



April 7, 2025

To: Regional Transportation Planning Committee
From: Darrell E. Johnson, Chief Executive Officer
Subject: Active Transportation Program Biannual Update

Overview

The Orange County Transportation Authority coordinates regional active transportation efforts with local jurisdictions, key stakeholders, and the public. An update on recent and upcoming activities is provided.

Recommendation

Receive and file as an information item.

Background

The Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA) is engaged in regional active transportation projects and programs in Orange County (OC). These efforts support OCTA's vision for a balanced multimodal transportation system. To realize this vision, OCTA works with local jurisdictions, stakeholders, and the public to advance the development of safe, accessible, and connected bicycling and walking networks. Updates on these projects and a summary of additional active transportation efforts are discussed below.

Discussion

Electronic Bicycles (E-Bikes) Safety Action Plan

In December 2024, OCTA completed the E-Bike Safety Action Plan (Plan) to address gaps in e-bike safety resources at regional, state, and local levels. The Plan proposes strategies to address these gaps and identifies potential funding sources to facilitate future e-bike initiatives.

The project team conducted an inventory of available e-bike data and non-infrastructure e-bike resources, including crash and count data, injury data, ongoing local safety efforts, regional initiatives, and statewide initiatives and legislation. The project team then conducted a gap analysis of these resources and initiatives, identifying areas where resources were both available and not available. The project team also engaged with OC's local jurisdictions, law enforcement agencies, regional agencies such as Orange County Healthcare Agency (OCHCA), hospitals such as Providence Mission Hospital, retailers, and other stakeholders involved in e-bike safety efforts, as well as the broader OC community.

Analyzing the stakeholder and community input, data and non-infrastructure inventory, and gap analysis, the project team developed the final Plan which recommends actions in six key strategy areas: infrastructure, legislation, collisions/injuries, ridership, education/encouragement, and retail collaboration. Each strategy area is accompanied by individual strategies and recommended actions to move towards safer e-bike use in OC.

Recommendations identified in the Plan include:

- Infrastructure: Continue to advance bikeway infrastructure which fosters safe e-bike riding.
- Legislation: Support e-bike use as a sustainable transportation mode and encourage safe adoption of active modes.
- Collisions/injuries: Build understanding of crash and risk factors, especially those that result in severe injury or fatality.
- Ridership: Understand growth trends and hot spots for e-bike use.
- Education/encouragement: Target behavior changes for key groups affected by e-bike safety issues.
- Retailer collaboration: Leverage e-bike retailers for outreach and data collection.

OCTA staff is exploring implementations and partnership strategies to best operationalize the recommendations identified in the plan.

Next Safe Travels Education Program (Next STEP) Project

In June 2024, OCTA, in partnership with OCHCA, launched the Next STEP Project which partners with city staff, schools, and school districts to conduct walking and bicycling education and encouragement activities and assess

infrastructure needs at participating schools. The Project will be implemented at 25 eligible public elementary schools across OC. The \$2.1 million Next STEP Project is funded by an \$850,000 California Transportation Commission Active Transportation Program (ATP) grant and a \$1.25 million Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) Regional Early Action Planning (REAP) 2.0 grant.

Using eligibility criteria established in the Safe Routes to School Action Plan, the project team has thus far enrolled 14 schools to participate in the infrastructure needs element of the Project (Attachment A). While all cities have been contacted, enrollment in the project remains incomplete as the project team continues working to meet with district and school staff to enroll the remaining schools based on their eligibility and ability to participate in the Project. The project team is conducting walk audits in collaboration with school staff, school districts, city staff, county staff (as appropriate), parents, and the OCHCA. These audits include observing drop-off and/or pick-up activities followed by an evaluation of surrounding roadway, bicycle, and pedestrian facilities. During the walk audits, parents and school staff are encouraged to provide feedback on infrastructure conditions as well as safety and access needs. Traffic data collection efforts and student travel tally surveys are also completed to help analyze the use and movement of vehicles, bicycles, and pedestrians near schools. Recommendations based on the audits will be developed by the project team and reviewed by each city prior to being finalized.

Project staff is soliciting participation from 25 schools to gauge interest in the education programming component. Once recruitment is complete, the project team will begin delivering walking and bicycling education and encouragement activities at participating schools.

Active Transportation Outreach and Engagement Project

The Active Transportation Education and Engagement Project began in summer 2024 and will continue through June 2026. The project team is attending community events, conducting and participating in bicycle rodeos, developing online education modules, and deploying mobile street team ambassadors to distribute safety materials to the public. These efforts aim to empower residents to safely and confidently use bicycling and walking as a viable mode of transportation. The project also strengthens partnerships with community-based organizations in support of active transportation safety to help increase community engagement and participation and further develop OCTA's active transportation stakeholder group. This project is funded with a \$400,000 SCAG REAP 2.0 grant.

The project team is working with local jurisdictions and stakeholders to identify community events where providing active transportation engagement and education can be beneficial to the safety and well-being of the community. Collateral and educational materials were developed and are being distributed to aid in this messaging including:

- Vehicle, pedestrian, and bicycle safety tips flyers
- E-bike safety flyers
- E-bike stickers
- Bicycle stickers

The project team identified and procured walking and bicycle safety equipment. Depending on the focus of the events attended, the project team has been distributing the following:

- Reflective ankle wraps and keychains
- Bicycle lights
- Bicycle bells
- Bicycle helmets

The project team has attended 14 events, engaged 1,840 attendees, and distributed over 2,497 safety items and 1,966 educational materials (Attachment B).

OC Connect Project

OCTA is completing the Project Approval and Environmental Document (PA/ED) phase of the OC Connect Project in cooperation with the cities of Garden Grove and Santa Ana (Cities), the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) District 12, and Orange County Public Works. This project proposes approximately four miles of Class I shared-use path, connecting the Cities and closing an active transportation gap for the communities around the former Pacific Electric Right-of-Way (PEROW) corridor.

Closing this gap would greatly improve the active transportation connectivity by providing a safe, well-connected active transportation corridor linking the Cities' downtown areas to the surrounding communities as well as the Santa Ana River Trail, multiple transit stops, and the OC Streetcar. In addition to increased connectivity, the project creates a valuable and lasting community greenway that benefits both Cities' downtown areas and the neighborhoods surrounding the corridor. Transformation of the former PEROW corridor into a vibrant community will promote health and wellbeing and create a positive identity using recreation and leisure amenities not currently available in the surrounding areas.

OC Connect PA/ED phase is funded by a \$3 million ATP grant, which will complete preliminary design, determine the trail's feasibility, estimate project costs, and complete the requisite environmental documentation. Caltrans, as assigned by the Federal Highway Administration, is the lead agency under the National Environmental Policy Act and OCTA is the lead agency under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). In addition to design and environmental document preparation, OC Connect includes extensive communication with local stakeholders and the surrounding community through a two-phase public outreach and input campaign. These meetings provided opportunities for public comments and discussion regarding the project and the CEQA statutory exemption documentation and process.

OCTA has also secured \$6 million in funding to complete the project through the final design or Plans, Specifications, and Estimates (PS&E) phase. After the PA/ED phase concludes in June 2025, OCTA plans to begin the procurement process for PS&E services. Prior to beginning the PS&E phase, OCTA is working with the Cities to secure a commitment to operate and maintain the trail once constructed. Staff will provide the Board with an update in fall 2025 after the completion of the PA/ED phase.

Orange County Bicycle Counts

OCTA is collecting bicycle count data from 450 locations on roads and bicycle paths across the County and updating the OCTA bicycle counts database. This data supports active transportation in the County by providing data for analysis, grant applications, and project development. OCTA is using a web-based platform for local agencies to request counts at specific locations. In January and February 2025, outreach emails were sent to key city and county representatives, including city engineers, public works directors, and active transportation coordinators with the purpose of encouraging jurisdictions to request bicycle count locations within their jurisdiction.

Data collection took place in June 2024 and will take place again in May 2025. Counts are taken at each location for one weekday and one weekend day during the collection period. The count information includes a range of data categories such as direction of travel, sidewalk versus street usage, electric versus non-electric bicycles, and helmet usage. The final 2024 bicycle count data has been added to the database and is available to cities upon request. The 2025 data is expected to be available by the end of summer 2025.

Summary

OCTA supports efforts to improve active transportation throughout OC. This includes ongoing education, encouragement, engineering, and evaluation efforts for active transportation. Coordination and collaboration will continue between regional, state, and local agencies, key stakeholders, and the public to encourage and support safer walking and bicycling in OC.

Attachments

- A. Next Safe Travels Education Program Participating Schools (Infrastructure)
- B. Active Transportation Outreach Support Summary

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