




**May 12, 2025**

**To:** Members of the Board of Directors

**From:** Darrell E. Johnson, Chief Executive Officer 

**Subject:** Amendment to the Master Plan of Arterial Highways

### **Overview**

On April 14, 2025, the Orange County Transportation Authority Board of Directors deferred action for up to 30 days on a recommendation to remove the planned Garfield-Gisler bridge crossing over the Santa Ana River from the Master Plan of Arterial Highways. The deferral was provided in response to a request from the City of Fountain Valley for additional time to confirm its formal position through discussions with the City Council. The City of Fountain Valley has completed its discussions, and the item is being returned to the Board of Directors for consideration.

### **Recommendations**

- A. Approve amending the Master Plan of Arterial Highways to fully remove the Garfield-Gisler Santa Ana River crossing.
- B. Direct staff to close out the Memorandum of Understanding C-6-0834 among the cities of Costa Mesa, Fountain Valley, and Huntington Beach, and the Orange County Transportation Authority regarding agency responsibilities for implementing the consensus recommendation for the Garfield-Gisler bridge crossing over the Santa Ana River.
- C. Direct the Executive Director of Planning, or her designee, to file a Notice of Exemption from the California Environmental Quality Act in support of the Master Plan of Arterial Highways amendment.

### **Background**

The Garfield-Gisler crossing was first included in Orange County's arterial highway system in 1956 as one of four planned bridges over the Santa Ana River to improve east-west connectivity. While two of these crossings have been built, the Garfield-Gisler and 19th Street-Banning bridges have remained

unconstructed, due in part to community opposition. However, the 19th Street-Banning bridge was removed from the Master Plan of Arterial Highways (MPAH) in 2012 by the Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA) Board of Directors (Board).

The Garfield-Gisler bridge was reclassified on the MPAH as “Right-of-Way Reserve” in 2006, following years of technical analysis and community engagement. This designation preserved the right-of-way while allowing for further analysis of whether surrounding roadways could function acceptably without the bridge. That decision was formalized through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between OCTA and the cities of Costa Mesa, Fountain Valley, and Huntington Beach (Cities). This MOU (Attachment A) outlined a performance-based approach to considering the full removal of the Garfield-Gisler bridge from the MPAH and included a list of roadway improvements, known as Strategy A, identified to offset the absence of the bridge.

In 2020, OCTA and the Cities amended the MOU (Attachment B) to defer the reevaluation of the surrounding roadways, and a final determination was reached on the disposition of the Garfield-Gisler bridge on the MPAH, until the completion of the Interstate 405 (I-405) Improvement Project, which opened to traffic in late 2023. In November 2024, OCTA reconvened with the Cities and initiated a reevaluation process consistent with the terms of the MOU.

On January 29, 2025, OCTA presented its technical reevaluation to the Cities, comparing current traffic forecasts against the 2006 baseline. This analysis showed that traffic conditions had improved or remained stable in the absence of the bridge. The findings were documented in a technical report prepared by OCTA and a third-party peer review completed by Iteris, Inc. (Attachments C and D, respectively). By early March, all three cities provided concurrence letters supporting the removal of the bridge from the MPAH (Attachments E, F, and G).

### ***Discussion***

This item is returning to the Board following a deferral granted at the April 14, 2025 Board meeting, which was intended to allow the City of Fountain Valley (City) additional time to clarify its formal position through a city council study session. That session took place on May 6, 2025. A status report of the study session will be provided at the Board meeting.

As noted, the City initially submitted a letter of concurrence with the findings of the technical review on March 11, 2025. However, on April 10, 2025, the City submitted a retraction letter (Attachment H) citing concerns that not all obligations under the 2006 MOU have been fulfilled.

It is important to clarify that the 2006 MOU describes the list of roadway improvements as non-prescriptive, acknowledging that implementation would depend on future development and performance needs. The agreement also committed the agencies to making “reasonable progress” on these improvements.

As of 2025, substantial progress has been made:

- All ten identified intersection improvements have either been completed or determined to be unnecessary since they are still operating at an acceptable level.
- The Talbert-MacArthur bridge lane additions were completed.
- Operational improvements were either completed or partially completed, apart from three bus turnouts that were deemed not necessary to achieve performance standards.

OCTA’s reevaluation, conducted using the latest version of the Orange County Transportation Analysis Model, found that traffic conditions in the study area remain stable or improved compared to 2006. The analysis confirmed that the surrounding arterial network is capable of accommodating future demand without the Garfield-Gisler crossing. This conclusion was validated by the third-party peer review. Therefore, the technical basis for removal is valid, and the reevaluation process adhered to the intent of the 2006 MOU.

While consensus remains the goal, the Board retains the authority under Policy 2.13 of the MPAH guidelines to approve amendments without full concurrence of the affected agencies. This approach was previously used in 2012 to remove the 19th Street-Banning crossing from the MPAH.

### ***Summary***

OCTA has coordinated closely with the Cities for nearly two decades to evaluate the need for the planned Garfield-Gisler Santa Ana River crossing in accordance with the MOU. In late 2024, following completion of the I-405 Improvement Project, OCTA initiated a reevaluation of the corridor. The reevaluation—supported by a third-party peer review—confirmed that the surrounding roadway network is expected to operate acceptably through at least 2050 without the crossing. With the City having now conducted a study session to determine its position, the item is being returned to the Board for consideration.

**Attachments**

- A. Memorandum of Understanding C-6-0834 Among Cities of Costa Mesa, Fountain Valley and Huntington Beach and the Orange County Transportation Authority Regarding Agency Responsibilities for Implementing the Consensus Recommendation for the Garfield-Gisler Bridge Crossing over the Santa Ana River
- B. Amendment No. 1 to Memorandum of Understanding C-6-0834 Among Cities of Costa Mesa, Fountain Valley and Huntington Beach and Orange County Transportation Authority Regarding Agency Responsibilities for Implementing the Consensus Recommendation for the Garfield-Gisler Bridge Crossing over the Santa Ana River
- C. Garfield-Gisler Santa Ana River Crossing Technical Review
- D. Iteris FINAL Peer Review – Garfield-Gisler Santa Ana River Crossing Technical Review
- E. Letter from Raja Sethuraman, Public Works Director, City of Costa Mesa, to Rose Casey, Executive Director, Planning, Orange County Transportation Authority, dated March 13, 2025, re: Master Plan of Arterial Highways – Concurrence with the Garfield-Gisler Santa Ana Crossing Technical Review
- F. Letter from Scott Smith, Public Works Director, City of Fountain Valley, to Rose Casey, Executive Director, Planning, Orange County Transportation Authority, dated March 11, 2025, re: Master Plan of Arterial Highways – Concurrence with the Garfield-Gisler Santa Ana Crossing Technical Review
- G. Letter from Chau Vu, Director of Public Works, City of Huntington Beach, to Rose Casey, Executive Director, Planning, Orange County Transportation Authority, dated March 17, 2025, re: Master Plan of Arterial Highways – Concurrence with the Garfield-Gisler Santa Ana Crossing Technical Review
- H. Letter from Scott Smith, Public Works Director, City of Fountain Valley, to Rose Casey, Executive Director, Planning, Orange County Transportation Authority, dated April 10, 2025, re: Retraction of Garfield-Gisler Bridge Letter

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