Caltrans board approves funds to finish work on Interstate 15
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The people who control the state transportation budget have given the green light to pave the final 1 1/2-mile gap of Interstate 15 through City Heights.

"It has been a gash right through Mid-City," said San Diego Councilwoman Christine Kehoe. "It looks like it is finally on its way to healing."

Kehoe, who attended the California Transportation Commission meeting in Riverside Tuesday, said the group approved the allocation to fund the completion of I-15, which stretches from Barrio Logan all the way to Montana.

"The commission voted to approve the expenditure of $73 million needed to advertise the project and award bids for construction of the road beds," she said.

This phase of construction is slated to begin in the summer. Completion of the entire freeway section -- with widened bridges -- is due in 1998. The interstate will run 25 feet below ground level, allowing it to be crossed by most of the streets that now intersect 40th Street.

The freeway corridor along 40th Street through City Heights has been the center of attention for more than three decades of dissension and fiscal shortfalls.

The area, called "the heart of the freeway" by some, has been an eyesore for years. Houses in the freeway corridor were condemned, boarded up and demolished, leaving a long stretch of barren land that has become a magnet for trash and graffiti.

The $153 million project was first designated a state route in 1957. In 1985, Caltrans and the city of San Diego entered into a cooperative agreement for its development as an interstate highway.

The last delay in the project was caused by a freeze of all projects to funnel money into earthquake retrofitting statewide.