

Proposed Response to June 5, 2017, Grand Jury Report

August 14, 2017

The Honorable Carrie Carmody
Presiding Judge of the Superior Court
700 Civic Center Drive West
Santa Ana, CA 92701

Dear Judge Carmody:

The Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA) is pleased to respond to the findings and recommendations of the June 5, 2017, report issued by the Orange County Grand Jury entitled, "Ortega Highway: Unnecessary Delays Have Cost Us Millions."

OCTA takes very seriously its responsibility to Orange County taxpayers to develop and deliver transportation solutions that enhance the quality of life and keep Orange County moving. Similarly, we appreciate the Orange County Grand Jury's responsibilities that include the examination of all aspects of county government, including special districts, to ensure the county is being governed honestly and efficiently, and public funds are being handled appropriately. OCTA believes that any thoughtful review of how to handle the public's business can only provide for better outcomes.

The widening of Ortega Highway has been envisioned for many years and will help relieve congestion once the project is completed. OCTA is committed to working with all agencies involved to advance this project to address travel demand needs.

Thank you again for the opportunity to respond to this report. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at (714) 560-5343.

Sincerely,

Darrell Johnson
Chief Executive Officer

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Enclosure

Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA)

Responses to Findings and Recommendations to the June 5, 2017 report issued by the Orange County Grand Jury

“Ortega Highway: Unnecessary Delays Have Cost Us Millions”

FINDINGS

Finding 2 – Traffic will continue to increase in South Orange County and Ortega Highway is one of the main arterial roads on which this traffic will travel. Until the Lower Ortega Project is complete congestion and safety concerns will remain.

OCTA agrees with this finding. Based on the latest projections from the Center for Demographic Research at California State University, Fullerton, Orange County is expected to grow in population by ten percent, with a 17 percent growth in employment by 2040. As a result of this growth, it is expected that travel demand will also increase. This makes completion of the planned roadway improvements critical. OCTA's role in the completion of the project pertains to planning. While public safety is a priority for all involved, operational and safety considerations are handled by the California Department of Transportation and local agencies.

Finding 3 – The costs for completion of the Lower Ortega Project have escalated and are probably still understated. Further delay will result in additional costs for the taxpayers of Orange County.

OCTA agrees with this finding. Barring an dramatic economic downturn. OCTA's experience has been that capital projects increase in cost over time,

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1 -- OCTA should continue to actively work to resolve future traffic concerns on Ortega Highway.

This recommendation has been implemented. The OCTA Board of Directors is supportive of Ortega Highway Improvements. This has been evidenced by OCTA granting funds for the project through our Measure M competitive grant program to the County of Orange earlier this year. In addition, the Ortega Highway widening project was part of our Long Range Transportation Plan in 2014. OCTA supports the project based on the need for congestion relief.