

Newport Coast Drive, which winds from Pacific Coast Highway just south of Cameo Shores to MacArthur Blvd. near University Drive in Irvine, opened Friday.

Irvine Co. officials sing 'Song of the Open Road'

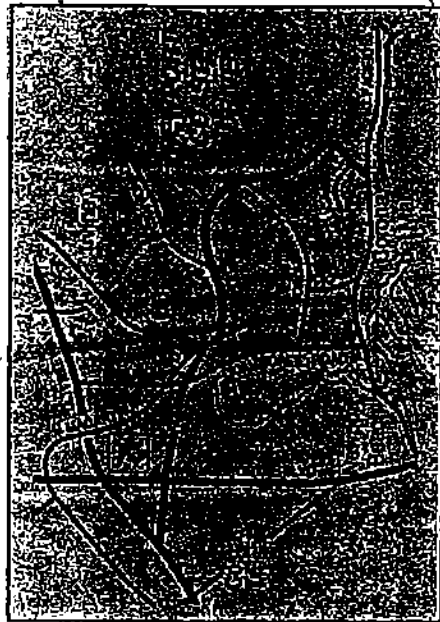
Local dignitaries gather for Newport Coast Drive debut

By Russ Loar
Staff Writer

Walt Whitman he's not, but Irvine Co. Chairman Donald Bren nevertheless delivered his own "Song of the Open Road" Friday afternoon before a crowd of about 500 community leaders perched on Pelican Hill to celebrate the grand opening of Newport Coast Drive.

"Roads have always meant going somewhere; roads have always represented freedom," Bren said, standing at a Plexiglas podium in a towering canvas tent erected for the ceremonies. "Today, I deeply believe we expand our own horizons with the opening of Newport Coast Drive."

Alluding to the titles of literary and musical works such as "The Road Not Taken" and "Hit the Road Jack," Bren declared the new road would significantly



Source: The Irvine Co.

improve access to and from coastal cities, while reducing traffic congestion in the area.

The \$67 million, 6-mile road winds from Pacific Coast Highway just south of Cameo Shores to

MacArthur Boulevard near University Drive in Irvine. The opening of the road Friday afternoon will offer south county residents a more direct route to John Wayne Airport, UCI and Newport Center, along with the promise of significantly reducing rush-hour congestion in Corona del Mar.

"I wasn't sure I'd live to see it," said Luvena Hayton, owner of Hayton's Bay Window dress shop in Corona del Mar and chairwoman of the transportation committee for the Corona del Mar Chamber of Commerce.

"We have been working for many, many years to get a viable bypass around Corona del Mar to alleviate the congestion in our village. Our quality of life will be better."

Although the Irvine Co. funded road was a necessary component of the 2,600-home Newport Coast development, Irvine Co. Senior Vice President Gary Hunt said the resort community would generate only about 19,000 cars a day, leaving 70 percent of road's capacity for outside traffic.

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Corona del Mar photography shop owner John Blom is not so sure the thinning out of traffic will be good for business. "As a businessman in Corona del Mar, I don't mind a lot of traffic," he said. "The busier, the better."

Although Irvine Co. officials are stressing the positive effects of the new road on local businesses, Blom is not sold on their good intentions. "For all they care, the merchants in Corona del Mar could dry up and blow away," he said. "It's just about the only area in town where they don't have a piece of the action."

But Michelle Zweber, whose family has owned Zweber's Pharmacy on East Coast Highway for 20 years, says relief from local traffic congestion is long overdue. "We deliver, and it can get pretty hectic between 5 and 7 in the evening," she said. "If the road helps reduce congestion, then that's good."