

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

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*Making Conservation
A California Way of Life.*

January 22, 2021

Darrell E. Johnson
Chief Executive Officer
Orange County Transportation Authority
550 South Main Street
P.O. Box 14184
Orange, CA 92863-1584

Dear Mr. Johnson:

This is in response to your letter dated January 31, 2020 regarding proposed High-Occupancy Toll Lanes in North Orange County. We appreciate the opportunity to present to the Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA) Board of Directors (Board) at its December 9, 2019 meeting. The presentation highlighted the need to address High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) Lanes degradation on various Orange County freeways and presented the outcome of a Project Study Report (PSR) for proposed Managed Lane (ML) improvements on Interstate 5 (I-5) from Red Hill Avenue to the Los Angeles County line that was completed by Caltrans in November 2019.

At the end of the presentation on December 9, 2019, the Board requested adding an alternative to evaluate conversion of HOV lanes occupancy requirement from 2+ to 3+. In 2020, Caltrans completed a supplemental PSR to include this alternative and carry it forward for further study in the Project Approval and Environmental (PA&ED) phase. Your letter further requests that the project evaluate an option of changing the limits of the project to start from SR-57 rather than from SR-55. You also requested us to consider the timing of future HOT lane studies until such time the OCTA Board provides specific direction on a tolled express lane network in Orange County.

Caltrans recognizes several priorities shifted in 2020 due primarily to the COVID pandemic that has tested both our agencies resiliency as we continue to provide essential services to residents and visitors to Orange County. We look forward to overcoming challenges COVID has created and continuing engagement with OCTA on tolled express lanes in the County.

We understand and acknowledge concerns raised by OCTA and the role it, and Caltrans, have in the planning and decision-making process for High Occupancy Toll lanes in Orange County. Therefore, to accommodate your request we have delayed the start of the PA&ED phase of studies for the proposed I-5 ML project until March/April 2021. The PA/ED phase will be approximately 2 years and should allow enough time to gain additional input from the OCTA Board and staff. Further, during the early stages of the PA&ED phase, the project development process allows for the ability to study new alternatives or variations of current alternatives. Caltrans will work closely with OCTA to consider various options for pricing strategies to continue to allow carpools to utilize the HOV lanes as intended under M2 in addition to begin and end project limits of the improvements.

Caltrans appreciates the collaboration with the OCTA and looks forward to continued partnership in moving critical projects forward that address HOV degradation, provides opportunities for multi-modal transportation solutions, and helps the state in achieving its goals of reducing greenhouse gas emissions to meet statutory requirements.

Sincerely,

RYAN CHAMBERLAIN
District 12 Director

c: Kia Mortazavi, OCTA
 Lan Zhou, Caltrans
 Adnan Maiah, Caltrans