

BRIDGING THE GAP

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CALTRANS RESPONSE LEADS TO NATIONAL RECOGNITION

In the early hours of November 11, 2023, just twelve days before Thanksgiving, a massive fire erupted beneath the vital I-10 freeway in downtown Los Angeles.

The blaze caused significant damage to the freeway's superstructure – including 65 columns, leading to a full freeway closure projected to last three to five weeks. This section of the freeway stretching from E. Olympic Blvd. to S. Alameda Street serves as a crucial route, facilitating the daily commute of over 300,000 motorists and playing a pivotal role in the region's economic activity.

In response to this crisis, Governor Gavin Newsom promptly declared a State of Emergency. From first responders and firefighters to the California Highway Patrol, Los Angeles Police Department, HazMat teams, local city workers, and the entire Caltrans workforce, it was an all-hands-on-deck effort, with everyone working together.

The Caltrans State Bridge Engineer and State Bridge Construction Engineer spearheaded the efforts alongside selected contractors. Together with division engineers, they focused on quickly shoring up the weakened structure.

Structure Maintenance and Investigations and Materials Engineering and Testing Services engineers meticulously sampled and tested concrete and steel materials to evaluate their residual strength. Within 48 hours of the fire, engineers crafted a comprehensive temporary support plan.

The combined efforts of Caltrans District 7's Construction, Design, Program & Project Management, Maintenance, and Traffic Operation/Safety teams led to the swift construction, installation, and preloading of 24 massive temporary support structures. Each structure bore 110 percent of the superstructure's dead load, with an additional nine percent horizontal structure resistance transferred to the ground.



Just eight days after the fire, Caltrans reopened the I-10 Freeway to the public, perfectly timed for the Thanksgiving holidays. Caltrans' Chief Engineer expressed profound gratitude to all staff members for their unwavering dedication in accomplishing this historic emergency restoration, which significantly bolstered the economic vitality of Los Angeles.

The reopening garnered national attention and drew dignitaries including the Mayor of Los Angeles, Karen Bass, the Governor of California, Gavin Newsom, and the Vice President of the United States, Kamala Harris. Acknowledging the pivotal role of efficient transportation in fostering economic prosperity, the dignitaries hailed the collective efforts of the team as genuine American heroes, instrumental in upholding California's reputation as the nation's most vibrant state. They offered heartfelt commendation to Team One Division of Engineering Services for their exemplary performance. Caltrans continues to repair the damaged columns in phases, currently correcting minor damage to some columns, with additional columns and soffit concrete restoration in the next phases.

