

Seismic work on historic coastal bridge to begin

Retrofit of North Torrey Pines span will take 2 1/2 years

Jonathan Horn, San Diego Union Tribune, 11-7-10

DEL MAR — The coastal bridge that connects San Diego to Del Mar has been a scenic spot for tourists, filmmakers and locals since 1933.

A bridge in time: The North Torrey Pines Bridge through the years

- 1929 — Bridge is designed by M.J. Dwyer of the Division of Highways
- 1933 — Construction is completed
- 1996 — North Torrey Pines Bridge designated a city of Del Mar Historic Landmark
- 2000 — City of San Diego transfers ownership of its part of the bridge to Del Mar for purposes of this project
- 2010 — Seismic retrofitting and bridge restoration project begins

Designated a historic structure more than 60 years later, the North Torrey Pines Bridge should stand for at least another half century. That's because Del Mar has secured the funding to seismically retrofit the bridge, designing it to withstand a 7.0 magnitude earthquake from the Rose Canyon fault, which runs up San Diego's coastline. The Del Mar City Council on Oct. 18 approved a \$13.3 million construction contract. It will hold a groundbreaking ceremony 10 a.m. Tuesday to embark on the two-and-a-half year project. The bridge, about six stories high and 600-feet long, will retain its historic look despite the infrastructure modernization.

"I'm so proud when I think of what our engineers and what our forefathers were able to do when the challenges were so great," said Councilwoman Crystal Crawford. "It is one of the most important projects our community will ever undertake."

About 20,000 drivers go over the North Torrey Pines bridge each day, even though many are unaware they are even on it. The bridge, on Coast Highway 101, slopes up from Torrey Pines beach toward Carmel Valley Road, the entrance to Del Mar. But unlike the Coronado Bridge, which a car ascends and descends, the North Torrey Pines bridge can go unnoticed to drivers. It appears to be part of the road's natural incline.

"It doesn't curve," said Larry Brooks of the Del Mar Historical Society, noting that it looks a lot better when viewing it from the side. "You really appreciate it from down on the beach."

The 77-year-old bridge is safe, city officials say. It's just that it isn't designed to withstand a major earthquake, and does not meet the modern standards. The bridge has passed Caltrans safety inspections, said Del Mar public works director David Scherer.

Del Mar appears to have benefited from the recession in this case. The low bid for the construction contract came in at \$13.3 million, more than \$10 million less than the original estimate. State and federal money is paying for most of the project, a total of \$25 million including environmental studies, design engineering and consulting. Del Mar contributed \$900,000 for design. Crawford said she hoped the excess funds, which would

be reallocated for other Caltrans uses, could stay in the county, and maybe even help Del Mar again. She said improvements will ultimately be needed on the bridge on the north side of the city, on Camino Del Mar.

Scherer said other than a few highly publicized nighttime closures, two-way traffic across the North Torrey Pines Bridge would be maintained. He said temporary bridges would be built to handle cars and bikes, but there would be no pedestrian access during the project. Scherer said the northbound bike lane would be retained, but southbound would be shared with cars since bikes can sustain a higher speed downhill.