



November 1, 2021

To: Regional Planning and Highways Committee
From: Darrell E. Johnson, Chief Executive Officer
Subject: Active Transportation Program Biannual Update

Overview

The Orange County Transportation Authority coordinates regional active transportation efforts in Orange County through planning, grant funding, and safety programs. An update on recent and upcoming activities is provided for review.

Recommendation

Receive and file as an information item.

Background

The Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA) Board of Directors (Board) receives biannual updates on regional active transportation (bicycling and walking) projects and programs. These efforts support OCTA's vision for a multimodal transportation system.

Discussion

Safety

OCTA is administering two grants focusing on Safe Routes to School (SRTS) and bicycle, pedestrian, and transit user safety. These grants fund the Safe Travels Education Program (STEP) Campaign and the Bus Stop Safety and Accessibility Study. Both projects foster continued collaboration between OCTA and local partners and stakeholders including the Orange County Health Care Agency, local schools, jurisdictional partners, and the public.

STEP Campaign

The STEP Campaign is a \$500,000 California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) Active Transportation Program (ATP) Cycle 5 grant-funded project, which develops and will deliver education and encouragement activities for walking and bicycling to 25 public elementary schools serving disadvantaged communities. A range of activities will be offered based on school interest and time availability for assemblies, walk or bicycle-to-school day events, and training activities. In response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, the project team has been adapting the activities to be compatible with virtual and hybrid schooling. This includes the development of online modules and educational videos for various age groups focusing on safe walking and bicycling, as well as alternative delivery methods for live events. The “menu” of activities for school is included in Attachment A. There are currently 21 schools enrolled in the program which will continue through November 2022.

SRTS

OCTA completed the SRTS Action Plan in spring 2021. This plan outlines recommendations, as well as priority and supporting actions focused on creating a countywide SRTS Program. OCTA is exploring ways to move towards implementing the plan’s recommendations by determining which entity should lead the program, how to establish a sustainable funding stream, and how best to sustain support for delivering SRTS in Orange County.

Bus Stop Safety and Accessibility Study

OCTA received a \$300,000 Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) Sustainable Communities grant to complete the Bus Stop Safety and Accessibility Study. This study will identify first/last mile improvements within 1/4 mile of OCTA’s 13 busiest bus stops to facilitate better connections with the adjacent communities (Attachment B). This will be done in coordination with the cities of Anaheim, Costa Mesa, Garden Grove, and Santa Ana, as well as the surrounding communities and local stakeholders. The study will begin in spring 2022.

Planning

OCTA is undertaking several initiatives to better understand and improve the active transportation users’ experience on Orange County’s transportation systems. These projects include the Garden Grove – Santa Ana Gap Closure Study, Bike Gap Closure Feasibility Study, and the Cyclic Counts Program (CCP).

Garden Grove – Santa Ana Gap Closure Study

The study will complete the environmental document and preliminary engineering phase for an active transportation facility on 3.1 miles of OCTA-owned former Pacific Electric corridor between Raitt Street and Euclid Avenue, as well as 0.85 miles of the Wintersburg Channel to Hazard Avenue (Attachment C). It is funded through a \$3 million ATP Cycle 5 grant and will begin in summer 2022 and be completed in approximately three years. This study will support the advancement of subsequent project phases by the cities of Garden Grove and Santa Ana. The Board will be asked for approval to release a request for proposals in early calendar year (CY) 2022.

Bike Gap Closure Feasibility Study

This study will evaluate alignments, develop cost estimates and facility concepts for three key regional bikeways: the OC Central loop, the OC South loop, and the OC Connect (Attachment D). The study recommendations will be available to local agencies pursuing funding opportunities for implementation. The study is currently undertaking the stakeholder engagement portion of the project by conducting ten pop-ups and two large format events to provide project stakeholders information and solicit feedback. Events will be starting in mid-October and continue through the end of the project. The project is funded with \$160,000 in Caltrans Sustainable Community Grant funds and \$40,000 in State Transportation Improvement Program planning, programming, and monitoring funds.

Bike Counts Program

The Bike Counts Program began in April 2020 and collected bicycle counts at 120 locations throughout Orange County between May 1 and June 6, 2020, (not including Memorial Day weekend). The project team concluded that assessing changes in active transportation travel behavior during the pandemic presented a unique opportunity for data collection. When using this data in the future for year-to-year analysis, it will be noted that COVID-19 and its effects on travel behavior may have contributed to any data anomalies.

An additional 100 counts were taken during May and June 2021 to complete the project. The 2021 count data is being incorporated into a bicycle volume map and OCTA is in the process of developing a subsequent count project to take place in CYs 2022 and 2023. This data will provide critical information for local agencies for grant applications, evaluation of existing facilities, and assist with decision making on where to locate facilities in the future.

Other Active Transportation Considerations

Electric Bikes

OCTA and many partner jurisdictions are observing a rapid increase in interest and usage of electric bicycles (E-bikes). At the September Bicycle/Pedestrian/Active Transportation Subcommittee meeting, OCTA hosted four local E-bike sellers to discuss the state of E-bikes in Orange County. While there were varying perspectives on how exactly to best accommodate E-bikes, there was consensus on the fact that usage, both for recreation and commuting, will continue to grow. E-bikes attract new riders to the market due to allowing riders in hilly areas to use the bicycles, because they require less physical power to operate, and because the price of E-bikes is becoming competitive with non-motorized bicycles. E-bikes allow new bicyclists to be on the road longer or more often because they place less physical strain on the riders. Lastly, E-bikes travel faster compared to conventional bicycles. Because of these and other factors, it is important to monitor usage and travel patterns to determine the best course of action to support the needs of this rapidly growing mode of transportation.

Summary

OCTA has advanced planning, education, encouragement, and enforcement efforts to improve active transportation throughout Orange County. Coordination and collaboration will continue between SCAG, Caltrans, and stakeholders to encourage and support walking and bicycling within Orange County.

Attachments

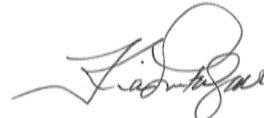
- A. STEP, An Orange County Safe Routes to School Program
- B. Bus Stop Safety and Accessibility Study, Disadvantaged and Low-Income Communities
- C. Project Fact Sheet, Garden Grove-Santa Ana Rails-to-Trails Gap Closure Project
- D. Bike Gap Closure Feasibility Study Map

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