

Health Impacts of Freeway Expansion

A Health Impact Assessment of the I-710 Corridor Project in Los Angeles



Interstate 710 is a vital transportation artery that links the Ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles to the rest of the Southern California region and beyond. The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) proposed an expansion of the freeway to alleviate existing congestion and to accommodate the quadrupling of goods movement through the Ports planned for the next 25 years.

Background

The I-710 corridor passes through 15 cities and unincorporated areas in Los Angeles County. Trucks compose more than 25% of the traffic on the freeway, moving between the Ports, warehouses, transloading and intermodal facilities, and rail yards in the corridor. The I-710 is in close proximity to residences, schools, day care centers, senior centers, and hospitals. The vulnerable communities living near the I-710, already burdened by health disparities, have expressed significant concerns about the I-710 expansion. As a result, Caltrans made air quality and public health improvement their primary goal in the process.



Following an HIA training conducted by HIP, a broad coalition, including community groups, academic experts, city, county, regional and federal agencies, and environmental groups, was formed to encourage Caltrans to conduct an HIA on the proposed I-710 expansion. This coalition presented evidence to project decision makers that convinced them to vote to conduct an HIA to inform the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). HIP was hired to conduct the HIA and completed it in the Fall of 2011.

The HIA focused on changes in I-710 Corridor communities that would result from the proposed expansion, most of which would be mediated through changes in truck and car traffic on the freeway and in the neighborhoods. Impacts on health through changes in the following were studied:

- congestion/mobility
- air quality
- noise
- traffic safety
- neighborhood resources (e.g., parks and schools)
- jobs

Outcomes

The HIA was completed in the context of and using data from the EIA being conducted for the project – one of the first such HIAs. This presented many challenges and resulted in many lessons learned, as detailed in a case study available at <http://www.humanimpact.org/past-projects#I710>.

Caltrans did not include the HIA findings in its draft EIA. The HIA, however, was one of several factors that has led them to decide to significantly revise of their plans in a manner that would benefit public health. These revised plans are now under development.