



November 1, 2021

To: Regional Planning and Highways Committee
From: Darrell E. Johnson, Chief Executive Officer
Subject: Amendment to the Master Plan of Arterial Highways

Overview

The Orange County Transportation Authority administers the Master Plan of Arterial Highways, including the review and approval of amendments requested by local jurisdictions. The City of Orange is considering the recurring seasonal closure of Glassell Street to operate the Orange Plaza Paseo. An amendment to remove Glassell Street from the Master Plan of Arterial Highways is presented for the Regional Planning and Highways Committee and Board of Directors' consideration. An update on pending Master Plan of Arterial Highways amendments is also provided.

Recommendations

- A. Approve an amendment to the Master Plan of Arterial Highways to remove Glassell Street between Walnut Avenue and La Veta Avenue from the Orange County Master Plan of Arterial Highways.
- B. As applicable, direct the Executive Director of Planning, or his designee, to file a Notice of Exemption from the California Environmental Quality Act in support of the Board of Directors' action.

Background

The Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA) administers the Master Plan of Arterial Highways (MPAH), a plan that establishes a system of countywide arterial roadways to support regional travel demand. The MPAH represents the transportation element of Orange County local agencies' general plans and supports regional planning efforts dealing with intercity circulation, public transit, accessibility, etc. Further, consistency with the MPAH is a prerequisite for local agencies to be eligible for Measure M2 (M2) net revenues and funding programs, including the Comprehensive Transportation Funding Program (CTFP) and M2 Local Fair Share (LFS) funds. Consistency with the

MPAH means that a local agency's Circulation Element must maintain an equivalent number of minimum through-lanes on each arterial highway shown on the MPAH.

In July 2020, the City of Orange (City) closed Glassell Street between Maple Avenue and Almond Avenue to traffic. This closure allowed for the creation of Orange Plaza Paseo (Paseo), which permitted businesses to operate outdoors in response to coronavirus (COVID-19) restrictions. Glassell Street is designated as a collector (two-lane, undivided) in the MPAH.

In December 2020, OCTA issued an MPAH letter agreement with the City for the temporary closure of Glassell Street (Attachment A). OCTA was supportive of the Paseo given suppressed traffic volumes due to the pandemic and previous positive experience with the City involving street closures. The City agreed to restore pre-COVID-19 traffic operations on Glassell Street at the end of the current public health emergency or when the City Council ceases closure of the facility, whichever occurs first.

Recently, the City decided to continue the closure of Glassell Street while City staff performs an environmental review of a recurring seasonal Paseo from late spring to late summer (Attachments B and C). Although this change was initially a temporary measure to address pandemic impacts on the local economy, the City's recent action to study a recurring seasonal closure – independent of the pandemic – requires OCTA to modify the MPAH. A recurring closure has circulation and public transit implications as well as potential conflicts with M2 funding eligibility. In order to support the City's efforts and adhere to regional planning requirements, staff has developed a proposed solution which is discussed below.

Discussion

The December 2020 MPAH letter agreement will expire when the public health emergency ends. At that time, the City will have to reopen Glassell Street to vehicular traffic or risk conflicting with the M2 funding eligibility requirement of MPAH consistency. M2 funding eligibility requires that each jurisdiction must adopt and maintain a circulation element within the jurisdiction's general plan that is consistent with the MPAH. Additionally, volume control measures (e.g., street closures and diverters) are prohibited by MPAH policies. Consequently, the closure of Glassell Street to vehicular traffic, seasonal or permanent, is contrary to the intent of the MPAH consistency requirement.

In anticipation of the City's consideration of the seasonal Paseo that would close portions of Glassell Street, OCTA proposes to remove Glassell Street between Walnut Avenue and La Veta Avenue from the MPAH (Attachment D). The proposed MPAH amendment will allow the City flexibility to study and implement the proposed seasonal closures of Glassell Street while it remains closed, without risking M2 eligibility for CTFP or LFS funds. Because the LFS distribution formula is calculated using existing centerline MPAH miles, there will be a reduction in the City's share of LFS funds should Glassell Street be removed from the MPAH.

Typically, local agencies initiate amendments to the MPAH. However, MPAH guidelines provide the OCTA Board of Directors (Board) with the discretion to amend, modify, and/or waive the recommended processes in the MPAH guidance. OCTA Board action is proposed to ensure the City meets M2 eligibility requirements. An amendment is technically justified in this case given the nature of Glassell Street within a historic district, constructed as a two-lane collector with relatively low traffic volumes and supported by a dense local street network.

A preliminary travel demand analysis of the proposed closure was conducted and the analysis suggests that the closure of Glassell Street would not result in new significant traffic impacts, and any impacts would be contained in the surrounding local area within the City. The City has also coordinated the proposed street closure with OCTA to reroute transit operations. OC Bus routes 54, 56, and 59 have been permanently modified during the October service change. Overall, the recurring seasonal closure of Glassell Street should have minimal impacts on regional transportation.

California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)

Amendments to the MPAH are exempt from the CEQA review. As such, if the Board approves the recommendations, OCTA will file a Notice of Exemption from CEQA in support of the proposed amendment to the MPAH. The City could then determine whether or not to remove Glassell Street from their own planning documents. Should the City decide to leave Glassell Street on its general plan, it would not result in M2 funding ineligibility and will allow the City to implement seasonal closures on Glassell Street. On the City's general plan, Glassell Street would represent a local road that is in addition to the facilities reflected on the MPAH. Glassell Street could also be added back to the MPAH should the City decide on a year-round opening.

MPAH Status Update

As indicated in the status report in Attachment E, there are currently 18 pending amendments proposed for the MPAH. These pending amendments are awaiting local action to amend their respective general plans. Others are either under review, are in the cooperative study process, are pending resolution of issues with other agencies, or are awaiting refinement of development plans.

Summary

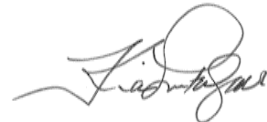
Staff is seeking Board consideration for the removal of Glassell Street from the MPAH, consistent with current policies. A summary of pending MPAH amendments is also provided for Board review.

Attachments

- A. Letter from Christopher S. Cash, Public Works Director, City of Orange, to Kia Mortazavi, Executive Director, Orange County Transportation Authority, dated January 12, 2021
- B. City of Orange, City Council Agenda Item #7.2, Dated October 13, 2021
- C. Letter from Christopher S. Cash, Public Works Director, City of Orange, to Kia Mortazavi, Executive Director, Orange County Transportation Authority, dated August 30, 2021, re: Orange Plaza Paseo Traffic Analysis
- D. City of Orange, Proposed Removal of Glassell from MPAH
- E. Status Report on Pending Master Plan of Arterial Highways Amendments

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