




April 2, 2018

To: Regional Planning and Highways Committee

From: Darrell E. Johnson, Chief Executive Officer 

Subject: Interstate 5 (Avenida Pico to San Diego County Line) Project Status Update

Overview

The Orange County Transportation Authority is developing a project study report/project development support document for potential improvements to Interstate 5, in San Clemente, from Avenida Pico to the San Diego County line. An initial project status update was provided in September 2017. At that meeting, the Board of Directors requested that staff return in early 2018 to provide an update, which is provided in this report.

Recommendation

Receive and file as information item.

Background

In 2014, the Orange County Transportation Authority's (OCTA) Board of Directors (Board) advanced OCTA's Long-Range Transportation Plan to the Southern California Association of Governments for inclusion in the 2016 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP). OCTA's submittal included a project to extend high-occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes on Interstate 5 (I-5) in the City of San Clemente (City), from Avenida Pico to the San Diego County line (Project). The Project complements the Measure M2 Freeway Program and completes Orange County's HOV system. The Project could also potentially tie into future improvements (immediately south of the study area) that are planned in the San Diego Association of Governments' (SANDAG) RTP (Attachment A).

In 2016, OCTA initiated development of a project study report/project development support (PSR/PDS) document (Study) for this Project. PSR/PDS documents are planning studies that are required to be approved by the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) before a project can be considered eligible for state and federal funding. PSR/PDS typically analyze the

engineering feasibility of a range of alternatives, provide cost estimates, and specify a project's purpose and need. However, a preferred alternative is not selected at this stage of the project development process.

Discussion

In September 2017, staff provided the Board a status update on this PSR/PDS. The Board directed staff to return in early 2018 with a status update on project-related activities. Since September 2017, project development team (PDT) and other meetings have been convened, and specific issues emerging from these meetings are discussed below.

In October 2017, an update was provided to the San Clemente City Council (Council). There was general support for the Study, particularly for the HOV lane extension alternative. Concerns were expressed over potential right-of-way (ROW) impacts, especially with alternatives that propose two lanes in each direction. The Council also requested that Study alternatives focus on typical (i.e., weekday AM/PM peak hour) traffic analysis metrics, given the need to maintain consistency of analysis techniques on a county-wide basis.

In November 2017, the Study's seventh PDT meeting was convened. The objective was to finalize traffic forecasts and project alternatives. Key issues discussed at that meeting included the following:

1. Caltrans noted that OCTA's traffic forecasts are substantially lower than previous planning forecasts.
2. Caltrans and the Transportation Corridor Agencies also requested that weekend congestion be factored into the traffic analyses and considered as a major factor in developing project alternatives.

In response to these two issues, staff has provided the following considerations:

- Traffic forecasts change over time as economic trends and the state of the practice evolves. Previous traffic forecasts included socio-economic data that was substantially higher than what is currently observed and forecasted today. For instance, population and employment projections in the South County area have been reduced by California State University, Fullerton's Center for Demographic Research, by approximately four percent and 11 percent respectively, since 2000.

- PSR/PDS documents completed to date by OCTA have utilized state-of-practice AM and PM weekday peak period traffic analyses. While OCTA agrees that a weekend congestion issue exists, utilizing non-traditional analyses is not recommended to develop project alternatives because a validated weekend travel demand model for Orange County does not exist. Further, such a model is not likely to establish a need for project alternatives that are substantially different from what OCTA is currently proposing, especially since the Study's proposed managed lane extension options will likely address both traditional peak period and weekend congestion.

To follow-up on the traffic issues, Caltrans conducted a workshop with the PDT on December 15, 2017 to present a preliminary review of weekend traffic conditions. At that meeting, OCTA agreed to include a qualitative discussion of weekend conditions in the PSR/PDS, and acknowledge that weekend congestion remains an issue of concern that should be addressed in the future project development process. Staff subsequently submitted a discussion memo to the PDT (Attachment B) in February 2018 to reflect OCTA's position. These and other issues were discussed at a subsequent PDT held on February 21, 2018.

The final draft PSR/PDS is scheduled to be submitted to Caltrans in late spring/early summer. Should Caltrans opt to not sign the PSR/PDS due to the above issues, OCTA, at a minimum, would finalize the substantial technical and feasibility work on the Project, which could be incorporated into future project development efforts.

Summary

A status update on the I-5 (Avenida Pico to San Diego County line) PSR/PDS document is provided for information purposes. The document is scheduled to be submitted to Caltrans by early summer 2018.

Attachments

- A. I-5 – Pico to San Diego County Line
- B. Memorandum from Neelam Dorman and Tim Erney, Kittelson & Associates, Inc., to Carolyn Mamaradlo, OCTA, I-5 Avenida Pico to SD County Line PSR/PDS, Weekend Data Review, dated February 21, 2018

Prepared by:



Carolyn Mamaradlo
Senior Transportation Analyst
(714) 560-5748

Approved by:



Kia Mortazavi
Executive Director, Planning
(714) 560-5741