



What will be a new four-lane, Highway 46 East expressway takes shape in the Shandon area in San Luis Obispo County. The Highway 46 Corridor Improvement Project was launched in 2008 to upgrade a two-lane rural road to a modern highway capable of handling increased traffic.

## Projects Transform Popular Route

Work Continues to Complete a Wider, Safer Highway 46 from Kern to Coast

Over the last decade, Highway 46 has evolved, several miles at a time, from a rural two-lane path over the Coast Range to a broad expressway better able to serve a traffic flow that has more than doubled in recent years.

Construction projects will continue for several years as Caltrans and its partners improve the 60-mile section straddling the agricultural fields starting from I-5 in Kern County to the vineyards and tourist destinations along Highway 101.

With great beaches, resorts, a major summer fair, Hearst Castle and a flourishing wine industry, California's Central Coast is more popular than ever. In Paso Robles, at the west end of Highway 46, Caltrans' traffic surveys counted 17,300 vehicles during a busy month in 1997. By 2015, the number had jumped to 36,500 vehicles tallied during the same monthly period. Overall, one million people live in the Central Valley between Fresno and Bakersfield, so traffic volumes will likely continue to rise.

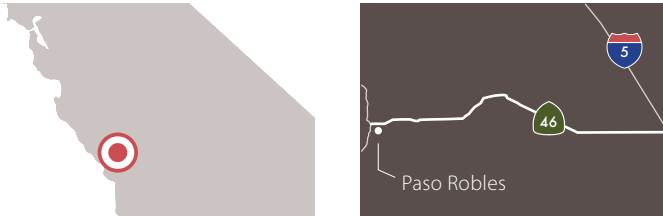
In 2008, Caltrans began a major widening effort — the [Highway 46 Corridor Improvement Project](#) — to improve mobility and enhance safety on what had mostly been a two-lane highway between the Central Valley and Central Coast.

In California, highway construction is performed by contractors overseen by engineers from one of Caltrans' 12 regional districts. Highway 46 stretches through two Caltrans districts, each of which undertook portions of the highway, essentially moving from both ends toward the middle.

Caltrans' District 5, based in San Luis Obispo, has completed three major widening projects on the Central Coast stretch of 46, transforming 14.1 miles of the route into a four-lane expressway and currently working on the fourth phase.

Meanwhile, Caltrans District 6, which oversees the state highway system in Kern County, has been improving Highway 46 from the Central Valley side. Three project segments totaling 27.5 miles west to the Kern-SLO county line have been completed;

## Project Spotlight



travelers now enjoy a four-lane expressway with a wide median.

The next phase of work in Kern County is scheduled to begin in early 2018, with a reconstruction of the Highway 46–I-5 interchange, and the widening of 46 to a four-lane highway with a raised median along a two-mile commercial zone.

About \$100 million was spent to complete the three Kern project segments. The upcoming construction is budgeted at about \$18 million.

The final 46 project in Kern proposes to close the 4.5-mile gap between finished sections through the community of Lost Hills and connect with I-5.

Reducing the number of serious collisions on 46 is one of the major goals of upgrading the busy valley-coastal corridor.

The design phase of that project is expected to begin this summer.

On the San Luis Obispo side of Highway 46, more than 14 miles of highway has been reconstructed since 2008 from the city of Paso Robles east to the Shandon area. About \$118 million has been spent on those three phases of the overall project. One of the construction highlights was the placement of twin bridges crossing the Estrella River.

A five-mile widening of the highway near Shandon is now underway, and the \$47 million project is expected to be complete by the end of 2018. Plans call for construction to the Cholame area. The projected \$55 million project is expected to begin in late 2019.

## Steps to improve safety

There are also plans to rebuild the Highway 46/Highway 41 interchange in Cholame, where week-

*At left, a survey crew stakes out the parts of the new Highway 46 as an excavator equipped with a claw breaks up earth. The aerial photo shows construction on 46 in the Whitley Gardens area of San Luis Obispo County, east of Paso Robles, including work on the Estrella River Bridges.*

Caltrans photo by Steven Hellon



ends bring especially busy traffic as motorists coming from the Fresno, Visalia-Tulare, and Bakersfield areas converge with those traveling to and from the Central Coast. A construction date has not yet been determined.

Reducing the number of serious collisions on 46 is one of the major goals of upgrading the busy valley-coastal corridor. Efforts appear to be paying off. On one improved stretch in San Luis Obispo County, the number of significant collisions recorded by the California Highway Patrol dropped from 37 during 2005-2008, prior to construction, to 29 during the three years after completion.

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Caltrans also has taken other steps to improve safety on 46, such as adding a daytime headlight section, providing increased road striping and sig-

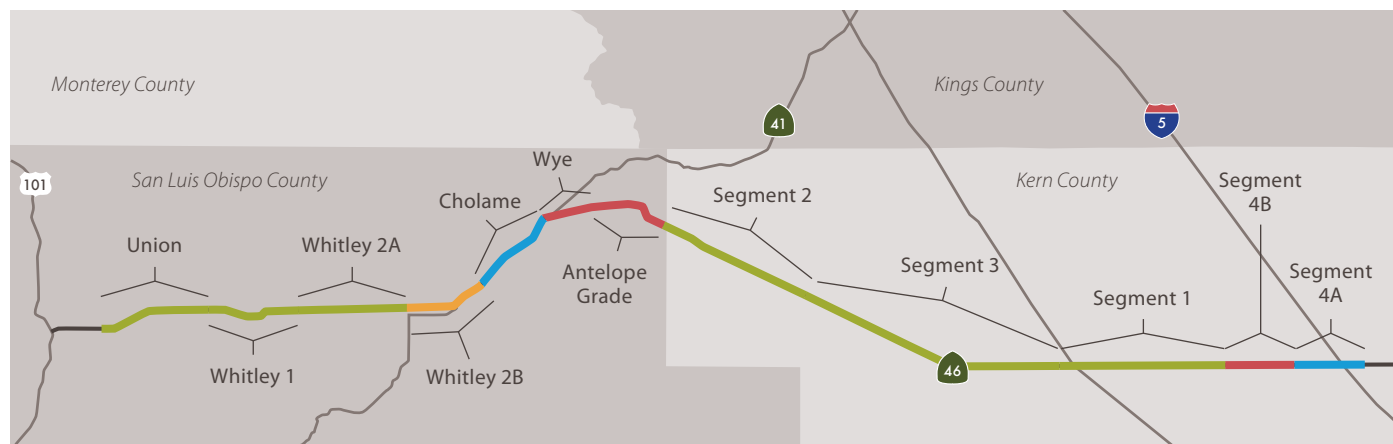
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nage, and placing median barriers in targeted travel lanes to prevent head-on or broadside collisions.

“These widening projects have shown our commitment to safety along this corridor and we are very pleased with the progress we have made so far along this inter-regional route,” said Caltrans District 5 Director Tim Gubbins. **MM**

*Source: Jim Shivers, Public Information Officer, Caltrans District 5; District 6 Public Affairs Office*

## Highway 46 Corridor Project



Segment	Length (Miles)	Phase	Construction Cost (Millions)
Union	5.0	Completed	\$33.3
Whitley 1	4.0	Completed	\$47.0
Whitley 2A	5.1	Completed	\$38.1
Whitley 2B	4.0	Construction	\$45.7
Cholame	4.4	Design/Right of Way	\$55.0
Wye	3.2	Planned	\$111.0*

Segment	Length (Miles)	Phase	Construction Cost (Millions)
Antelope Gr.	3.1	Planned	\$43.2*
Segment 2	7.3	Completed	\$24.3
Segment 3	12.5	Completed	\$45.3
Segment 1	7.7	Completed	\$24.2
Segment 4A	3.0	Design/Right of Way	\$17.5
Segment 4B	3.0	Planned	\$50.0*

\* Unfunded Need