



August 5, 2024

To: Regional Transportation Planning Committee

From: Darrell E. Johnson, Chief Executive Officer

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Darrell Johnson", is written over the "From:" line of the header.

Subject: South Orange County Transportation Projects Update

Overview

In October 2021, the Board of Directors approved an agreement with the County of Orange and the City of San Clemente to work cooperatively on key south Orange County transportation projects. The projects include a non-tolled extension of Los Patrones Parkway, widening a portion of Ortega Highway, and a southerly extension of the Interstate 5 high-occupancy vehicle lanes. Significant progress has been made in the project development process, and a status report is provided for review.

Recommendation

Receive and file as an information item.

Background

The Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA) has been working to advance transportation improvements in south Orange County. One of the primary funding mechanisms for these improvements is Measure M2 (M2), a local half-cent transportation sales tax administered by OCTA. To date, M2 funds have been combined with other sources to provide approximately \$1 billion in freeway projects, \$336 million in arterial projects, \$54 million in signal synchronization, \$189 million in rail projects, and \$36 million in community circulators (Attachment A).

In October 2021, the Board of Directors (Board) approved a three-party cooperative agreement (Attachment B) between OCTA, the County of Orange (County), and the City of San Clemente (San Clemente) to document support and describe the roles and responsibilities for three key projects in south Orange County. These projects are listed below and depicted in Attachment C.

- Extending Los Patrones Parkway as a non-tolled arterial from Cow Camp Road to Avenida La Pata;
- Improving Ortega Highway between Calle Entradero and Reata Road; and,
- Extending the Interstate 5 (I-5) high-occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes from the Orange/San Diego County Line to Avenida Pico.

These projects focus on meeting the near-term travel demand needs that remain following the elimination of the proposed extension of the State Route 241 (SR-241) toll road, known as the Green Alignment. The Green Alignment was eliminated in 2016 through a settlement agreement between the Transportation Corridor Agencies (TCA), the State Attorney General, and a coalition of environmental groups. Following which, the Board provided direction to staff in April 2020, to collaborate with key agencies on the development of these three key projects.

Discussion

Since October 2021, project development has progressed on all three projects, and updates are provided below.

Los Patrones Parkway Extension (LPPE): Preliminary Engineering Underway

The approximately four-mile non-tolled LPPE was added to the County's general plan, San Clemente's general plan, and OCTA's Master Plan of Arterial Highways in early 2021. It will be built as a four-lane divided arterial between Cow Camp Road and Avenida La Pata, consistent with California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) documents approved by the County of Orange. LPPE replaces prior plans by TCA to extend the SR-241 toll road from Oso Parkway to I-5 in south San Clemente. As a non-tolled facility, the LPPE will provide an alternative route to parallel and adjacent corridors including Antonio Parkway, Avenida La Pata, I-5, and Ortega Highway. The LPPE is also expected to shift some arterial traffic to SR-241.

In May 2021, the Board awarded \$1.875 million in funding to the County for preliminary engineering of the LPPE through the competitive M2 Regional Capacity Program. The County and the Rancho Mission Viejo Company are coordinating the preliminary engineering efforts and the development of construction cost estimates. The preliminary engineering phase is expected to be complete by early 2025, followed by final design completion in 2026. Construction could begin in 2027 and be complete as early as 2031, contingent on available funding.

Ortega Highway Gap Closure: Final Design Underway

This project will improve a 1.1-mile section of Ortega Highway between Calle Entradero in the City of San Juan Capistrano (San Juan Capistrano) and Reata Road (near the boundary between San Juan Capistrano and unincorporated county) to provide a lane configuration that is consistent with adjacent segments (two lanes in each direction). The improvement will relieve congestion particularly for westbound morning traffic headed to I-5. The project is environmentally cleared under the CEQA and the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA). In June 2021, San Juan Capistrano, the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), OCTA, and the County executed agreements to fund and initiate the plans, specifications, and estimates phase that is now being led by Caltrans. Caltrans is expected to complete the final design in 2026 with construction starting in 2027. The project is expected to be open to traffic by early 2029.

This project is funded with \$87.5 million of funding, \$85.4 million of which was secured by OCTA. The estimated cost for the right-of-way (ROW) and construction phases is \$71.6 million. OCTA secured full funding for the project as part of the 2022 State Transportation Improvement Program. It is fully funded based on current cost estimates and programmed funding.

I-5 HOV Extension from San Diego County Line to Avenida Pico: Environmental Clearance/Preliminary Engineering Underway

The I-5 HOV Extension Project, from the San Diego County Line to Avenida Pico, proposes to add one HOV lane in each direction, re-establish existing auxiliary lanes, modify ramps at select locations, and widen bridge structures, where applicable. This 3.5-mile project will extend the HOV improvements that were completed as part of Project C in the M2 Freeway Program and complete most of the remaining HOV lane network in Orange County.

OCTA is developing the environmental document, which is anticipated to be completed in 2025. While OCTA is leading the environmental work, Caltrans will have final approval authority under NEPA and CEQA. OCTA is also leading the stakeholder involvement process with various agencies including San Clemente, San Diego Association of Governments, and other stakeholders. After environmental approval, the next planned phase is final design that is likely to begin in 2026, contingent on available funding. It should be noted that OCTA is seeking state and federal funding for the final design, ROW, and construction phases.

The current order-of-magnitude cost estimate for all phases (environmental, final design, ROW, and construction) is approximately \$400-\$450 million (not including mitigation). As the project progresses through the project development process, OCTA will develop a detailed schedule.

Summary

Major projects to address south Orange County transportation needs are advancing through the planning and project development phases. This includes a non-tolled extension of Los Patrones Parkway, a key gap closure on Ortega Highway, and an extension of the I-5 HOV lane.

Attachments

- A. South County Transportation Improvements
- B. Cooperative Agreement C-1-3815
- C. Key South Orange County Transportation Projects

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