Frequently Asked Questions
Olancha/Cartago 4-Lane Project

1. What is the project?

This project will convert approximately 12.6 miles of the existing U.S. Highway 395 from a two-lane highway into a four-lane highway in Inyo County from south of Olancha (post mile 29.2) to north of Cartago (post mile 41.8).

Source: Draft Environmental Document, 1.3 Alternatives.
http://www.dot.ca.gov/dist9/projects/olancha/docs/draft_olancha-cartago_envir_doc.pdf

2. Why do we need the project?

The purpose of the project is to:
• Accommodate increased traffic demands by improving level of service
• Improve safety
• Provide route continuity

In the project area, from January 1999 to December 2008 there were:

- 135 accidents
- 16 fatalities
- 121 injuries

Source: Draft Environmental Document, 1.2 Purpose and Need
http://www.dot.ca.gov/dist9/projects/olancha/docs/draft_olancha-cartago_envir_doc.pdf

Inyo County Board of Supervisors September 21, 2010 Presentation
http://www.dot.ca.gov/dist9/projects/olancha/docs/inyo_bos_21Sep2010presentation.pdf

Ten Year Collision History map
http://www.dot.ca.gov/dist9/projects/olancha/
Note that the figures in this map are slightly different from the 1999 to 2008 data because the time periods analyzed are slightly different.

3. What is the current status of the project?

The project is in the Project Approval/Environmental Document (PA&ED) phase. Once the Final Environmental Document is complete in mid-2013, the project will move into the Design Phase

and Right of Way Phase. Once those phases are complete construction can begin, subject to funding.

Source: Project Development Workflow Task Manual
http://www.dot.ca.gov/hq/oppd/pdwt/fd1.pdf

Inyo Local Transportation Commission July 20, 2011 meeting
http://www.inyoltc.org/minutes/0711.pdf

4. When will the preferred alternative be selected?

The Final Environmental Document will include a full discussion on the preferred alternative to be built, responses to comments made on the draft environmental document, and the alternative selection process. That document is expected in 2013.

On June 29, 2011 District 9 Director Tom Hallenbeck announced that the preferred alternative for this project is a combination of Alternative 3 and Alternative 4. The Final Environmental Document is the report that documents the preferred alternative that will be built.

Source: News Release June 29, 2011 http://www.dot.ca.gov/dist9/pr/pr_29jun11.pdf

5. When will the project be built?

Construction is anticipated to begin in 2016. However, this date may change. Check www.4Lane395.com for project information.

Source: News Release June 29, 2011 http://www.dot.ca.gov/dist9/pr/pr_29jun11.pdf

6. How is the project funded?

The project is expected to be funded with State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) Funds. These are State transportation fund moneys from various sources, primarily State and Federal fuel taxes. These funds are specifically dedicated for transportation improvements and cannot be used for other purposes.

The project is a jointly funded project with Inyo (40%), Mono (10%), and Kern (10%) County and Caltrans (40%) contributing transportation funds for this project. The project is fully funded through the PS&E (Design) phase and Right of Way phase. Construction funding is not currently programmed.

Source: Draft Project Report, page 33, 34
http://www.dot.ca.gov/dist9/projects/olancha/docs/draft_olancha-cartago_project_report.pdf
Transportation Funding in California 2011, Chart 3 on page 11
http://www.dot.ca.gov/hq/tpp/offices/eab/fundchrt_files/Transportation_Funding_in_California_2011.pdf

7. The preferred alternative is a combination of two alternatives described in the Draft Environmental Document. Is that allowed?

Yes. The Draft Environmental Document states "In response to public and agency comments and consideration of environmental impacts, portions of the alternatives may be combined to create a preferred alternative that minimizes impacts and maximizes benefits."

Source: Draft Environmental Document, 1.3 Alternatives, page 10
http://www.dot.ca.gov/dist9/projects/olancha/docs/draft_olancha-cartago_envir_doc.pdf

8. How did Caltrans determine the preferred alternative?

A Project Development Team comprised of members from:

- Inyo County Local Transportation Commission
- Mono County Local Transportation Commission
- Kern Council of Governments
- California Highway Patrol
- U.S. Bureau of Land Management
- Los Angeles Department of Water and Power
- Caltrans staff

compared each alternative against the following factors as determined by the Team from most important to least important:

- Safety
- Local public concerns
- Cost
- Interregional/regional public concerns
- Natural and physical environment

Over three meetings that totaled more than 16 hours of discussion and review of public comments, the Project Development Team recommended that Caltrans proceed with Alternative 3, a divided highway passing west of Olancha adjacent to the existing highway through Cartago.

Caltrans District 9 Director Tom Hallenbeck reviewed the recommendation of the Project Development Team, the initial study/environmental assessments, project documents, comments received, survey results, public meeting results, before determining that the preferred alternative for this project would be a combination of Alternative 3 and Alternative 4.

Combining the alternatives takes advantage of the best that each had to offer. It will reduce environmental impacts, residence relocations, direct impacts to businesses, increase safety, and best meet the purpose and need of the project. "We have an opportunity to save lives" said District 9 Director Tom Hallenbeck.

Source: Inyo Register, September 17 & 18, 2011, "Caltrans' Olancha/Cartago decision a balancing act" http://inyoregister.com/node/1778

News Release June 29, 2011 http://www.dot.ca.gov/dist9/pr/pr_29jun11.pdf

9. Alternative 1 has some local support. Why not pick that alternative?

Local Public Concerns was the second most important of the five factors determined by the Project Development Team and Alternative 1 scored highest against this factor. However, when all of the five factors were considered, Alternative 3 scored highest overall. As a result, Alternative 3 was considered the best overall alternative and was recommended to the District Director by the Project Development Team. Alternative 3 was subsequently modified by Tom Hallenbeck to create a similar alternative that had even greater benefits. For more information, please see FAQ #8.

From most important to least important, the factors determined by the Team were:

- Safety
- Local public concerns
- Cost
- Interregional/regional public concerns
- Natural and physical environment

Source: Inyo Register, September 17 & 18, 2011, "Caltrans' Olancha/Cartago decision a balancing act" http://inyoregister.com/node/1778

10. Why aren't there more meetings so people can comment on the preferred alternative?

The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) specifies the environmental process, which basically is the following:

a. Prepare Draft Environmental Document (Completed August 2010)

b. Circulate Draft Environmental Document for public review and comment during a 30-day public comment period (Completed September 2, 2010 through October 22, 2010)
c. Approve the Final Environmental Document, which includes the final alternative selection, responses to comments made on the draft environmental document, and describes the alternative selection process (expected 2013)

Source: http://ceres.ca.gov/ceqa/flowchart/

11. Why not build an alignment to the east of the current alignment?

Alternative 2R was considered and would have followed the same alignment as Alternative 2, except that the alignment would have continued past State Route 190 (US 395 post mile 34.4) on the east side of the existing highway up to about post mile 35.75, where it would have crossed over to the west of the existing highway and back to the proposed alignment for Alternative 2. This alignment would have substantially reduced right-of-way impacts, cost of construction, and some environmental impacts.

However, Alternative 2R would impact 28 acres of wetlands while the other alternatives would impact fewer than 5 acres of wetlands. The Clean Water Act Section 404(b)(1) requires that Caltrans must consider the practicable alternatives that are least environmentally damaging to the aquatic environment before selecting this alternative, so Alternative 2R was removed from further consideration.

Source: Draft Environmental Document, 1.3 Alternatives, page 28
http://www.dot.ca.gov/dist9/projects/olancha/docs/draft_olancha-cartago_envir_doc.pdf

12. How was the width of Alternative 1 determined?

The proposed right of way width of Alternative 1 is 122', which includes four 12' lanes, a 14' median, and a 30' clear zone on each side of the highway (48' + 14' + 60' = 122'). The clear zone includes a 10' paved shoulder and 20' of graded area, which provides an unobstructed and traversable recovery zone for vehicles that may run off the road way. It also provides enhanced sight distance and refuge for vehicles entering the highway and other traffic (pedestrians, bicycles, etc...) that may be in the shoulder area, which improves safety.

Source: Draft Environmental Document, Appendix F
http://www.dot.ca.gov/dist9/projects/olancha/docs/draft_olancha-cartago_envir_doc.pdf

Draft Project Report, page 9
http://www.dot.ca.gov/dist9/projects/olancha/docs/draft_olancha-cartago_project_report.pdf

13. Why not use median barrier for Alternative 1 to reduce cross-centerline accidents?

The median provided for Alternative 1 would need to be widened by at least 8 feet to permit the installation of median barrier. Also, the median barrier would introduce an immovable object in the traveled way and would restrict sight distance, which could lead to more accidents. This might be justified at higher volumes of traffic, but is not justified at the current volumes. A median barrier also would not be consistent with one of the objectives of Alternative 1, which is to maintain the access that is currently available along the existing highway (i.e., a median barrier would block access to driveways and businesses).

14. What are the environmental impacts of each alternative?

The Draft Environmental Document details these impacts. The summary table beginning on page vi of the document provides a good summary. Below is a summary table

Source: Draft Environmental Document, page vi-viii
http://www.dot.ca.gov/dist9/projects/olancha/docs/draft_olancha-cartago_envir_doc.pdf

15. How will the different alternatives affect the businesses and residences in the Olancha/Cartago area?

The following table from the Draft Environmental Document identifies the homes and businesses that are anticipated to be relocated as a result of each of the alternatives.

Table 2-9 Summary of Relocations

Total Displacements	Alternatives				
	1	2	2A	3	4
a. Total Residential Units (Single-family and Mobile Homes)	7	6	7	4	1
Estimated Total of Displaced Residents *	21	18	21	12	3
b. Total Business Units	5	9	8	3	None
Estimated Number of Displaced Employees**	13	10	10	4	None
Total Units Relocations (a + b)	12	15	15	7	1

Source: Draft Relocation Impact Statement

* *The estimate of residential displacements is based on an average of 3.0 residents per household as determined by the Department of Finance Demographic Research Unit.*

** *Estimate number of displaced employees is based on a visual surveys and general assumption about the type of businesses.*

Source: Draft Environmental Document, page 49
http://www.dot.ca.gov/dist9/projects/olancha/docs/draft_olancha-cartago_envir_doc.pdf

16. How many acres of habitat will be disturbed by the different alternatives?

The estimated area of habitat disturbance was determined for each alternative and is identified in this table from the Draft Environmental Document:

Project Alternative	Acres of Impact*
1	215
2	268
2A	279
3	269
4	296

* Includes 60 acres of borrow site

Source: Draft Environmental Document, page 130
http://www.dot.ca.gov/dist9/projects/olancha/docs/draft_olancha-cartago_envir_doc.pdf

17. What will the speed limits be for the different alternatives?

Alternative 1 would likely have an initial posted speed limit of 55 mph, but it is anticipated that the speed limit would increase to 65 mph, based on future speed surveys. The divided expressway alternatives would all be posted for the legal maximum speed limit of 65 mph.

Source: Draft Project Report, pages 13,15
http://www.dot.ca.gov/dist9/projects/olancha/docs/draft_olancha-cartago_project_report.pdf

Inyo County Board of Supervisors September 21, 2010 presentation, page 10
http://www.dot.ca.gov/dist9/projects/olancha/docs/inyo_bos_21Sep2010presentation.pdf

18. Why can't Caltrans slow traffic down to 45 mph or slower in the Olancha/Cartago area?

Caltrans does not set speed limits. The California Vehicle Code requires the establishment of speed limits on the State Highway System upon the basis of either an engineering and traffic survey or the maximum speed limit specified in the California Vehicle Code. In general, the engineering and traffic survey determines the speeds at which a majority of safe and reasonable drivers are traveling. In the case of Olancha/Cartago, the majority of safe and reasonable drivers are traveling at speeds greater than 45 mph and as a 2-lane undivided highway the maximum speed limit specified in State law is 55 mph, without an engineering and traffic survey.

Source: California Vehicle Code, Sections 627, 22349, 22354
http://www.dmv.ca.gov/pubs/vctop/vc/vctoc.htm

19. How will each alternative affect emergency response?

In providing an upgraded highway through the area, the project would have a beneficial impact on emergency services. The project would increase access to the project area and facilitate faster emergency response in the area by providing additional travel lanes, passing opportunities, and improved intersections.

Access to the divided expressway alternatives would be controlled, but at-grade median cross-overs would be provided at most intersections and at other appropriate locations to maintain reasonable access across the facility. Locations for access points would be coordinated with emergency responders to ensure minimal effect on emergency response. The existing highway would still be available for emergency response along the existing corridor and would also provide an alternate route for emergency responders in the event that the new expressway was unpassable.

Source: Draft Environmental Document, page 60
http://www.dot.ca.gov/dist9/projects/olancha/docs/draft_olancha-cartago_envir_doc.pdf

Source: Draft Project Report, pages 9, 13-19, 30
http://www.dot.ca.gov/dist9/projects/olancha/docs/draft_olancha-cartago_project_report.pdf

20. What are the projected costs for each alternative?

The projected costs for each alternative are indicated below. The cost figures are escalated to the scheduled time of construction (FY 2015/2016) and include capital costs for construction, right of way acquisition, utility relocation, and environmental mitigation.

Projected Costs:

Alternative 1	$94.1 Million
Alternative 2	$110.4 Million
Alternative 2A	$104.4 Million
Alternative 3	$92.9 Million
Alternative 4	$128.4 Million

The preferred alternative cost will be determined in Final Project Report, but is expected to be between the cost of Alternative 3 and Alternative 4.

Source: Draft Project Report
http://www.dot.ca.gov/dist9/projects/olancha/docs/draft_olancha-cartago_project_report.pdf

Inyo County Board of Supervisors September 21, 2010 presentation, page 9
http://www.dot.ca.gov/dist9/projects/olancha/docs/inyo_bos_21Sep2010presentation.pdf

21. How will each alternative affect access in the Olancha/Cartago area?

All of the divided expressway alternatives would control access to existing intersections and other significant access points. At-grade median cross-overs would be provided at these locations to maintain reasonable access across the facility. Portions of the existing highway that are no longer needed would be converted to frontage roads, which would preserve the existing access and uses along the highway in those areas. Where necessary, portions of the existing highway that are incorporated into the new expressway would be replaced with frontage or alternative roads that would restore access to parcels that currently use the existing highway for access. At-grade intersections and alternative roads would also be provided to restore access to existing roads that may be bisected by the new expressway alternatives.

The conventional highway segments that would be constructed with Alternative 1 would not control access and a paved median would be delineated for turning movements, which would allow the existing access through the corridor to be preserved. However, the wider facility proposed for the project would also impact pedestrian, recreational, and agricultural uses that occur both along and across the existing highway.

Source: Draft Project Report, pages 6, 9, 11, 13-19, 30
http://www.dot.ca.gov/dist9/projects/olancha/docs/draft_olancha-cartago_project_report.pdf

22. Will access be provided to the Crystal Geyser Bottling Plant?

Additional at-grade intersections would be provided at other significant locations, such as the Crystal Geyser Bottling Plant.

Source: Draft Project Report, pages 9, 16, 31
http://www.dot.ca.gov/dist9/projects/olancha/docs/draft_olancha-cartago_project_report.pdf

23. How will each alternative affect recreational access in the Olancha/Cartago area?

The wider highway facility proposed for all alternatives would affect pedestrian, recreational, and agricultural uses in the project area. Where feasible, the project will incorporate box culvert undercrossings to provide safe access under the facility and maintain access to the recreational areas to the west.

Source: Draft Project Report, pages 6, 11, 21, 26
http://www.dot.ca.gov/dist9/projects/olancha/docs/draft_olancha-cartago_project_report.pdf

24. Have other communities along the US 395 corridor been bypassed?

Yes. For example, the communities of Aberdeen, Round Valley, and Crowley Lake have all been bypassed with new alignments of U.S. 395.

Crowley Lake in Mono County:	Bypassed in 1970
Aberdeen in Inyo County:	Bypassed in 1966
Paradise and Round Valley in Inyo/Mono Counties:	Bypassed in 1956

25. Where will the borrow site be located?

A borrow site at the end of Fall Road and south of Olancha Creek would likely be developed to provide road materials for the project. The site would be acquired from the U.S. Bureau of Land Management, which currently owns the site. An estimated 250 acre-feet of material would be mined and the area of disturbance within the material site would be approximately 60 acres or less.

Source: Draft Environmental Document, pages iii, v, 11, 34
http://www.dot.ca.gov/dist9/projects/olancha/docs/draft_olancha-cartago_envir_doc.pdf

Source: Draft Project Report, page 31
http://www.dot.ca.gov/dist9/projects/olancha/docs/draft_olancha-cartago_project_report.pdf

26. What will happen to the old road if Alternative 1 isn't selected?

The project development team recommended redesignation of US 395 from the current junction of State Route 190 to the south as SR 190. District 9 Director Tom Hallenbeck agreed with the recommendation and proposes that it be perpetuated in the preferred alternative

Those portions of existing highway that are not converted into SR 190 are contemplated to be relinquished to Inyo County for use as frontage roads. A surface treatment will most likely be required to improve the surface quality and ride in these relinquished areas or otherwise bring the roadway up to a state of good repair.

Source: Draft Project Report, pages 9, 12, 13-19, 30
http://www.dot.ca.gov/dist9/projects/olancha/docs/draft_olancha-cartago_project_report.pdf

Inyo County Board of Supervisors September 21, 2010 presentation, page 14
http://www.dot.ca.gov/dist9/projects/olancha/docs/inyo_bos_21Sep2010presentation.pdf