



September 2, 2021

To: Regional Planning and Highways Committee
From: Darrell E. Johnson, Chief Executive Officer
Subject: Long-Range Transportation Plan Challenges and Goals

Overview

The Long-Range Transportation Plan provides Orange County's program of projects for the Regional Transportation Plan, prepared by the Southern California Association of Governments. The plan also serves as the policy framework for future transportation investments in Orange County. Over the planning period for the Long-Range Transportation Plan (2019-2045), many challenges have been identified that may influence how transportation facilities, services, and needs evolve. To provide context and guidance for the development of the Long-Range Transportation Plan, these challenges and the proposed goals are presented for review.

Recommendation

Receive and file as an information item.

Background

The Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA) is preparing the Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) as input into the Southern California Association of Governments' 2024 Regional Transportation Plan and Sustainable Communities Strategy. The LRTP will analyze travel conditions based on a 2045 horizon year, which considers a nine percent growth in population and a 12 percent growth in employment. As a result of this growth, it is expected that travel demand will increase.

OCTA currently has commitments to deliver projects that help manage travel demand and improve system efficiencies. These are being delivered primarily through OC Go and OCTA's public transit services. However, even with these commitments, additional improvements will be needed to help offset the growth in travel demand anticipated by 2045.

Discussion

Many factors influence travel demand and system performance beyond demographic changes and growing populations and OCTA's current Measure M2 (M2) commitments. Several of these factors have been identified as challenges for discussion in the LRTP, and they have been considered in developing the proposed LRTP goals. The challenges were identified after engaging with the OCTA Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) and OCTA Diverse Community Leaders Group. These challenges, along with the goals, are presented for discussion below.

Growing Traffic and Limited Land

Travel demand will continue to increase with the projected growth in population and employment. Beyond the improvements in Measure M2 which will mitigate some of this growth, limitations on available right-of-way and funding reduce opportunities to add capacity to meet demand. Further, the availability of resources to maintain the added facilities is also a consideration. Therefore, transportation efficiencies will need to be improved. These improvements could include gap closures and chokepoint fixes on freeways and arterials, better access to transit, providing convenient alternatives to driving alone, and better utilization of available capacity.

Evolving Travel Trends

The coronavirus pandemic has influenced travel behavior in many ways, such as increases in the number of people that work from home and use active transportation. However, it will take months or years to collect enough data to understand long-term changes in travel behavior. While this adds uncertainty to predicting future travel conditions, the recent changes to travel behavior may highlight opportunities to advance emerging technologies and services that can help reduce congestion and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. This includes the fast-growing popularity of electric bicycles and widespread use of cloud networking that makes remote working more productive and appealing. OCTA is continuously monitoring emerging technologies and services like these to better understand how they may impact transportation. For example, OCTA's 2021 Attitudinal and Awareness survey showed strong support for encouraging work from home strategies to reduce vehicle miles traveled and congestion.

Transit ridership dropped during the pandemic. Furthermore, market shifts that predate the pandemic resulted in nationwide transit ridership declines. This resulted in ridership on OCTA buses falling 37 percent between 2009 and 2019. OCTA initially responded with the OC Bus 360° strategy that focused on redeploying resources in more productive areas and providing services that meet the needs of the traveling public. However, additional strategies will need

to be identified through efforts like the Bus System Restructuring Plan to reverse the declining trend and grow ridership in the future.

Another trend is the increasing number of commuters that travel into or out of Orange County for employment. Between 2009 and 2018, intercounty commutes have increased 20 percent. Commutes coming into Orange County have seen the most growth at approximately 24 percent during the same period. With the projected employment growth (12 percent) outpacing projected housing growth (nine percent), the increase of Orange County employees living in surrounding areas is expected to continue. While the decline in Metrolink ridership during the pandemic on lines serving Orange County (which fell as much as 93 percent) may suggest that many of these employees are able to work remotely, it is difficult to estimate the extent to which remote work options will continue post-pandemic.

Increasing Climate-Related Risks

As documented in the OCTA Rail Defense Against Climate Change Plan, Orange County is at risk of more frequent and/or more intense extreme heat days, wildfires, droughts, coastal floods, and inland floods. These hazards threaten closures and damage Orange County's transportation infrastructure. These events can also create safety hazards for the traveling public.

Similar climate challenges have been recognized throughout California. Over the past 15 to 20 years, the State has put policies in place that have ramped up efforts to reduce GHG emissions. This has resulted in a set of ambitious goals, such as reducing statewide transportation sector GHG emissions to 80 percent below 1990 levels by 2050.

Changing Funding Outlook

Consistent with the state's GHG emissions reduction goals noted above, the California State Transportation Authority recently developed the Climate Action Plan for Transportation Infrastructure (CAPTI). The purpose of CAPTI is to better align investment of state transportation funds with the goals and policies of the State. This means that competitive funding programs managed by the State will begin favoring projects that support reductions in GHG emissions and other state priorities.

Another funding change that requires significant consideration in this LRTP is the sunset of the M2 half-cent local sales tax in 2041. This funding source alone represents nearly a quarter of the total revenues projected in the 2018 LRTP. With this iteration of the LRTP looking out to 2045, the sunset of M2 will present a significant loss of locally controlled funds in the outer years.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Historically, disadvantaged populations throughout the nation have been disproportionately burdened by transportation inequities that limit access to opportunities. During the past year, there has been a renewed call for transparency regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion, especially in public sector activities, to ensure that the voices of those most in need are heard and meaningfully addressed. While this challenge is not specific to Orange County, there are always opportunities for improvements to watch for that may also align with the 2021 OCTA Board of Directors and Chief Executive Officer Initiatives to provide balanced public transportation options and solutions, and to engage with diverse and disadvantaged communities.

Proposed Goals and Objectives

The overarching goals are consistent with the previous LRTP, while the objectives for achieving those goals respond to the challenges discussed above and are generally consistent with input received through the 2021 Attitudinal and Awareness Survey. Together, the goals and objectives are intended to help guide policy recommendations and investment priorities within the LRTP. Proposed goals and objectives are presented below.

Deliver on Commitments

- Prioritize M2 commitments consistent with the Next 10 Delivery Plan
- Provide safe and reliable transit services

Improve System Performance

- Improve the efficiency of transit, highways, and roadways
- Leverage emerging technologies and services

Expand System Choices

- Support options for single-occupant vehicle trips
- Improve equitable access to key destinations
- Enhance connectivity between travel modes

Support Sustainability

- Identify strategies to address climate-related risks
- Explore opportunities to improve financial sustainability
- Deliver a financially constrained LRTP

It is also important to keep in mind that major travel and trade corridors within Orange County are generally shared by adjacent counties. Implications of intercounty projects and studies within these corridors will be acknowledged and considered in the development of the LRTP.

Ongoing Outreach

Community input is a key factor when developing the proposed strategies and options that will help shape the LRTP. The primary goals are to inform target audiences about transportation options, key issues and challenges, and to gather input. To ensure the study receives input from a broad range of stakeholders and the general public, the engagement program will use both traditional and non-traditional outreach methods. All outreaches will be responsive to public health directives while striving to obtain the greatest level of public involvement possible.

OCTA will seek input from the general public, stakeholders, including the CAC and diversity, equity, and inclusion communities, and elected officials through various tactics that include social media, online surveys, webinars, roundtables, pop-up events, and a community helpline. The first phase of outreach will take place in September 2021 and October 2021. The survey and materials will be provided in Spanish and Vietnamese so that OCTA is inclusive of multiple communities throughout the County.

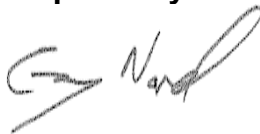
Summary

Travel demand in Orange County is expected to increase with population and employment growth. OCTA transit services, M2, and other committed investments help to address this travel demand. However, additional improvements must be explored to address issues impacting transportation. To help guide policy recommendations and investment priorities within the LRTP that address these issues, a series of goals and objectives are being proposed.

Attachment

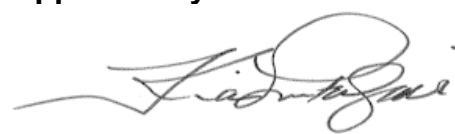
None.

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