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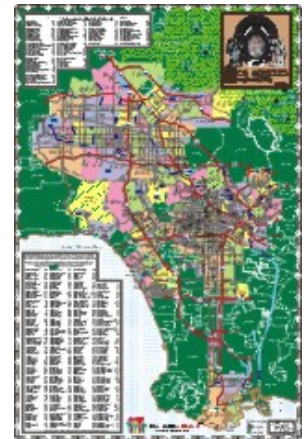
Mission Bells on 101 Freeway

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The **mission bells** seen on the 101 Freeway and other locations have been in place since the early 20th Century to mark the original route of *El Camino Real* (Spanish for *Highway of the King* or *Royal Highway*) from San Diego to Sonoma. The 700-mile-long *El Camino Real* linked California's 21 missions, which were founded by **Father Junipero Serra** and spaced approximately one day's journey apart by horse. Over the years, *El Camino Real* gave way to modern highways, principally Routes 101 and 82.

Efforts to mark the old highway were first initiated in 1892 by Anna Pitcher of Pasadena. The California Federation of Women's Clubs (principally in the persons of Mrs. A.S.C. Forbes and Mrs. Caroline Olney) and the Native Daughters of the Golden West eventually brought Pitcher's proposals to fruition. The El Camino Real Association was established in 1904 to investigate the original route of the old highway and provide a distinctive marker to be installed along the route. Mrs. Forbes (upon a suggestion by Mrs. C.F. Gates) designed these markers as miniature mission bells said to be modeled after the bells of the Old Plaza Church in Los Angeles. The cast iron bells hung from eleven-foot bent guideposts that made them easily visible to passing travelers. The first bell was installed in 1906 in front of the Old Plaza Church in downtown Los Angeles.

The original bell installers made no provision for maintenance of the bells. By 1926, the bells had fallen into disrepair and some had been stolen. From 1926 to 1931, the California State Automobile Association and the Automobile Club of Southern California assumed responsibility for maintenance and replacement of bells on state-owned property. In fact, the bells served as vital markers for California motorists during that period. In 1960, Justin Kramer of Los Angeles won the bid to manufacture replacement bells. His design became the

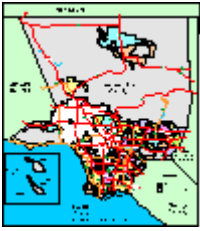


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standard and he is still casting bells today. In 1974, the California Legislature appointed the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) to be responsible for repairing or replacing bells. Caltrans replacement bells are now cast in concrete, rather than iron (also see [California Bell Company](#)).

Today, more than 380 bells are in place marking the old highway and its branches. The [California Federation of Women's Clubs](#) is working with Caltrans to replace more bells along the route. The bells are located in San Diego, Los Angeles, Ventura, San Benito, Monterey, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, San Mateo and Santa Clara Counties.

For an excellent detailed history of *El Camino Real* and the marker bells along the route, see the book [California's El Camino Real and Its Historic Bells](#) by Max Kurillo and Erlene Tuttle (Sunbelt Publications). The Editor of *The Los Angeles Almanac* is grateful to Mr. Kurillo and Sunbelt Publications for providing most of the information above.

Source: *California's El Camino Real and Its Historic Bells* by Max Kurillo & Erlene Tuttle and the [California Department of Transportation](#).

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