



June 6, 2022

To: Regional Planning and Highways Committee

From: Darrell E. Johnson, Chief Executive Officer

Subject: Regional Planning Update

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

Overview

Updates on regional planning matters are provided regularly to highlight current transportation planning issues impacting the Orange County Transportation Authority and the Southern California region. This update focuses on the substitutions of Transportation Control Measure projects, the California Transportation Assessment, and a California Department of Transportation study to evaluate the conversion of carpool lanes to tolled express lanes on Interstate 5.

Recommendation

Receive and file as an information item.

Background

The Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA) regularly coordinates with other planning and regulatory agencies within the Southern California region. This coordination is conducted at many levels, involving the OCTA Board of Directors (Board), executives, and technical staff. Some examples of the regional planning forums in which OCTA participates include:

- Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) Regional Council, policy committees, and technical working groups,
- State Route 91 (SR-91) Advisory Committee,
- Regional Chief Executive Officers meetings,
- South Coast Air Quality Management District working groups, and
- Interregional planning coordination meetings (OCTA, SCAG, the San Diego Association of Governments, and the California Department of Transportation [Caltrans] districts 7, 8, 11, and 12).

Staff provided regional planning updates to the Board in May and November 2021. The status of items previously presented and other ongoing regional planning activities is summarized in Attachment A. This includes a matrix that identifies lead agencies, a summary of each activity, key dates, as well as OCTA's interests and current involvement.

Since the November update, the following new activities have emerged:

- Proposed substitutions of Transportation Control Measure (TCM) projects in the Federal Transportation Improvement Program (FTIP),
- Release of the California Transportation Assessment report, and
- Initiation of the environmental phase for potential conversion of carpool lanes to express lanes on Interstate 5 (I-5), from just south of State Route 55 to the Los Angeles County Line.

A discussion of each of these new activities is provided below.

Discussion

TCM Substitution

Project schedules are regularly updated and amended in the FTIP. The FTIP is a federally mandated four-year program of transportation projects that will receive federal funding or are subject to a federally required action. Within the SCAG region, the FTIP is a comprehensive listing of such transportation projects proposed over a six-year period and is developed in partnership between the six county transportation commissions of Imperial, Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, and Ventura counties, as well as Caltrans Districts 7, 8, 11, 12 and Headquarters. Within the FTIP, near-term projects that reduce vehicle use and benefit air quality are referred to as TCMs. Near term TCMs are closely monitored. If a TCM project is delayed, a replacement project with equivalent air quality benefits that can be implemented within the same timeframe must be amended into the FTIP.

TCMs are also included in the Air Quality Management Plan and State Implementation Plan to help demonstrate how National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) will be met for specific years. Calendar year 2023 is one of the key attainment years for the NAAQS. Therefore, committed TCMs that are scheduled to be open to public use by December 31, 2022, cannot be delayed without first demonstrating that a substitute project (or projects) can be implemented by December 31, 2022, and that it provides at least equivalent air quality benefits. This ensures the region stays on track to meet the 2023 NAAQS attainment requirement and remains eligible to access federal transportation funds.

As noted in the May 2021 Regional Planning Update, the Transportation Corridor Agencies (TCA) decided to delay the planned widening of the existing toll roads. These projects were identified as committed TCMs. TCA determined that toll road widenings were not needed in the near-term. These projects are located on the San Joaquin Hills Transportation Corridor (between I-5 in the City of San Juan Capistrano and approximately MacArthur Boulevard in the City of Irvine); Eastern Transportation Corridor (between I-5 and State Route 91); and Foothill Transportation Corridor-North (between Oso Parkway and the Eastern Transportation Corridor). Because the implementation of these toll road projects would have eased congestion on parallel routes (e.g., I-5) and help traffic move more freely in south Orange County, less air pollution would have been produced. Accordingly, it is necessary to identify projects that produce equivalent air quality benefit in the Orange County portion of the South Coast Air Basin.

As also noted in the May 2021 Regional Planning Update, the County of Orange cancelled the Hazard Avenue Bikeway Project, which was also a committed TCM. Additionally, schedule updates to two OCTA projects (Placentia Commuter Rail Station and Paratransit Expansion Vehicle Purchase) also require TCM substitutions as the new completion dates are beyond December 31, 2022.

In working with SCAG on the above substitution request, OCTA was instructed to separate the substitution request into at least two distinct substitutions. Accordingly, the first substitution involves transferring the TCM designation from the TCA projects to three new traffic signal synchronization projects along Portola Parkway (between Paloma Parkway and Plano Trabuco Road), 1st Street/Bolsa Avenue (between Bolsa Chica Street and Newport Avenue), and Alton Parkway (between Red Hill Avenue and Portola Parkway). This substitution was approved by the SCAG Regional Council (RC) on May 5, 2022. The substitution is currently with the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the California Air Resources Board (CARB) for concurrence.

OCTA is continuing to work with SCAG on next steps for the County of Orange and OCTA projects. The two OCTA projects will likely involve a formal substitution with the introduction of Bravo! Rapid bus service primarily on Main Street in Anaheim, Orange, and Santa Ana. This substitution is anticipated to be considered by the SCAG RC in July 2022. The County of Orange bikeway project will likely follow a less formal administrative substitution process and is anticipated to be resolved in the next few months. OCTA will continue to participate in interagency consultation on TCM substitutions through SCAG's Transportation Conformity Working Group, leading to SCAG RC adoption, and EPA and CARB concurrence prior to December 31, 2022.

California Transportation Assessment Report

In accordance with AB 285 (Chapter 605, Statutes of 2019), the California Strategic Growth Council (SGC) published the California Transportation Assessment (AB 285 Report) in February 2022. The AB 285 Report evaluates how transportation funding in California supports long-term planning goals, including building and maintaining a transportation system that advances California's climate goals and meets the transportation needs of Californians. The AB 285 Report, written by researchers from the University of California Institute of Transportation Studies, analyzes state and regional transportation plans and institutions, funding allocations to various state, regional, and local transportation programs and funding sources, and the legal frameworks that govern how transportation funds are spent in California.

In considering the findings contained in the AB 285 Report, the SGC solicited input from stakeholders to develop recommendations on five issue areas:

- Aligning existing state funding programs with State goals. For example, the statute that governs State Highway Operation and Protection Program and State Transportation Improvement Program funding has goals based on rehabilitation and maintenance, safety, operations, and expansion, but no reference to climate or equity, which are key state goals.
- Updating and better aligning state funding programs with existing state and regional plans. This could include modifications to the California Transportation Plan and exploring options to improve alignment with other statewide modal plans and Regional Transportation Plans / Sustainable Community Strategies.
- Re-evaluating project and program funding and reviewing the current transportation project pipeline. This could include revisiting projects currently in the planning and development pipeline to evaluate consistency with state goals. It is unclear at this time how this might impact projects funded by local option sales tax measures, such as the Measure M2 (M2) freeway program.
- Assessing the roles of state transportation institutions. This could involve exploring the roles and responsibilities for planning and delivering transportation projects across state agencies such as the California State Transportation Agency, Caltrans, and the California Transportation Commission. Additionally, this could include re-evaluating the roles of related state agencies (e.g., CARB and SGC) to ensure decisions align with state goals.
- Assessing metropolitan planning organization (MPO) and local government roles and responsibilities. This could involve a review of the specific authorities and institutional structure of MPOs to enhance their role in reviewing local land use and transportation actions.

OCTA staff has participated in several input venues to discuss the findings in the AB 285 Report and the SGC proposed recommendations. The key concern raised by OCTA is that the AB 285 Report and subsequent recommendations assume a project-level approach rather than a regional, comprehensive approach for meeting the State's climate goals. The implications of this approach include treating highway capacity projects, regardless of multimodal or systemwide benefits, as uniformly counter to the State's climate goals. This potentially impedes delivery of M2 commitments. Therefore, OCTA has partnered with SCAG and the county transportation commissions in the SCAG region in a joint letter (Attachment B) addressing the region's concerns.

I-5 Express Lanes

Express lanes have emerged as a primary approach for addressing federal high-occupancy (HOV) lane degradation standards (i.e., the HOV or carpool lane fails to maintain at least 45 miles per hour for 90 percent of the time over a consecutive 180-day period during morning or evening weekday peak-hour periods). The State and SCAG region are increasingly looking to express lanes to address HOV lane degradation and to provide mobility options. Express lanes are typically considered to be consistent with state climate and equity goals as the lanes are unlikely to induce new vehicle travel, especially when degraded HOV lanes are converted to express lanes. These types of lane conversions allow qualified carpools to continue to travel for free while other drivers can access the lane by paying a toll when additional lane capacity is available. This ensures reliable travel and increases average vehicle occupancy by encouraging carpooling and vanpooling while meeting federal performance standards.

Caltrans District 12 is initiating the environmental phase to study the potential conversion of carpool lanes to express lanes on I-5, between Red Hill Avenue to the Los Angeles County line (Attachment C). This phase of work is anticipated to continue through fall 2023. In an earlier project phase, OCTA requested (in January 2020) that Caltrans consider options for modifying the minimum occupancy requirements from two-plus to three-plus (without a tolling element) and/or moving the southern limit of the project to State Route 57 (SR-57) and maintain current carpool requirements between State Route 55 and SR-57, where a second HOV lane was recently added per M2 (Attachment D). Caltrans provided a response in January 2021 to OCTA's letter stating a commitment to include an HOV occupancy change alternative and an intention to work closely with OCTA to consider various other options (Attachment E). OCTA staff will participate in the environmental phase project development team and provide periodic updates to the OCTA Board.

Summary

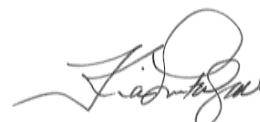
Staff continues to coordinate ongoing activities regarding transportation planning in Orange County and Southern California. As drafts of these planning documents are released, staff will review and provide comments as needed to protect OCTA's interests. Staff will continue to keep the Board informed on the status of these ongoing activities.

Attachments

- A. Regional Planning Activities, June 2022
- B. Letter from Southern California Association of Governments and Southern California's six county transportation commissions to Lynn von Koch-Liebert, Executive Director, California Strategic Growth Council, dated May 6, 2022, re: AB 285 Report
- C. Notice of Preparation of a Draft Environmental Impact report for the Interstate 5 Managed Lanes Project
- D. Letter from Darrell E, Johnson, Chief Executive Officer, Orange County Transportation Authority to Ryan Chamberlain, District 12 Director, California Department of Transportation, dated January 31, 2020, re: Interstate 5 Proposed High-Occupancy Toll Lanes in North Orange County
- E. Letter from Ryan Chamberlain, District 12 Director, California Department of Transportation, to Darrell E, Johnson, Chief Executive Officer, Orange County Transportation Authority, dated January 22, 2021, re: Interstate 5 Managed Lanes from Red Hill to Los Angeles County line

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