



**May 1, 2017**

**To:** Regional Planning and Highways Committee

**From:** Darrell Johnson, Chief Executive Officer

**Subject:** Interstate 5/EI Toro Road Interchange Improvement Project  
Environmental Phase Update

**Overview**

On November 22, 2016, the Orange County Transportation Authority entered into a cooperative agreement with the California Department of Transportation to perform environmental phase services for preparation of the project report and environmental document for the Interstate 5/EI Toro Road Interchange Improvement Project. Federal authorization for funding has been provided, and the California Department of Transportation is ready to begin environmental phase services.

**Recommendation**

Receive and file as an information item.

**Discussion**

The Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA), in partnership with the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), is developing a project to improve the Interstate 5 (I-5)/EI Toro Road interchange located in the cities of Laguna Hills, Laguna Woods, and Lake Forest. The existing I-5/EI Toro Road interchange currently experiences congestion during the morning and afternoon peak periods, resulting in unacceptable levels of service.

The I-5/EI Toro Road Interchange Improvement Project (Project) will improve traffic flows and ease congestion within the interchange, accommodate an expected increase in regional traffic, and improve access to and from the I-5 freeway. Caltrans is the implementing agency for the environmental phase of the Project. The Project is included in the Capital Action Plan and is part of Project D in the Measure M2 freeway program.

El Toro Road is County Highway S18 and acts as the primary east-west access between the cities of Laguna Hills and Lake Forest. The Project will improve traffic capacity and mobility, accommodate future traffic demand, and relieve congestion on I-5 and on El Toro Road in south Orange County. Improvements at the El Toro Road interchange include widening the local roads, modifying entrance and exit ramps, and modifying or replacing bridge structures.

Cooperative Agreement No. C-6-1262 between OCTA and Caltrans documents the obligations of each party and Caltrans' commitment to the Project cost and schedule. Caltrans, in both the environmental phase lead and implementing agency role, will provide the Project environmental phase services. Caltrans is required to review and approve the Project alternatives, traffic modeling, exceptions to design standards, and supporting studies and technical analysis. Caltrans will be responsible for preparation of the project report and environmental document (ED) for the Project. The Project is complex in terms of the existing configuration and traffic flow and is very constrained from a right-of-way (ROW) standpoint. Most of the interchange reconstruction concepts will involve consideration of exceptions to design standards in order to avoid significant ROW impacts. With Caltrans as the implementing agency performing these tasks, reviews, and approvals, comment and response cycles will be eliminated to support timely environmental approval for completion of the environmental phase to meet the Next 10 Delivery Plan commitment. OCTA will perform public information outreach activities.

Work on the Project ED is planned to start in May 2017 and be complete by November 2019. Caltrans has committed to complete the environmental phase in 30 months. Both state and federal environmental approval is required so that the Project will be eligible for use of federal funding. Pursuant to Chapter 3 of Title 23, United States Code (23 U.S.C.) 326 and 23 U.S.C. 327, Caltrans is the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) lead agency for the Project. Caltrans is responsible for NEPA compliance, will determine the type of NEPA documentation, and will cause that documentation to be prepared in accordance with NEPA requirements. Caltrans will also perform ED quality control and NEPA assignment review procedures for environmental documentation. Quarterly updates will be provided by Caltrans as the Project progresses.

### ***Summary***

Caltrans approved the project study report for the Project in 2015. Cooperative Agreement No. C-6-1262 between OCTA and Caltrans was signed November 22, 2016. On April 6, 2017, federal approval was obtained for

Caltrans to begin work on the Project. Therefore, the Project is ready to proceed into the environmental phase.

***Attachment***

None.

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Niall Barrett', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

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