

No free ride on freeways

Local filming may be important, but there's no excuse to hand over the 105 to Bruce Willis.

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EDITORIAL

ALL LOS ANGELES is a sound stage, its people merely extras. Most Angelenos get that, accepting that a certain amount of inconvenience goes along with living in Hollywood's 10-million-inhabitant back lot. Local filming benefits everybody, providing jobs and pumping money into the economy. But at what point do we cross the line from being accommodating to exploited?

To our minds, it's when key access routes to Los Angeles International Airport are obstructed for weeks during the busiest season of the year for shippers and travelers.

Bruce Willis' latest "Die Hard" epic will apparently include the mother of all freeway explosion sequences, judging from the pyrotechnics scheduled for the next two weeks on Imperial Highway near LAX. Some or all lanes between Aviation Boulevard and Nash Street were closed from early morning until 7 p.m. starting Thursday, and they will remain that way off and on through Nov. 18 and 19 — the "getaway weekend" before Thanksgiving. Portions of the 105 Freeway also will be closed this weekend and next. As if getting to and from LAX weren't hassle enough already. Airport officials are warning travelers to expect delays, and cargo carriers fear the filming could cost them thousands of dollars in delayed deliveries during the crucial holiday retail season. What are producers paying in compensation? Not much.

The state doesn't charge filmmakers a dime to rent roadways or freeways, though they do have to cover the costs of the Caltrans workers and Highway Patrol officers needed to close and reopen them; in the case of "Live Free or Die Hard," that comes to \$15,540 for the 12 days of filming for Caltrans and roughly \$45,000 for the CHP. They also have to pay city fees, but those are quite cheap as well. The city of L.A. charges only \$312 for filming-related road closures (not per day but for the entire length of the shoot), and producers have to pay \$64 an hour for a fire marshal and between \$150 to \$1,000 to notify nearby residents.

Yes, local filming brings in money for crew salaries, craft services, set construction, etc. The L.A. County Economic Development Corp. estimates that a medium-budget movie pumps about \$2.6 million a day into the economy. What's the price tag on all that lost productivity from excess traffic? No one knows, but with more than 100,000 travelers going to and from LAX every day, the number of those who miss flights could skyrocket.

Movie producers have been fleeing L.A. for years. It's understandable that permitting officials would bend over backward to accommodate filmmakers. Yet public input into the decision to close the roads around LAX for "Live Free or Die Hard" was nearly nonexistent, despite the enormous inconvenience and potential cost to residents and businesses. This is one scene we wouldn't have minded being shot in Canada.