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## Some O.C. cities would like to bury tunnel plan

Irvine and Laguna Beach are among its foes; commuters have mixed views.

By **ERIKA I. RITCHIE**

The Orange County Register

Some south-Orange County cities want to bury the idea of a possible tunnel under the Cleveland National Forest - a plan that wouldn't see light for at least a decade.

"It's an unworkable, unaffordable alternative to deal with the transportation issue," said Irvine Councilman Larry Agran. "It would have the effect of dumping tens of thousands of cars in Irvine and central Orange County."

On Friday, a joint committee of Orange County Transportation Authority and Riverside Transportation Commission officials voted unanimously to continue studying the \$6 billion tunnel concept, while killing plans for expanding the Ortega (74) Highway. They also voted to make improvements on the Riverside (91) Freeway.

Studies show continued residential growth in Riverside County and jobs in Orange County will increase the current inter-county flow of 300,000 cars each day to 400,000 in 2030.

Those who favor the tunnel say there needs to be an alternate route to the route through the Santa Ana Canyon.

Michael Cripps commutes two hours from Wrightwood to his job as a UPS driver in Orange County.

"It's building up everywhere," he said. "The 91 is bumper to bumper, stop and go. You can't get around on surface streets. The tunnel would ease congestion."

Designed to improve congestion and traffic flow between Orange and Riverside counties, the tunnel would start in Corona at Interstate 15 near Cajalco Road and travel 15 miles to the junction of the 133/241 toll roads in Irvine. It could carry 100,000 cars each day.

Eleven miles of that stretch would be underground and include four to six reversible lanes. If constructed, it would be the second-longest tunnel in the world, said Michael Litschi, a spokesman for the Orange County Transportation Authority.

City councils in Lake Forest, Laguna Beach and Aliso Viejo share Irvine's concerns, saying that while much of the tunnel project is unknown, its effect would debilitate local streets.

"Residents told us that they heard that people in Riverside were getting presentations that they could be in Laguna Beach in 20 minutes," Laguna Beach Mayor Elizabeth Pearson-Schneider said.

"That's just what we need, another 100,000 people here in the summer. We can't move. Our quality of life is already affected."

For Lake Forest Mayor Peter Herzog, the tunnel is a total unknown.

"To flood resources doesn't make sense," he said. "The tunnel is 15 to 16 years out. We can't sit around and put our focus on that. We have to do something now."

Mission Viejo resident Heather Victor, 25, often drives out the Riverside (91) Freeway and would welcome any improvement.

"It's so frustrating going out there," she said. "I think the tunnel is a great idea. Other cities have subways and things underground - Orange County is one of the most congested areas."



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"I would never use it because of earthquakes. I think there's a better alternative like mass transit. Building is never a better way to prevent population growth."

- Keith Mitchell, 38, screenwriter, Mission Viejo



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"I can't imagine the extra congestion it would create down here as a result. Already the development in Irvine, the continued development inland are so severely impacting traffic and circulation into and out of Laguna Beach."

- Morris Skendarian, architect, Laguna Beach



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"I don't see why the tunnel would be a problem. I don't think it would add to congestion. The toll roads have eased a lot of congestion and made a huge difference."

- Annmarie MacNevin, 37, part-time teacher, Lake Forest



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