



**Jim Martin**

**CALTRANS ORAL HISTORY - EDITED SUMMARY  
BASED ON MY NOVEMBER 3, 2010 INTERVIEW WITH JIM MARTIN  
BY GUY LUTHER**

Jim graduated from Fortuna High School in 1957, and attended Humboldt State University for about two and one-half years, majoring in civil engineering.

Through High School, Jim was interested in being a Park Ranger. He worked part time during the summers as a janitor assistant at an elementary school, and at Fortuna Hardware doing clerical work and waiting on customers.

Jim's family has a long history of work for the Division of Highways. Jim's grandfather, father and uncle all had long careers with the Division of Highways Maintenance. And, his sister worked in the Office, Environmental and Clerical for about nine years before she transferred to Fish and Game.

In the summer of 1957, Jim started his career with the Division of Highways as an Engineering Student Trainee. He liked the work and the idea of building highways, so he changed his career goal from Park Ranger to Engineer.

Jim started in Construction, weighing ten yard dump trucks that were hauling rock slope protection trucks from a quarry called Brownieville Slide, just north of Garberville. Louie Dorris was the Resident Engineer.

As he promoted through the engineering technician classifications, Jim worked on Construction doing materials testing, surveying, Inspection, and field office work, in addition to being an Assistant Resident Engineer. He did just about everything that was required out on construction. Many of the functions performed by construction personnel when Jim was in Construction, such as weighing trucks, surveying, and some of the inspection, are now done by contractors or specialists.

Projects Jim worked on included the Tan Oak Park Expressway (the Empire Camp Rest Area is nearly at the center of this project), the Fortuna Freeway, the Pepperwood Freeway, and the Trutman Sink project. These were all projects to convert segments of Route 101 to 4-lane freeway or expressway. Jim also worked on the Circle Point to Berry Summit project on Route 299.

Jim was a member of the National Guard Engineering battalion in Eureka, and was called into service for about a month and one-half after the 1964 flood. This was considered to be of a magnitude that would occur only once in one thousand years, and it devastated the North Coasts bridges and roadways.

After his National Guard service, Jim went out on storm damage surveys, and was all over the District compiling information necessary to start replacing roadways, culverts, and bridges. Jim said that it was really neat to be able to help at a time like that, with all of that devastation. He credits District Engineer Sam Helwer for making sure the Division of Highways did whatever it took to get the roadway open to traffic, and not worrying about process and paperwork until the main highways were open to traffic. The History Channel had a program about bridges on the West Coast, and they interviewed Jim regarding the 1964 flood.

Jim enjoyed working in Construction, and worked there for over ten years. Typically he worked in the field for most of the year, then came in to the District Office and worked in Design during the winter. And, between Construction assignments, Jim also worked on a preliminary surveys crew for about a year.

After he promoted to Associate Transportation Engineer, Jim worked as a Design squad leader, and one of his projects was the Eureka Freeway. Jim managed the design on this project through the geometric approvals, and was disappointed that we didn't construct the project.

Subsequently, Jim worked as the District's Program Management Engineer, and as the District's Local Assistance Engineer.

In Program Management, Jim and his staff were required to plan or project the required person years (PY's) to design and build the District's projects. It was a continuing challenge to program projects so they could be delivered on time and within budget, and to anticipate future workload changes.

As the District's Local Assistance Engineer, Jim and his staff worked with Counties and incorporated Cities within the District, overseeing the planning and building of projects that used Federal funding. One of the most interesting projects involved building a sea wall along the ocean just north of Petrolia in Humboldt County. This consisted of a concrete type bin wall that was manufactured by Hilfiker Pipe Company of Eureka. This wall can be seen today at various locations just south of Ocean House Ranch, on the road from Ferndale to Petrolia.

Jim also noted that he enjoyed helping Humboldt County get the special Federal funds to construct the bay shore protection going into King Salmon.

As Caltrans implemented Project Management, Jim was one of the first Project Managers in District 1. One of his most challenging projects was one that protected Route 101 from the northward migration of the Mad River. Jim took his Project Manager job seriously, and felt that he had a responsibility to protect

the highway. The District wasn't making any progress towards a solution, so Jim approached the District Director and told him the situation was urgent, and we needed to consult with Headquarters. The District Director called, and the next day someone came up from headquarters. Ultimately, we worked out a solution, and were able to save the freeway, but it was a real challenge.

Jim feels that regionalization was one of the major changes to the Division of Highways/Caltrans during his career. Since Caltrans implemented it, Jim tried as much as he could to help make it work, but he doesn't think it has been efficient or cost effective.

He said that over the years our District had been reasonably successful at keeping a balanced staff. We'd have some peaks when we had storm damage or more money for projects, and we would need more people for that. And, when there wasn't any storm damage, we might be slightly overstaffed. But we always tried to keep a staffing balance, and he thinks the District did very well at that. Short term transfers to accommodate work load changes would probably have been preferable to regionalization, and wouldn't have separated workers from their supervisors or managers.

After almost 40 years with the Division of Highways and Caltrans, Jim retired in 1998. While he liked the organization and the people, he felt he had put in his time, and wanted to look forward to spending some good years in retirement. And, he says they have been good years.

When asked what he thought was better about the Division of Highways/Caltrans now than when he started working for them, Jim said "nothing". He has discussed this with other current and former Division of Highways/Caltrans staff, and feels that they generally concur.

Since Jim's retirement, all of the positions he worked in as a Associate Transportation Engineer have been upgraded to Senior Transportation Engineer: Design Squad Leader, Program Management Engineer, Local Assistance Engineer, and Project Manager.