

Staff Evaluation of Services Provided by Topp Strategies for 2025

The following narrative provides specific information with respect to major issues addressed by Topp Strategies, with Moira Topp as the Orange County Transportation Authority's (OCTA) primary state legislative advocate in 2025, and general services provided. Each issue has been evaluated based on effort and outcome using a rating of excellent, very good, good, fair, or poor.

State Budget Provisions for Transportation Purposes

Effort: Excellent; Outcome: Very Good

The focus of much of the Legislature's activities and policy actions in the transportation space was related to the budget. This required Topp Strategies to take both proactive and defensive measures to protect funding for OCTA, often in coordination with the larger transit agency network via the California Transit Association. In previous budget cycles, when the State was operating in a budget surplus, the Legislature approved \$4 billion in formula funding for the Transit Intercity Rail Capital Program (TIRCP) to be used for transit operating and capital purposes. With the State facing both another funding shortfall this year, and negotiations occurring about the reauthorization of cap-and-trade, risk was present about not only these funds continuing to flow, but also funding commitments from previous cycles of discretionary TIRCP. For both the cap-and-trade discussions and budget negotiations, Topp Strategies continuously communicated with not only Orange County delegation offices, but also committee staff and leadership on impacts to OCTA if funding for transportation purposes was not continued, highlighting not only funding commitments OCTA has in the pipeline but also opportunities for future funding. This became paramount as discussions related to the newly rebranded cap-and-invest program turned to discuss the potential for earmarks. Topp Strategies ensured OCTA was at the table this year, but also laid groundwork for continued negotiations next year. Due to both individual agency advocacy and work in coordination with other agencies and partners, transit funding was maintained. However, a lot of work will be necessary next year to keep these commitments in place.

Bills of Interest

Effort: Excellent; Outcome: Good

SB 741 (Blakespear, D-Encinitas)/AB 986 (Muratsuchi, D-Torrance): This year, the OCTA Board of Directors directed efforts to sponsor legislation to streamline the permit process for work along the Los Angeles-San Diego-San Luis Obispo (LOSSAN) Rail Corridor. Topp Strategies worked closely with Senator Blakespear's office to offer a variety of ideas on how this could be done, which led to the introduction of SB 741. While OCTA ultimately did not sponsor SB 741, Topp Strategies remained in constant contact with the Senator's office, remaining nimble as negotiations occurred. Due to opposition, the bill ultimately was amended to have provisions that could have negatively impacted the work on the LOSSAN Rail Corridor. Topp Strategies clearly communicated these concerns and worked with staff on alternative methods to address these concerns. Ultimately the bill became a two-year bill, with OCTA continuing to work with the Senator on these efforts moving forward.

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Simultaneous to informing SB 741, the OCTA Board of Directors took a support position on AB 986 which would have streamlined the emergency declaration process for impacts from landslides. This bill was informed by the City of Rancho Palos Verdes, but would have provided benefits for the LOSSAN Rail Corridor. Ultimately, this bill was vetoed by the Governor. But the veto message provided a strategy for future incidents via the Governor's emergency declaration authority.

SB 364 (Chapter 313, Statutes of 2025): Authored by Senator Strickland (R-Huntington Beach), this bill was a repeated attempt from previous years to clarify the process by which the California Department of Transportation can approve outdoor advertising in periods of highway construction. OCTA supported this bill in conjunction with the League of Cities and several Orange County cities. Topp Strategies worked closely with the Senator's office as amendments were offered that would have jeopardized the viability of the bill. Ultimately these conversations proved successful, with the bill being signed into law.

Transit Bills: This year, OCTA supported several bills sponsored by the California Transit Association, including efforts to expand prohibition order authority on transit systems, to streamline the California Environmental Quality Act, and extend the sales tax exemption for zero-emission buses. While several of these were successful, the bill to extend the sales tax exemption for zero-emission buses became a two-year bill, essentially removing this exemption at the end of 2025. Topp Strategies worked closely with OCTA's delegation and partner agencies to get these bills passed. However, next year more work will be needed on the sales tax exemption front to prevent immediate impacts to planned OCTA bus procurements.

General Services

Effort: Excellent; Outcome: Excellent

Topp Strategies regularly scheduled meetings with legislators, committee consultants, Administration staff, and staff of various state departments, boards, and commissions to discuss issues of importance to OCTA. Topp Strategies has been responsive to requests by OCTA staff, provided timely information, advice and reports, and provided testimony in legislative committees that accurately reflected Board positions on legislation and policy issues. Topp Strategies also worked on a number of other issues on behalf of OCTA that were not necessarily contained in legislation.

Specifically, this year, Topp Strategies provided critical meetings with new and existing Orange County delegation members to discuss OCTA's top priorities including support for permitting reform, challenges related to the transition to zero-emission buses, and transportation funding. In addition, Topp Strategies secured meetings with several different administrative agencies, including the California State Transportation Agency, California Coastal Commission, California Department of Transportation, and the California Transportation Commission. These meetings proved critical to making

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progress on permits for emergency work on the LOSSAN Rail Corridor and highlighting OCTA's leadership on managed lane facilities.

Further work will be needed next year to advance connections with other relevant state agencies, including the California Air Resources Board, as the next stage of the Innovative Clean Transit regulation takes place, and more in-depth conversations about roles and responsibilities in the transportation funding, planning and operating space.

Effort: Excellent; Outcome: Very Good

Topp Strategies efforts overall are rated as excellent 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 legislators and members of various state departments, boards, and commissions, and availability. Topp Strategies outcomes overall are rated as excellent based on the outcomes of the issues discussed.