



May 21, 2026

To: Legislative Committee
From: Darrell E. Johnson, Chief Executive Officer
Subject: Federal Legislative Status Report

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

Overview

The Orange County Transportation Authority regularly updates the Legislative Committee on policy and regulatory issues directly impacting the agency's programs, projects, and operations. This report provides an update on federal Fiscal Year 2027 Community Project Funding and Congressionally Directed Spending requests, including coordination with the Orange County congressional delegation to advance priority transportation projects for potential inclusion in the appropriations process. The report also includes an overview of emerging policy developments related to the 900-megahertz band, which is used by a range of transportation technologies, including electronic toll collection systems.

Recommendation

Receive and file as an information item.

Discussion

Community Project Funding/Congressionally Directed Spending Requests

Similar to prior appropriations cycles, members of Congress have solicited earmark requests for federal fiscal year (FY) 2027. For context, the House of Representatives uses the term "Community Project Funding" (CPF), while the Senate uses "Congressionally Directed Spending" (CDS). Both are commonly referred to as earmarks and generally include funding designated for a specific project, entity, or geographic area. CPF and CDS requests are subject to enhanced transparency and accountability requirements, including certification by members of Congress that the project serves a public purpose and does not financially benefit the member.

For FY 2027, OCTA is continuing to coordinate with the Orange County congressional delegation to identify and advance priority projects for potential inclusion in the appropriations process. Given the expiration of advance

appropriations under the IIJA and ongoing uncertainty regarding future federal transportation funding levels, CPF and CDS requests may represent an important opportunity to secure funding for regionally significant transportation improvements.

At this time, OCTA is in the process of working with delegation offices to develop and submit project requests. The following projects have been submitted for consideration in the FY 2027 appropriations package by members:

- \$15 million for the State Route 91 East Corridor Operations Project by Representative Young Kim (R-CA). This project is a shared cost between OCTA and the Riverside County Transportation Commission (RCTC) and has been submitted as a joint request, with any funding ultimately secured to be split between OCTA and RCTC. The funding would support corridor improvements in Orange and Riverside Counties, including additional eastbound capacity and interchange upgrades, to reduce congestion and improve traffic flow along a heavily traveled corridor used by both passenger vehicles and freight.
- \$2.7 million for the Irvine Station Metrolink Rehabilitation Project by Representative Dave Min (D-CA). This project includes improvements at the Irvine Metrolink Station. These upgrades will support system reliability, safety, and ongoing state of good repair needs for rail service.
- \$3 million for the OC Loop Segment A Project by Representative Linda Sanchez (D-CA). This project would construct approximately 3.1 miles of Class I bikeway in the City of La Habra, helping close a critical gap in the 66-mile OC Loop regional trail network. The project will improve connectivity, provide safe active transportation options for residents, and enhance access to schools, parks, and surrounding communities.
- \$3 million for the PCH Bridge Replacement Project by Representative Mike Levin (D-CA). This project would replace a nearly 100-year-old rail bridge in the City of Dana Point that has reached the end of its useful life, improving structural integrity, seismic resilience, and long-term reliability. The project supports the continued safe operation of both commuter and freight rail along a critical segment of the Los Angeles – San Diego – San Luis Obispo Rail Corridor and helps prevent service disruptions while maintaining regional mobility.

This list is not yet comprehensive, as the Senators have not finalized their requests, and it does not include projects submitted by other Orange County jurisdictions, including local cities, the County of Orange, or partner agencies such as Metrolink. Although submission of a request does not guarantee funding in the final appropriations bill, these requests represent an important component of the federal funding strategy for regional transportation projects. Staff will

continue to engage with congressional offices throughout the appropriations process and will provide updates to the OCTA Board of Directors as additional information becomes available.

Potential Federal Action Affecting Tolling Technology and Infrastructure

Discussions have taken place at the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), which have created concerns about proposed changes to federally regulated radio frequencies used by transportation technologies, including electronic toll collection. Specifically, the issue involves the lower 900-megahertz (MHz) spectrum band, a portion of the airwaves that supports a wide range of existing wireless applications, including tolling systems, freight logistics, and other transportation operations. A private company, NextNav, which develops positioning, navigation, and timing technologies, has requested changes to how a portion of this spectrum is used, prompting federal review and congressional action due to potential impacts on existing systems.

NextNav has petitioned the FCC to reconfigure a portion of the 900-MHz band and significantly increase permitted power levels to support a terrestrial position, navigation, and timing network intended to complement Global Positioning System. The proposal would allow NextNav to deploy a ground-based system while also making additional spectrum capacity available for commercial wireless use. Stakeholders across the transportation sector, including tolling agencies, have raised concerns that the proposal could reduce available spectrum and introduce harmful interference to existing systems. Electronic tolling systems are particularly sensitive to potential interference, as they rely on consistent communication between roadside equipment and in-vehicle transponders. Nationally, there are an estimated 120 million tolling transponders in use. Disruption to these systems could degrade performance, increase transaction errors, and result in significant costs related to equipment replacement, system modifications, and lost revenue.

In response to these concerns, the House Appropriations Committee adopted amendment language offered by Representative Steve Womack (R-AR) in April 2026 as part of the Fiscal Year 2027 Financial Services and General Government appropriations process that would restrict the FCC from advancing NextNav's petition. The amendment reflects growing concern that the proposal could impose substantial costs on existing users and disrupt critical infrastructure. The California Toll Operators Committee, of which OCTA is a member, has previously engaged on this issue, sending a comment letter in 2024 when it was first introduced. This letter is provided as Attachment A.

The issue remains under consideration at the federal level, including as the appropriations process continues in Congress. Industry stakeholders, including the International Bridge, Tunnel and Turnpike Association, are actively engaging federal policymakers to ensure that transportation system impacts are fully considered. Staff will continue to monitor developments and coordinate with

industry partners to support policies that protect OCTA's existing and future transportation technology investments.

Summary

Information is provided on federal Fiscal Year 2027 Community Project Funding and Congressionally Directed Spending requests and on federal spectrum policy developments related to the 900-megahertz band, including recent congressional activity and potential impacts on tolling and other transportation technologies.

Attachments

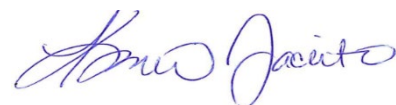
- A. Letter to the Federal Communications Commission, from Murali Ramanujam, California Toll Operators Committee, Executive Committee Chair, and Kirk Avila, California Toll Operators Committee, Executive Committee Vice Chair, dated September 4, 2024, re: Public Notice - NEXTNAV PETITION FOR RULEMAKING WT Docket No. 24-240 RM-11989
- B. Potomac Partners DC, Monthly Legislative Report – April 2026

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