

Southern California - this just in

From the staff of the Los Angeles Times and...

## Form and freeway

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If you find yourself stuck at the interchange of the 405 and 10 freeways, spend some time (since you are not going anywhere soon) to admire the long, sweeping ramps that soar overhead. This is the work of Marilyn Jorgensen Reece, the state's first licensed female civil engineer. This morning, Caltrans will honor Reece, who died in May 2004, by naming the junction the Marilyn Jorgensen Reece Memorial Interchange.

Women were still a rare sight in the engineering and architectural departments in the late 1940s, when the [North] Dakota native started work for the State Department of Highways (now Caltrans) as a junior engineer. But in 1954, Reece (who liked math but didn't want to teach) was the first woman to earn a California civil engineering license and later the first to design an interchange, the three-level at the intersection of the San Diego and Santa Monica freeways. "It is very airy. It isn't a cluttered, loopy thing," she told *The Times* in a 1995 interview. "That was so you didn't have to slam on the brakes, like you do on some interchanges."

Of course, it now seems like brake lights illuminate Reece's interchange nearly all day as traffic congestion has grown way beyond what she and other engineers ever imagined. But there's still a simplicity and elegance of her design that led urban critic Reyner Banham, author of *"Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies,"* to praise the interchange as "a work of art, both as a pattern on the map, as a monument against the sky, and as a kinetic experience as one sweeps through it."



Now if only this traffic gets moving and you can zoom across the carpool ramps on the Harbor-110 freeway.

■ Jesus Sanchez

*Photos courtesy Anne Bartolotti*