



WIX FREEWAY PROJECT

A Business Survival Guide



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Roadwork Ahead: A Business Survival Guide

Introduction

We've all heard the old joke about the lost motorist asking a farmer for directions to a nearby city. The grizzled farmer mulls over the question and proclaims "You can't get there from here."

This refrain may become a convenient excuse for shoppers to take their business somewhere else and traffic congestion caused by the highway work.

The perception that "you can't get there from here" may be incorrect, but when perception becomes reality, the challenge becomes changing this perception to keep customers coming into your establishment.

The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) recognizes the special needs of businesses located in construction zones. It's crucial that customers continue to patronize and have access to businesses despite any inconvenience from roadwork.

Merchants often ask what kind of physical changes construction will have on or near their businesses. The challenges of doing "business as usual" include parking, business access and general construction work such as noise, dust and detours.

Caltrans has been meeting with business groups and civic leaders to understand local business concerns and takes them into consideration in planning the schedule and alternate routes to minimize the impact. However, some inconvenience and business disruption is unavoidable.

You don't need to panic. There are things you can do to lessen the impact on your business. This toolkit provides tips and techniques that have been used successfully in communities around the country. It offers businesses and community leaders a useful tool and source of ideas to plan for upcoming roadway construction.

Staying Informed

Businesses and Caltrans are "in this together." Both share in the long-term benefits of the road improvements after they are completed. Both need to **work together to lessen any negative consequences.** When involved early, businesses tend to take on some ownership for the improvements and are more optimistic when facing the challenges during construction.

Keeping Customers Informed

As a business person, you can keep informed by:

- **Attending public meetings** during the design phase and before construction.
- **Invite Caltrans representatives** to talk about the project at your business association or group meetings.
- **Share what you learned** with letters, newsletters, advertisements and other techniques to help the community become more aware of what's ahead.
- Set up a **line of communication**. Call if you have questions. You also can get together with other businesses to identify a point person to collect questions and bring back answers and other information.
- Identify key businesses to which Caltrans can email news releases or project updates.
- Sign up for **email alerts or social media updates**, available from Caltrans on **Fix50.com**

Motorists informed about highway construction tend to be more understanding about why the improvements are necessary and won't be surprised by the traffic interfering work. They give more thought to looking for ways around construction and getting to your business rather than fuming about detours and traffic congestion.

These are helpful tips to help you keep customers walking through your doors:

- **Use the FREE "Open for Business"** feature that Caltrans has created for businesses to promote their services. Go to **Fix50.com/open-for-business** to create your **free ad**. Offer a special promotion to give customers an added incentive to visit you before, during, and immediately after the project. Caltrans will also post these special promotions on social media to help draw attention to them throughout the project.
- **Use maps to tell your customers about the best alternate routes to reach your business.** Put them on your doors, windows, bulletin boards, insert them in mailings, emails or social media, and distribute them to your customers who may be unfamiliar with local roads.
- **Let the community know you're open for business.** You can develop ads or pool resources with other businesses for group advertising and promotions. Brainstorm for creative ideas to promote your business.

When Construction Starts

Dust, noise, and vibration are all inevitable during roadwork. These are not areas where you will have a great deal of control. Traffic delays and detours also are difficulties that occur during construction. Here are some ideas to deal with these issues:

- **Set aside more time or money for cleaning.** While there is little you can do about dust and noise from construction, you can focus on keeping your own business as dust-free as possible.
- **Develop a friendly rapport with construction workers.** While they aren't the contact about concerns, it can only improve the situation to maintain a good rapport with crews. They also could be a good source of business.
- **Communication will be crucial** during the entire construction project. As a business owner, you must communicate with the construction project officials, your employees, other businesses and, most importantly, your customers.
- **Stay informed with Fix50.com**

Handling Traffic

Businesses and Caltrans walk a fine line together. Caltrans and its contractor want to reduce traffic on the highway under construction so work can be completed efficiently, quickly and safely, which is the No. 1 priority. At the same time, businesses want to maintain a steady traffic flow for customers and employees to reach their destinations as easily as possible. It's essential to reduce traffic around the construction area. Diverting just 10 to 20 percent of the cars and trucks on the road to alternate routes can help keep traffic flow workable for motorists and the contractor. This allows the remaining 80 to 90 percent of the traffic to move through the construction area at a reasonable speed and allows drivers to reach businesses and residents along the route.

Here are ways businesses can help reduce traffic backups during construction:

- **Let customers know about the construction as far ahead as possible.** This allows them to plan ahead to get around the construction to reach your doorsteps. You can put up posters or pass out copies of alternate routes.

Power of Positive Thinking

- **Ask suppliers to make deliveries during off-peak construction hours.** Make sure they are given alternate routes.
- **Schedule shipments at non-peak travel times** and consider routes that enable your outgoing vehicles to avoid the construction area.

The Number One thing you can do to promote your business is to **stay completely positive** about the entire construction project, no matter how frustrating it may seem. Customers rely on you to represent the business and its place in the community. By remaining positive, you are sending a message that your business supports a vibrant business district.

Business Planning 101

You're not alone. Business owners across California and the nation have been through the construction process. Here are some of their suggestions:

- **Keep your staff lean.** Unfortunately, if you expect a significant decrease in business once construction starts, you may need to consider keeping staffing lean. Other options may be job sharing or reducing hours.
- **Evaluate** several scenarios for how your business might be affected during the construction period. **Analyze** the financial performance based on predicted changes for each scenario during the construction period. This helps identify opportunities or adjustments you can make on your business plan to help the bottom line and let you address concerns proactively.
- **Reduce inventory.** This can be a useful strategy to respond to slower periods due to construction.
- **Collect customer contact information before construction.** This is a good way to keep your customers informed of road and traffic conditions, best routes to your business and promotional specials during construction. You might consider sending out weekly newsletters or messages to customers stressing that their loyalty is important during construction.
- **Talk with your employees about developing a plan** to stay prosperous during construction. Discuss marketing efforts and

Marketing Your Business

allow employees to share their ideas and concerns. The dialogue may generate new ideas to boost business.

- This could be an ideal time to move ahead with improvements or changes to your property that you have thought about for a while.

Creativity has no limits. Marketing experts advise you to do what works for your business and budget. **Smart marketing can help you** and your employees get through the construction season. Here are some suggestions:

- **Run special promotions** such as cookouts, sidewalk sales, block parties, street dances or prize drawings.
- Develop a **catchy advertising slogan** such as “Follow the Road to Savings.”
- Offer registration into a “Hard Hat Club” and **offer discounts** for club members.
- Sell hard-hat lunches to go.
- **Participate in planned community events.** Sign up as a participant or plan your own promotions around any special events scheduled during or after construction.
- **Provide local delivery.** If millions of internet customers wait days for books, clothing or other merchandise to arrive by mail or UPS, why would a local shop’s existing customers not be interested in same-day hand delivery. Consider **cost-sharing opportunities** to partner with other local businesses to provide delivery services.
- Print placemats or **maps** that steer customers to parking or offer directions to businesses and recommended routes.
- Staple **flyers** promoting the business to every receipt or bag.
- **Cross-market** with other businesses. Make arrangements with other businesses inside and outside the construction area to **cross-promote**. For example, one restaurant offered a free dessert if a customer purchased a dozen roses at the local florist.
- Develop a phone script to **capture each caller’s name, address, phone number and email address** by training yourself and your employees how to deal with telephone calls, using a reward pool at the end of each week to reward employees who handled the task the best.

- **Extend your hours** — “Our highway may be closed, but we are open”
- Use your telephone and website to **“up-sell,”** reminding customers “just one more thing...would you like to hear about it?” The promotion could be offering a caller or website visitor a 10 percent discount for coming in on the weekend when commuting traffic is less.
- Create **in-store events** or **giveaways**.
- Send **thank you cards** or **create coupons** with an **incentive** for customers to return after the project.
- **Offer special value-added services** such as installation, repair or appraisal.
- **Sponsor demonstrations** to showcase products and services that may lead to more business or new customers.
- Provide **curb service** or other **convenience-oriented** services.
- Ask suppliers and vendors for information about **special giveaways, cooperative advertising** or other **promotional** opportunities.
- **Use social media** to promote your business, and send out messages and specials to your customers through **Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Foursquare** and other social media accounts.

What Others Did

Some communities have drawn attention to their business districts with innovative marketing campaigns and promotions to emphasize to customers that they were open for business during construction. These are some examples of what others around the country have done:

- Before starting construction, one community sponsored a jackhammer party as a groundbreaking.
- A local chamber of commerce developed a coupon book featuring coupons for three dozen businesses. The coupon book included raffle tickets for gift certificates. Winners were selected at community events during the summer.
- A convention and visitors bureau sponsored a lunch for construction crews with employees from local businesses serving the feast.
- A motel erected a sign that counted down the number of days to construction completion - “Smile — 100 days left of road project” it read at one point.

- One town parked a full-sized mobile billboard at various locations around a construction project area. One message read “Road Open All Summer” and another, “Thank You.”
- Another chamber of commerce organized a summertime “Barricade Busters Extravaganza.” The event carried a \$10 admission charge that covered food, door prizes, music and a silent auction. Proceeds went to signs to direct traffic from the detour route into local business areas. For \$50, a merchant could list their business on these signs.
- A group of businesses pooled their money for a zone advertising campaign and placed a full page ad in the local newspaper. The ad featured business owners and their employees posing before a front-end loader. The headline read, “The Construction is Here, The Hard Hats Are in Gear! We’re Open for Business. We’re Glad You’re Here.”
- A downtown business group held planning meetings before and during a construction project, coming up with signs, marketing campaigns and First Friday events held every month during construction.

You Made It

CONSTRUCTION IS OVER. Don’t forget a plan to invite customers back. Despite all your efforts to keep your customer base throughout construction, it is possible that some percentage of your customers have stayed away from the construction area. The biggest danger is not the temporary loss of their business, but the chance they changed their shopping habits. To offset this risk, it is important to **celebrate the end of construction**. You can show your appreciation to those customers who remained loyal while spreading the word that the traffic congestion is over by featuring special offers or promotions. Finally, support other businesses that undergo a similar process. Give them your patronage and provide feedback based on your experiences.

Useful Resources

W/X Freeway Project Website: www.Fix50.com

Facebook: www.facebook.com/Fix50WX

Twitter: [@Fix_50](https://twitter.com/Fix_50)

Instagram: [@Fix_50](https://www.instagram.com/Fix_50)

Fix50 Open For Business Specials: Fix50.com/open-for-business

California Department of Transportation District 3 News and Traffic Alerts: www.dot.ca.gov/dist3/departments/d3press/pressReleases/

Dennis Keaton, Caltrans Public Information Officer,
(530) 741-5474 dennis.keaton@dot.ca.gov

Sacramento Regional Transit: SacRT.com

City of Sacramento Traffic Alerts:
CityofSacramento.org/transportation/street/newstrafficalerts.html

Sacramento Region 511:
SacRegion511.org/ or call 511 from within the Sacramento area.

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