



February 5, 2024

To: Regional Transportation Committee

From: Darrell E. Johnson, Chief Executive Officer

Subject: 2023 Orange County Complete Streets Program Project
Prioritization Recommendations

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Darrell E. Johnson", is written over a light blue rectangular background.

Overview

On August 14, 2023, the Orange County Transportation Authority Board of Directors approved the 2023 Orange County Complete Streets Program guidelines and authorized the release of the call for projects. The Board of Directors is being presented with project prioritization recommendations for approval to submit to the Southern California Association of Governments for consideration as part of the final project selection process.

Recommendations

- A. Approve the 2023 Orange County Complete Streets Program project prioritization recommendations.
- B. Authorize submittal of 2023 Orange County Complete Streets Program projects to the Southern California Association of Governments to be considered for final project selection, with four projects contingent on the approval of amendments to the Master Plan of Arterial Highways.
- C. Authorize the Chief Executive Officer or his designee to provide concurrence on future project scope changes, extension requests, and substitutions to the Southern California Association of Governments as needed for the 2023 Orange County Complete Streets Program projects.
- D. Authorize staff to process all necessary amendments to the Federal Transportation Improvement Program to facilitate the above actions.

Background

The 2023 Orange County Complete Streets Program (OCCSP) Project call for projects (call) is intended to prioritize local agency projects seeking federal funds. This program expands eligible improvements compared to the predecessor program, the Bicycle Corridor Improvement Program (BCIP). While the BCIP was limited to bicycle improvements, the OCCSP allows for a broader range of project types and improvements to streets to enable safe access for all, including pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit riders of all ages and abilities. The OCCSP was also updated from using only federal Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement (CMAQ) Program funds to incorporating federal Surface Transportation Block Grant (STBG) funds supporting the expanded project eligibilities. In December 2022, the Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA) Board of Directors (Board) authorized using \$55 million in CMAQ/STBG funds for an OCCSP call. Following guidelines approval in August 2023, the OCCSP call was released, and applications were due on October 5, 2023.

The Federal Highway Administration in part provides oversight for the administration of federal funds in support of the state, Metropolitan Planning Organizations, and other transportation partners to ensure compliance with federal requirements. In August 2021, the Federal Highway Administration issued a corrective action that required the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) to implement a new project selection process to comply with the latest interpretation of federal regulations for the administration of STBG and CMAQ, requiring SCAG to make the final project selection for funding. As a result, SCAG approved STBG/CMAQ program guidelines in June 2023 to implement the new project selection process. As part of this process, OCTA is required to prioritize projects into three designations: highly recommended, recommended, and not recommended, which will influence final project selection and submit them to SCAG for review and final approval.

Discussion

OCTA received 33 project applications from 19 agencies requesting a total of \$103.8 million through this call. Since the requested funding was significantly higher than the OCTA Board authorized amount of \$55 million, staff is recommending that 19 projects requesting \$58.47 million be designated as “highly recommended” to keep project funding requests whole. In addition, staff is recommending that all remaining eligible projects be submitted to SCAG for consideration through the project selection process since SCAG has indicated that projects that are not initially approved for funding may be placed on a contingency list, which may be approved as additional funding becomes available.

The project prioritization recommendations are provided in Attachment A.

Project evaluations were based on project eligibility, local agency project priority, consistency with SCAG STBG/CMAQ program guidance, and responses to OCTA criteria approved by the Board as part of the 2023 OCCSP guidelines, which included: 1) aligning with local planning efforts, 2) safety considerations, 3) access to community destinations including schools and transit, and 4) public participation, community engagement, and stakeholder coordination.

Highly recommended projects are distinguished by exceptional alignments with the local priorities criteria. The remaining eligible projects are listed as recommended projects and are generally aligned with the local priorities criteria. Three projects are not recommended for funding as they did not sufficiently meet all program requirements. The project prioritization recommendations include at minimum one project from each applicant that is designated either “highly recommended” or “recommended”.

Master Plan of Arterial Highways (MPAH) Amendments

The set of project prioritization recommendations includes four projects that are contingent on modifications to the MPAH. Adjustments to the MPAH are considered when local agencies make requests and provide supporting traffic studies for changes to the roadway classification (either a built or planned classification). OCTA typically conducts evaluations of proposed changes and works with the local agencies before submitting them for Board review and action. No formal MPAH amendment requests for these four projects have been submitted. When formal requests for amendments to the MPAH regarding these four projects are made and assessed, they will be incorporated into the upcoming MPAH update and submitted for Board consideration. These four projects are identified in Attachment A.

Lastly, and consistent with SCAG’s Federal Transportation Improvement Program (FTIP) guidelines, all federally funded or regionally significant projects must be included in the FTIP; therefore, Board direction to add or amend awarded projects in the FTIP is requested.

The projects that have highly recommended and recommended designations represent new and upgraded bicycle and pedestrian facilities along a total of approximately 29 miles of streets that would be implemented if selected by SCAG for funding. Other recommended improvements include traffic calming, safety improvements, and multiple multipurpose trail projects.

Next Steps

SCAG has indicated that they have opened the Solicitation for Project Nominations. Nominations are due March 29, 2024. With Board approval, OCTA staff will provide the project prioritization designations and supporting documentation for OCCSP projects to SCAG for consideration of STBG/CMAQ funds. The SCAG Regional Council is expected to consider project selection in July 2024. As projects are approved through Regional Council action or acceptance into the FTIP, staff will notify applicant agencies of their projects' selection status and keep the Board apprised.

Summary

Through the 2023 OCCSP call, OCTA staff is presenting project prioritization recommendations for Board approval and submittal to SCAG as part of the new project selection process. If approved for funding by SCAG, the projects will provide 29 miles of new or upgraded pedestrian and bicycle facilities and improvements to streets to enable safe access for all, including pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists, and transit riders of all ages and abilities.

Attachment

- A. 2023 Orange County Complete Streets Program – Project Prioritization List

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