

## **Staff Evaluation of Services Provided by Topp Strategies for 2024**

The following narrative provides specific information with respect to major issues addressed by Topp Strategies, with Moira Topp as the Orange County Transportation Authority's (OCTA) primary state legislative advocate in 2024, and general services provided. Each issue has been evaluated based on effort and outcome using a rating of excellent, very good, good, fair, or poor.

### **State Budget Provisions for Transportation Purposes**

*Effort: Excellent; Outcome: Excellent*

In previous budget cycles, when the State was operating in a budget surplus, the Legislature approved \$4 billion in formula funding for the Transit Intercity Rail Capital Program to be used for transit operating and capital purposes. With the State facing a significant funding shortfall this year, the Department of Finance froze various accounts in order to determine how to address ongoing funding needs. This included freezing transit funding that was set to be allocated to transit agencies in fiscal year (FY) 2023-24. OCTA was estimated to receive about \$183 million, which included funding for Metrolink operations and zero-emission bus purchases.

Topp Strategies, working in coordination with the California Transit Association and transit agencies across the State, developed an advocacy strategy to make the case to protect these funds and ensure quick allocation. Because transit funding represented the largest funding source that could potentially be shifted to address the budget deficit, work was necessary to showcase the importance of transit, the economic benefits from the use of these funds, and other co-benefits, including environmental. In the end, all funding for transit purposes was preserved, while adjusting some timelines for disbursement. This allowed OCTA to remain on schedule with the use of these funds and maintain promised transit service levels. Further, Topp Strategies was also successful in helping OCTA preserve funding for other transportation programs including active transportation and planning.

### **Bills of Interest**

*Effort: Very Good; Outcome: Very Good*

AB 7 (Friedman, D-Glendale): This is one of several bills OCTA opposed that Topp Strategies was successful in stopping last year AB 7 would have reprioritized various transportation funding programs in a manner inconsistent with their original intent, potentially jeopardizing OCTA's ability to deliver various transportation services and projects. Towards the end of the year, there was an attempt to again amend this bill to allow it to move forward. Even with the proposed amendments, significant concerns remained about the impacts this bill would have on transportation funding. Topp Strategies worked within the coalition they helped form last year to stop the bill from moving forward. This required coordinated advocacy with members of key committees, including the Senate Transportation Committee where the majority of members are from Orange County. Ultimately, the author pulled the bill from consideration.

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AB 2535 (Bonta, D-Oakland): Another bill OCTA opposed this session, which sought to reprioritize transportation funding under the Trade Corridor Enhancement Program, diminishing the ability for OCTA to qualify to use the funds to benefit goods movement in the region. Again, similar to the advocacy strategy used for AB 7, Topp Strategies coordinated with a coalition of stakeholders that included labor and transportation agencies, to convey the significant impacts this bill would have on programs and projects, and the potential to undermine voter intent in protecting funding provided under SB 1 (Chapter 5, Statutes of 2017). Despite last minute attempts by the author to amend the bill to appease opposition, she ultimately pulled the bill from consideration without the necessary votes to pass out of policy committee.

SB 768 (Caballero, D-Fresno): OCTA supported this bill, which would have created a report to provide more transparency about mitigation costs for transportation projects to address vehicle miles traveled increases. With the costs of mitigation increasing exponentially, and sometimes being more expensive than the actual project, this bill would have required more analysis about different approaches that could be taken and the associated costs and benefits. Sponsored by the Building Industry Association, the bill was ultimately amended at the end of session to focus solely on mitigation associated with housing projects. Without a nexus to OCTA projects, the support position for the bill was dropped. However, in supporting the bill, Topp Strategies had started conversations with legislative staff about the need in future sessions to have a more robust conversation about this issue.

SB 1098 (Blakespear, D-Laguna Hills): While OCTA did not have a position on this bill, part of the author's intent in introducing this legislation was to seek to create more transparency and accountability for the State in ensuring the protection of the Los Angeles – San Diego – San Luis Obispo Rail Corridor through various reporting requirements. The author's office consistently worked with OCTA staff and Topp Strategies to inform amendments to mitigate any unintended consequences. While much of the bill is contingent on future appropriations, it is expected that some of the work will begin next year on developing a working group to inform the initial work required of the final bill.

### **General Services**

*Effort: Excellent; Outcome: Excellent*

Topp Strategies regularly scheduled meetings with legislators, committee consultants, Administration staff, and staff of various state departments, boards, and commissions to discuss issues of importance to OCTA. Topp Strategies has been responsive to requests by OCTA staff, provided timely information, advice and reports, and provided testimony in legislative committees that accurately reflected Board positions on legislation and policy issues. Topp Strategies also worked on a number of other issues on behalf of OCTA that were not necessarily contained in legislation.

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Specifically, this year, Topp Strategies provided critical meetings with new and existing Orange County delegation members to discuss OCTA's top priorities including support for the rail corridor, transit operations funding, managed lanes and zero-emission buses. This included securing meetings with every Orange County delegation member at the beginning of the year. In addition, Topp Strategies secured meetings with several different administrative agencies, including the California State Transportation Agency, California Coastal Commission, California Department of Transportation, and the California Transportation Commission. Topp Strategies also strategized to start hosting OCTA Brown Bag lunches with Orange County delegation staff and staff from relevant policy committees. This provided further education about OCTA priorities.

Further work will be needed next year to advance connections with other relevant state agencies, including the California Air Resources Board, as the next stage of the Innovative Clean Transit regulation takes place.

*Effort: Excellent; Outcome: Excellent*

Topp Strategies efforts overall are rated as excellent based on responsiveness, time dedicated to advocating for and advancing of OCTA's positions and policies, timeliness of information, assisting in building cooperative relationships with legislators and members of various state departments, boards, and commissions, and availability. Topp Strategies outcomes overall are rated as excellent based on the outcomes of the issues discussed.