

The Earthquake: The City of Freeways Faces Chaos

The Freeways

Buckled Roads Devastate City That Lives by Its Cars

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in and around Los Angeles. She said Interstate 10, the busiest highway in the nation and widely known as the Santa Monica Freeway, was closed for nearly seven miles, a situation that will inevitably result in major disruptions over the next few months.

"Right now," Ms. Reid said, "we're getting out information on alternate routes. We're hoping and praying it works."

Several motorists were trapped in tons of concrete rubble as the overpasses on three highways buckled, severing Interstate 5, which is California's main north-south highway, and I-10, the Santa Monica Freeway.

During the earthquake, I-10, which slices across the city and ferries hundreds of thousands of commuters daily between the west side and downtown, swayed like a wave at the Fairfax

Avenue overpass, which fell to six feet above street level.

Mayor Riordan, noting that there had been "major damage" from the quake, said the damaged portion of the Santa Monica Freeway "will be closed for quite a while."

An Interchange Collapses

The earthquake also collapsed an arching intersection of two major freeways in the San Fernando Valley — Interstates 5, known as the Golden State, and Highway 14, called the Antelope Valley freeway.

Cars could be seen crushed beneath a fallen interchange overpass, whose Y-shaped support beam, shorn of the span it had helped hold aloft, jugged raggedly skyward. Two automobiles could be seen crunched up against its base.

The authorities said a police officer rushing to the scene on his motorcycle was killed early this morning.

Charles Kunz, an official of the Los Angeles Police Department, said the officer was unable to stop his motorcycle as it approached a collapsed portion of Interstate 5, and he fell about 20 feet to his death. The authorities believed he had died instantly.

A woman who was six months pregnant and traveling in a car was also critically injured in the highway collapse.

Serious Consequences

Elsewhere, a freeway bridge was damaged on State Route 118, the Simi Valley freeway.

Because Los Angeles residents are so dependent on freeways, the effect of the earthquake was expected to be severe, perhaps devastating, on the



Helping Overpasses Resist Earthquakes

Earthquakes in 1971 and 1989 devastated highway bridges in California and prompted two billion-dollar renovation programs. Here are three techniques used to prevent some earthquake-

Marissa Roth for The New York Times

Damage to freeways could cripple traffic for months. The Santa Monica Freeway collapsed at Fairfax Avenue and La Cieniga Boulevard.