

**Staff Evaluation of Services Provided by
Potomac Partners, DC for 2019**

The following narrative provides specific information with respect to major issues addressed by Potomac Partners, DC (PPDC) as the Orange County Transportation Authority's (OCTA) primary federal legislative advocate, in 2019. Each issue has been evaluated based on effort and outcome using a rating of excellent, very good, good, fair, or poor.

Policy Priorities

Effort: Very Good; Outcome: Very Good

This year Congressional discussions related to transportation surrounded the potential for an infrastructure investment package and surface transportation reauthorization. PPDC used these discussions to advance several OCTA policy priorities including the following:

- Securing language in the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee draft reauthorization legislation that mirrors Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (TIFIA) streamlining reforms requested by OCTA. In advancing this language, PPDC worked closely with Senator Feinstein's (D-CA) office to propose the reforms and worked to address questions and concerns raised by the Department of Transportation. Similar efforts were also engaged in with members of the House, however, draft reauthorization language has not yet been released.
- Pursuing clarification to a previous Federal Aviation Administration rulemaking requiring revenues from the sales tax on aviation fuel to be used for airport improvements. In pursuing this clarification, PPDC has utilized its relationships with House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee leadership and members. While a statutory fix has not yet been accomplished, PPDC's work has led to several efforts to not only seek statutory changes, but also reporting language. This includes communicating OCTA support for proposed legislation including HR 2939 (Napolitano, D-El Monte).
- Working with key delegation members to mold policy proposals related to mandates for zero-emission bus technology and transit security measures. In order to inform these efforts, PPDC worked to educate members of Congress on existing requirements under state and federal law, innovative approaches taken by OCTA, and floated revisions to these proposals that would allow transit agencies within California to best take advantage of these efforts.
- Tracking discussions surrounding the Safer Affordable Fuel Efficient Vehicles proposed rule, and potential impacts to OCTA projects and programs. As part of this efforts, PPDC advised on timing of communications and likely Administration direction going forward.
- Continuing pursuit of additional reforms contained within the OCTA Breaking Down Barriers proposal as part of any infrastructure package, and working to position OCTA ready to go projects for any immediate influx of transportation funding.

Appropriations and Grant Funding Opportunities

Effort: Very Good; Outcome: Good

Over the last year, the appropriations process has not been predictable, resulting in several continuing resolutions (CR) and partial shutdowns. PPDC communicated early and often about impacts to the Administration due to any shutdown, and provided regular updates on proposed reporting language, funding levels, and proposed rescissions. While actions from Congress have mostly resulted in consistency with funding levels authorized under the FAST Act, more recently there may be potential impacts due to statutorily required funding tests and rescissions. PPDC regularly discussed with OCTA any project impacts that may result from these challenges, to enable delegation members to respond appropriately. They also communicated any proposed amendments or reporting language associated with OCTA policy priorities, including that related to the Capital Investment Grant program and the use of revenues from sales taxes on aviation fuel.

PPDC also led efforts to secure support from delegation members for discretionary grant opportunities pursued by OCTA. This included getting a letter signed by all Orange County delegation members for OCTA's application for the Low or No Emission Vehicle Program, and delegation support for projects submitted for Infrastructure for Rebuilding America, Better Utilizing Investments to Leverage Development, and Bus and Bus Facilities grant programs. While OCTA was not ultimately successful in receiving funding from these programs, Administration officials often cited strong delegation support as something that was rated very highly when reviewing OCTA grant applications. Further work will be necessary to position OCTA more competitively within these programs going forward, with PPDC helping to brainstorm ideas.

General Services

Effort: Excellent; Outcome: Excellent

PPDC regularly scheduled meetings with members of Congress, staff, and members of the Administration to discuss issues of importance to OCTA. Members of Congress and the Administration consistently rely on PPDC to discuss and provide recommendations on a number of important transportation issues. PPDC has been responsive to requests by OCTA, provided timely information, advice and reports. While the bulk of PPDC's work for OCTA surrounded informing federal policy discussions, PPDC also worked on a number of other issues on behalf of OCTA including promptly responding to questions from federal delegation members, and relaying important information related to changes in the Administration and new appointments.

Specifically, this year PPDC arranged meetings with key members of Congress and the Administration when OCTA visited Washington, DC, in addition to assisting the scheduling of meetings for advocacy trips done in coordination with Mobility 21. This included meetings with newly elected members of the Orange County delegation, key committee members and staff, and senior level members of the Administration.

This year was unique, with a significant turnover in delegation members. Due to PPDC's proactive approach to meeting with new Orange County delegation members, early education on OCTA's priority policies and programs was communicated which facilitated several key actions by the delegation members. This included bringing House Transportation and Infrastructure Chairman Peter DeFazio (D-OR) to Orange County to be briefed on priority projects like the OC Streetcar and Interstate 405 Improvement Project. In addition, these meetings facilitated early communication about policy priorities, including TIFIA reform proposals that helped inform reauthorization discussions. From these discussions, delegation members regularly reached out to PPDC and OCTA to help inform talking points at committee hearings, and regularly complimented OCTA projects and programs.

In addition, PPDC worked to continue OCTA's transparent communications about the status and delivery of the OC Streetcar and the process to secure CIG funding for the project. This included helping facilitate meetings with key committee staff, and responding to inquiries from members of Congress.

Overall Rating

Effort: Very Good; Outcome: Very Good

PPDC's efforts overall are rated as very good based on responsiveness, time dedicated to advocating for and advancing of OCTA's positions and policies, timeliness of information, assisting in building cooperative relationships with Congress and members of the Administration, and availability. PPDC's outcomes overall are rated as very good based on the outcomes of the issues discussed.