




June 6, 2022

To: Regional Planning and Highways 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 in Orange County. An update on recent and upcoming activities is provided for review.

Recommendation

Receive and file as an information item.

Background

The Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA) Board of Directors oversees key regional active transportation (bicycling and walking) projects and programs in Orange County. 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, comfortable, and connected bicycling and walking networks. Key elements of OCTA's efforts include sharing information and encouraging people to walk and bike (education/encouragement), planning and design of pedestrian and bikeway projects (engineering), and collecting data for measuring projects and programs (evaluation). Details on these activities are further described below.

Discussion

Safe Travels Education Program

OCTA is administering a grant focusing on safe routes to schools. This grant funds the Safe Travels Education Program (STEP) Campaign. This project is a continued collaboration between OCTA and its local partners and stakeholders including the Orange County Health Care Agency, local schools, jurisdictional partners, and the public.

The STEP Campaign is funded through a \$500,000 state grant. This project will develop and deliver education and encouragement activities for walking and bicycling to 25 public elementary schools serving disadvantaged communities. In response to the coronavirus pandemic, the project team adapted some activities to be compatible with virtual and hybrid schooling. These resources, including videos focusing on bicycle safety, maintenance, and walking safety, are posted on the project webpage and are available for public use. During the spring 2022 school semester the project team has been providing in-school programming to students and parents at participating schools. These activities include bicycle skills classes, parent teacher association meetings, assemblies, and other safety activities. The “menu” of activities for school is included in Attachment A. There are currently 23 schools enrolled in the program (Attachment B), which is scheduled to continue through November 2022; however, OCTA is in the process of submitting a grant extension request to the California Transportation Commission to extend the project deadline to November 2023.

Electric Bicycles (E-bikes) Education

OCTA is continuing its work related to E-bikes in Orange County. This includes data and information gathering, as well as the development of education and encouragement materials. E-bikes will continue to be included in OCTA’s Cyclic Counts Program, and E-bike retailers were invited to a roundtable at the September 2021 OCTA Bicycle/Pedestrian Subcommittee meeting. To supplement the information provided by bicycle retailers, OCTA also surveyed the Technical Advisory Committee members to better understand trends and challenges cities across Orange County are experiencing. Some of the key takeaways were:

- Nearly all cities are experiencing an increase in E-bike use,
- Top issues identified were speeding, E-bike/bicycle/pedestrian crashes, and E-bike user adherence to bicycle and traffic laws,
- The most common responses for E-bike trip types were recreation, school, and commuting/errands, and
- Respondents estimated that approximately 20 percent of all bicycle trips made were using E-bikes.

On May 14, 2022, OCTA staff attended an E-bike safety and education event hosted by Assemblywoman Laurie Davies at Dana Hills High School. The event included remarks about E-bike safety by elected and public safety officials, as well as information booths, a skills course, and educational materials. The event was attended by residents, parents, and students who participated in the skills course and received E-bike safety information. Participants in the event also discussed approaches to improving E-bike safety using incentives and education.

All of these inputs are helping to inform OCTA's approach to the increasing use of E-bikes in Orange County. Staff is developing educational tools including videos and printable materials for local jurisdictions and stakeholders to communicate with the public. This information will focus on the safe operation of E-bike speed, parking, and safety messaging for motorists. The goal is to reach a broader audience with a message of safer operations of vehicles in Orange County.

OCTA is also pursuing several planning and engineering studies to improve bicycling and walking networks. These efforts span from developing better connections to high-volume bus stops to new multi-mile bikeway facilities. Efforts in these areas are further described below.

Bus Stop Safety and Accessibility Study

OCTA received a \$300,000 Southern California Association of Governments Sustainable Communities grant to complete the Bus Stop Safety and Accessibility Study. This study will identify first/last mile improvements within 1/4 mile of OCTA's 13 busiest bus stop locations to facilitate better connections with the adjacent communities (Attachment C). This will be done in coordination with the cities of Anaheim, Costa Mesa, Garden Grove, and Santa Ana, as well as the surrounding communities and local stakeholders. The study will begin in fall 2022.

Garden Grove – Santa Ana Gap Closure Study

This study will complete the Project Approval and Environmental Document and preliminary engineering phase for an active transportation facility. The study limits include 3.1 miles of OCTA-owned, former Pacific Electric Right-of-Way, the corridor between Raitt Street and Euclid Avenue, and 0.85 miles of the Wintersburg Channel to Hazard Avenue (Attachment D). Funding is provided through a \$3 million state grant. The project is anticipated to begin in fall 2022 and be completed in approximately two years. This study will support the advancement of subsequent project phases.

Bike Gap Closure Feasibility Study

The Bike Gap Closure Feasibility Study is evaluating potential alignments, developing cost estimates and facility concepts for three key regional bikeways: the OC Central loop, the OC South loop and the OC Connect (Attachment E). Study recommendations will be available to local agencies pursuing funding opportunities for implementation. The project team has conducted jurisdictional stakeholder meetings to vet and develop concepts, participated in pop-up events around the County to engage with the public, and delivered a public webinar to introduce the community to the project and solicit feedback. The webinar saw

participation from 32 attendees from around the County. The project team will be continuing work through the summer and will return to the OCTA Technical Advisory Committee and its Bicycle and Pedestrian Active Transportation Subcommittee with a draft of the study report for their feedback. The project is funded by \$200,000 in state funds.

Cyclic Counts Program for Evaluation and Planning

Finally, OCTA is collecting bicycle traffic data for use in project evaluation and planning. OCTA is continuing the Cyclic Counts Program in 2022 and 2023 by taking bi-directional counts at locations across Orange County in May 2022 and 2023. Attachment F includes count locations for the 2020/2021 project. Some of these locations will be used for the upcoming counts project; however, final count locations have not yet been determined. This data will be incorporated into the countywide bicycle flow map as well as being made available to partner agencies for their use. This data provides critical information for local agencies for grant applications, evaluation of existing facilities, and assists with future planning efforts.

Summary

OCTA has ongoing and upcoming education, encouragement, engineering, and evaluation activities and continues to support efforts to improve active transportation throughout Orange County. Coordination and collaboration will continue between the state, regional agencies, local jurisdictions, key stakeholders, and the public to encourage and support walking and bicycling within Orange County.

Attachments

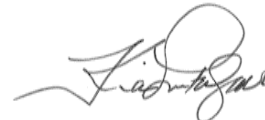
- A. STEP An Orange County Safe Routes to School Program
- B. OC STEP Campaign Participating Schools
- C. OCTA Bus Stop Safety and Accessibility Study
- D. Garden Grove-Santa Ana Rails-to-Trails Gap Closure Project
- E. OC Loops – Bike Gap Closure Study
- F. Bicycle Count Locations (2020/2021)

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