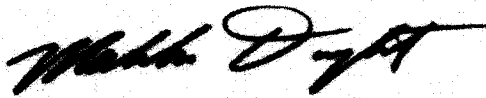
*Board  
Comments*

*02.28.2012*

2. **Internal Operational Improvements:** We are also pursuing organizational changes within the district. We have revised communication protocols and reporting procedures to guarantee that information flows readily—first to executive staff and then to the traffic management center and public affairs staff, which will ensure rapid dissemination to the public. We have also reiterated to our staff, not only in this district but throughout the state, the critical importance of effective communication and adherence to protocol and procedure.
3. **Forging Stronger Local Partnerships:** This incident has also highlighted the need to work with our local partners to improve the area's traffic management tools. While the ideal solution involves construction of an alternate, parallel route, which the county is pursuing, such a project is years away. In the near term, the department is applying a series of intermediate steps. We plan to erect changeable message signs at various locations to provide motorists with advance warning, enabling them to avoid traffic incidents before becoming trapped. Some of these signs will be installed this summer and others over the next year. Also, within the last year, our maintenance crews have constructed two median barrier breaks that will help traffic management by allowing law enforcement to turn traffic around during emergencies. These breaks will soon be equipped with moveable gates, and breaks will also be constructed at three additional locations over the next 16 months. We intend to implement these measures in full collaboration with our local partners in the area.

Once again I would like to express my sincere regret for the frustration and inconvenience that this incident caused many motorists. I hope this information helps you understand what we are doing to prevent a recurrence. If you need additional information or would like to speak with me directly, please don't hesitate to contact me at (916) 654-6130.

Sincerely,



MALCOLM DOUGHERTY  
Acting Director

Enclosure

### Synopsis of Events

- The project at issue involved a contract to replace deteriorated pavement slabs in both directions on I-10. The original work was completed last fall, at a time when nighttime temperatures were appropriate for concrete placement. Following completion of the original work, maintenance staff identified additional slabs in need of replacement
- Because nighttime temperatures during this time of year are unsuitable for concrete placement, and because daytime lane closures are problematic from a traffic perspective, this work should have been delayed until later in the spring. However, the contractor was scheduled to conduct grinding work in the area to smooth the pavement for improved ride quality. Delaying replacement of the additional slabs would have required that the contractor remobilize his operation at a later date to grind the additional slabs at additional cost to the contract. For this reason, the Caltrans resident engineer (RE) in charge of the project allowed the additional slabs to be replaced before beginning the grinding operation.
- The decision to allow the slab replacement required either that the work (and thus, the lane closure) extend into daytime hours when temperatures would be adequate to allow proper concrete curing, or that alternative heating methods be used. The RE chose to extend the closure until about 3 p.m., Sunday—eight hours past the 7 a.m. approved closure window. This decision was not elevated to the district traffic manager for approval, as is required. While the first-line supervisor, who was the area senior engineer, was aware that the work was occurring, he was never informed that the extended closure had not been approved.
- At approximately 11 p.m. Saturday, February 11, three of four westbound I-10 lanes were closed to traffic and slab removal began. Under the schedule developed by the RE, pouring of the replacement slabs was not even scheduled to commence until 7 a.m. on Sunday—the time at which the approved closure window was to have ended and all westbound traffic lanes were to be reopened. In actuality, the first concrete was delivered shortly after 10 a.m., a delay that was originally alleged to be caused by problems at the concrete plant but that, according to the contractor, was actually the result of problems encountered with the sub-base material that delayed the operation. Furthermore, the initial deliveries of concrete failed to meet specifications and were rejected.
- Placement of the new slabs did not begin until noon on Sunday February 12. Due to the number of slabs removed, this operation took several hours to complete. The first of the three westbound lanes (the No. 2 lanes) was reopened at approximately 5 p.m. The remaining two westbound lanes were reopened at 7:30 p.m.

