




**February 3, 2020**

**To:** Regional Planning and Highways Committee  
**From:** Darrell E. Johnson, Chief Executive Officer   
**Subject:** Regional Traffic Signal Synchronization Program Update

### **Overview**

The Orange County Transportation Authority has been working with local cities, the County of Orange, and the California Department of Transportation in funding and implementing key regional traffic signal synchronization projects. This report provides an update on the Measure M2 Regional Traffic Signal Synchronization Program, including results from recently completed projects.

### **Recommendation**

Receive and file as an information item.

### **Background**

The Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA) provides funding and assistance to implement multi-agency signal synchronization as part of the Measure M2 (M2) Regional Traffic Signal Synchronization Program (Project P). Annually, OCTA provides competitive capital grants specifically dedicated to the coordination of traffic signals across jurisdictional boundaries. The goal of Project P is to improve the flow of traffic by developing and implementing regional signal coordination that crosses local agencies' boundaries and maintains coordination through freeway interchanges, where possible.

OCTA and local agencies have implemented signal synchronization for 79 projects that included 2,757 signalized intersections and 705 centerline miles of streets (Attachment A). The projects have improved travel times, reduced delays and congestion, and increased the number of successive green lights drivers see in daily commutes. The results of the program translate into direct cost savings for the motorist, with less fuel consumption, and a reduction of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.

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### ***Discussion***

Signal synchronization is a cost-effective way to increase roadway throughput without major new construction. Projects are corridor-based, and new optimized signal timings are developed based on traffic conditions and current travel patterns. These projects optimize traffic signal timings to reduce travel times, stops, delays, and ultimately give users a better driving experience. Key to these efforts is regular dialogue between partner agencies and the California Department of Transportation, resulting in agencies working together towards the multi-jurisdictional goal of the program.

Funding is provided through annual calls for projects (call), with 80 percent of funding from M2 (Project P) and 20 percent from local agencies' matching funds. Supplemental funding is used whenever available, including SB 1 (Chapter 5, Statutes of 2017) Local Partnership Program funds and Congested Corridor grants. A variety of sources have been used in the past to fund signal synchronization projects, including Measure M1, Proposition 1B Traffic Light Signal Synchronization Program, and air quality funds.

Signal projects implement a coordination strategy involving time-based synchronization of the respective agencies' systems, including the necessary upgrades to the traffic signal infrastructure. This includes modifications to prepare for future connected and autonomous vehicle technologies and applications. Existing synchronization on crossing arterials is incorporated when and where applicable. Optimized timings are developed and implemented for identified peak periods, which are typically weekday mornings, midday, and evenings. For weekend operations, the peak is typically mid-morning through early evening. To quantify signal synchronization benefits, "before and after" travel time studies are conducted to evaluate the improvements from these new optimized timing plans.

These studies are conducted during peak traffic periods with specially equipped vehicles that have computer-linked global positioning system devices to collect traffic data. Several runs are made in each direction with the car "floating" in the middle of the traffic platoon of vehicles for each run. These studies showed improvements across all performance measures, including travel time, number of stops, and average safe speed. Additionally, fuel consumption, GHG, and other vehicle emission data is reported (Attachment B). Historically, signal timing efforts nationwide have resulted in travel time and speed improvements, as well as a reduction in stops in the range between five and 15 percent. Comparisons of the corridors' before and after studies indicate results in the high end of this range due to the combination of the optimized traffic signal timing plans, cooperation between all participating agencies, and minor signal upgrades to maximize traffic flow.

Signal Synchronization Projects

OCTA and local agencies have completed 79 signal synchronization projects since 2008. The signal program target of regularly synchronizing 2,000 signalized intersections, as expressed in the M2 voter guide, was met before December 2016. A total of 2,757 signalized intersections and 705 centerline miles of streets have been implemented. The total M2 grant allocation of the completed projects was approximately \$54.1 million. The completed projects are identified on the map in Attachment A. A summary of the results for the 79 completed signal synchronization projects is identified in the table in Attachment B. The early acceleration of Project P allowed the benefits of signal synchronization to be experienced by travelers much earlier than originally promised.

The completed projects have reduced average travel time by 13 percent and the average number of stops by 29 percent. Average speed improved by 14 percent. Consumers will save approximately \$160.7 million (at \$3.90 per gallon in today’s dollars) on fuel costs and reduce GHG emissions by approximately 826.2 million pounds over the three-year project cycle. The reduction of GHG emissions is made possible by reducing the number of stops, smoothing the flow of traffic, and reducing the amount of acceleration and deceleration of vehicles. These results are comparable to signal timing efforts nationwide.

The following four corridors out of 12 that were implemented in the past three years experienced the most improvements:

Corridor	Limits	Travel Time Improvements	Average Speed Improvements
Birch Street/Rose Drive	Brea Boulevard to Vesuvius Street	23%	30%
El Toro Road	Bells Vireo Lane to Bridger Road/Interstate 5 Northbound	17%	20%
Orangewood Avenue	Harbor Boulevard to Batavia Street	17%	22%
Irvine Boulevard	Jamboree Road to Bake Parkway	17%	21%

Currently, OCTA is funding an additional 29 signal synchronization projects that are in various stages of implementation. The committed funding from OCTA is primarily from the competitive signal program, and the grant allocation of these projects is approximately \$50.3 million. Once completed, these funded projects will synchronize an additional 986 signals and 258 miles of roadway.

It is good practice to periodically resynchronize traffic signals to make sure they consider changes in traffic. The signal program allows for streets and highways from completed projects to compete again for funding during the annual call process. Previous investments made as part of earlier projects are incorporated into the revisited projects. An example of this would be the Pacific Park Drive/Oso Parkway corridor. The signals along this corridor were synchronized in 2009 and updated in 2014. The result is a program that can regularly coordinate intersections as the basis for synchronized operation across Orange County.

#### Next Steps

OCTA continues to work with local agencies through various venues, including the Technical Steering Committee, Technical Advisory Committee, and the traffic forum to identify corridors that are eligible for funding and would benefit from signal program funding as part of the annual call.

#### **Summary**

OCTA and local agencies have successfully implemented new cooperative traffic signal synchronization timing on 79 corridors. Another 29 projects are planned or underway. The synchronization of traffic signals along these regional corridors continually results in significant improvements to traffic flow by reducing total travel times, stops per mile, and improving average speeds while decreasing fuel costs, GHG, and overall vehicle emissions.

#### **Attachments**


- A. OCTA-Funded Signal Synchronization Projects, (2008 – Present)
- B. Summary of Results for Completed Regional Traffic Signal Synchronization Projects

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