



June 18, 2026

To: Finance and Administration Committee

From: Darrell E. Johnson, Chief Executive Officer

Subject: 91 Express Lanes Update for the Period Ending –
March 31, 2026

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Darrell Johnson", is positioned to the right of the "From:" line.

Overview

The Orange County Transportation Authority has owned and managed the operations of the 91 Express Lanes since January 2003. Since then, traffic volumes and toll revenues have fluctuated with changes in the economy and the added capacity to the State Route 91 corridor. During the month of March 2026, approximately 1.94 million trips were taken, and over 5.34 million trips were made during the first quarter of calendar year 2026 on the 91 Express Lanes in Orange County. This report focuses on the operational and financial activities for the period ending March 31, 2026.

Recommendation

Receive and file as an information item.

Background

The Orange County segment of the 91 Express Lanes (91 EL) is a four-lane, ten-mile tolled facility built in the median of State Route 91 (SR-91) between the State Route 55/SR-91 interchange and the Orange/Riverside County Line. The 91 EL was built by the California Private Transportation Company (CPTC) for a cost of approximately \$135 million and opened to travelers in 1995. An agreement with the California Department of Transportation included a non-compete provision that created a 1.5-mile protection zone along each side of SR-91. This zone prohibited improvements along the corridor and created mobility problems as the region and corresponding transportation demands grew.

To mitigate growing concerns over congestion, the Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA) acquired the 91 EL franchise rights from the CPTC in January 2003. This eliminated the non-compete provision, clearing the

way for future enhancements to increase capacity and improve traffic flow along the SR-91 corridor.

With the non-compete provisions removed, the Riverside County Transportation Commission (RCTC) received authority to extend the 91 EL to Interstate 15 (I-15) in 2008. At a cost of \$1.4 billion, the RCTC 91 Corridor Improvement Project added general-purpose lanes, tolled express lanes, auxiliary lanes, and direct express lane connectors from the 91 EL to I-15. The Riverside County segment of the 91 EL opened in 2017, providing customers with eight additional miles of travel on SR-91. To provide 91 EL customers with a seamless experience, OCTA and RCTC entered into a three-party operating agreement with one firm to service both facility segments.

Historically, the 91 EL has used congestion management pricing to adjust tolls quarterly based on the number of vehicles traveling through the express lanes. Since 2003, OCTA, and RCTC in 2017, have used this tolling method to provide customers with a safe, reliable, and predictable trip on the 91 EL. In November 2023, the RCTC 91 EL segment transitioned to dynamic pricing, which adjusts toll rates based on real-time traffic volumes to maintain free-flowing trips in accordance with RCTC's 91 EL Toll Policy and Toll Schedule. The OCTA 91 EL segment still uses congestion management pricing, with tolls adjusted quarterly.

Motorists pay tolls using a transponder that automatically deducts the toll amount from a prepaid account. The transponder can be used on any California tolled facility through existing interoperability agreements.

OCTA and RCTC's tolling agreements allow both agencies to operate the 91 EL well into the future (2065 for OCTA and 2067 for RCTC). This provides customers with transportation options for 18 miles of travel in one of California's busiest corridors.

Discussion

The sections below discuss various operational data and information for the 91 EL in greater detail.

Traffic Volumes

The total traffic volume on the OCTA 91 EL for the month of March 2026 was 1,935,831. This represents a daily average of 62,446 vehicles. This is a 2.7 percent increase in total traffic volume from the same period last year when traffic levels totaled 1,884,597. For the 12 months ending March 2026, traffic volumes totaled over 22.3 million, representing a 1.8 percent increase from the same period in the prior year. The carpool percentage for March was

21.9 percent as compared to the previous year's rate of 25.8 percent. The decrease in carpool usage in the OCTA segment is similar to that seen in the RCTC segment and can be attributed to their implementation of an occupancy detection system (ODS). Even though OCTA has not implemented the ODS, it appears that travelers are adjusting their lane selection and travel patterns on both segments.

Gross Potential Toll Revenues (GPTR)

GPTR for the month of March 2026 was \$6,585,783, which represents an increase of 11.3 percent from the prior year's total of \$5,918,773 for the month of March 2025. The increase in GPTR is large because customers are changing their lane selection from the high-occupancy vehicle three-plus lane to the full toll lane. GPTR is equal to the toll rate times the number of vehicles traveling on the 91 EL (the amount does not consider violations or discounts). Over the previous 12 months, GPTR totaled \$73.7 million, representing a 6.2 percent increase from the same period in the prior year.

Toll Adjustments

The Board of Directors (Board)-adopted Toll Policy requires staff to review traffic volumes on the Orange County segment of the 91 EL for potential toll adjustments on a quarterly basis. Based on the traffic volumes during the review period, no hours in the eastbound or westbound directions reached the trigger point for a toll adjustment in December 2025. As of March 2026, toll rates ranged from a minimum of \$1.95 to a maximum of \$9.35. Any potential toll adjustments for the quarter ending March 31, 2026, will be reported in the following report.

Number of Accounts and Transponders

The number of active accounts totaled 187,497, and 755,529 transponders were assigned to those accounts as of March 31, 2026. Over the past 12 months, the number of accounts increased by 3,621, while the number of transponders in circulation increased by 22,620. Over the past several years, there has been continued growth in the number of accounts and transponders, primarily driven by the extension of the 91 EL into Riverside County and the opening of the 15 Express Lanes with direct connectors from the 91 EL.

Outstanding Debt

As of March 31, 2026, the outstanding amount of the 91 EL tax-exempt 2023 Senior Lien Toll Road Revenue Refunding Bonds (Bonds) totaled \$35.6 million. The Bonds are rated "AA-" by Standard and Poor's, "AA3" by Moody's, and "AA-" by Fitch Ratings. The scheduled interest payment was made

on February 15, 2026. The next scheduled interest and principal payment is on August 15, 2026.

Reserve Funds

The 2023 Bonds require three reserve funds: a major maintenance fund, an operating fund, and a debt service reserve fund. All three funds were fully funded with a total balance of approximately \$11.99 million as of March 31, 2026.

In addition to the required debt reserve funds, the Board elected to establish two additional reserve funds. An internal capital projects fund has a balance of \$33.68 million and is used for large capital projects for the 91 EL, such as pavement rehabilitation and back-office system (BOS) upgrades. The other reserve fund was established in 2017 for two future Measure M2 projects (Projects I and J) on the SR-91 corridor. Project I improves the mainline freeway, interchanges, and replaces four bridges along SR-91 between west of SR-57 (Acacia Street) and east of State Route 55 (Lakeview Avenue), estimated to cost approximately \$790 million. Project I is being developed as three separate design and construction projects. The easternmost segment commenced construction in April 2025, the westernmost segment commenced construction in January 2026, and the middle segment is in the final design phase. All three segments of Project I are anticipated to be completed by late 2030. Project J includes operational improvements on SR-91 between State Route 241 and the Orange/Riverside County Line and is currently scheduled for completion in 2035. The balance in that reserve fund is \$260.66 million and is used for project expenses as they are incurred. Lastly, OCTA has approximately \$44.36 million in excess toll revenues set aside for SR-91 corridor projects.

Operations Update

In March 2022, Cofiroute USA, LLC (CUSA) deployed a new BOS for the 91 EL for both Orange and Riverside counties. Since deployment, CUSA, OCTA, and RCTC staff have continuously monitored the BOS performance and the customer service center (CSC) performance. As part of ongoing monitoring, key performance indicators (KPI) are assessed for damages in accordance with the contract requirements. OCTA and RCTC staff have finalized the KPI damages for the months of July 2025 through January 2026. The KPI review is typically completed within three months after the close of the month. Staff is working on finalizing the KPI damages for February and March 2026, which will be reported in the following quarterly report. KPI damages are reported for the fiscal year in each quarterly update to reflect the amounts assessed during the year. These KPI damages are a result of OCTA and RCTC identified performance issues with the BOS and CSC, totaling \$133,983 for both agencies.

For OCTA, the total penalties amounted to \$68,572. Of this amount, \$47,000 was attributed to BOS performance, of which \$16,664 was waived, and \$30,336 was assessed. Of the amount waived, staff authorized waiving the penalty because it was associated with system availability issues from a separate priority KPI item. The priority incident was properly documented, evaluated in the corresponding KPI, and penalties were assessed for that priority incident. Therefore, since the separate priority incident incurred a KPI penalty and the system was available during the priority incidents, the other KPI penalty (\$16,664) was waived. The remaining \$21,572 in KPI damages was attributed to CSC performance failures, with the full amount assessed in the corresponding monthly invoices.

Attachment A summarizes some of the KPIs of the CSC over the past 12 months. The KPI for service level for the speed of answer (KPI 5) was met in February and missed four times in January and twice in March. The abandonment rate KPI (KPI 6) was met in February and missed three times in January and once in March. CUSA continues to evaluate staffing levels and review the communication schedule to optimize message delivery timing. Prior corrective measures have led to improvements in meeting KPI 5 and KPI 6 in the past quarter compared to the prior year.

Operational acceptance testing was passed in June 2025. Since then, staff has been working closely with CUSA to address deferred and punch-list items. As of March, CUSA has made progress in completing the deferred and punch-list items, but some items remain outstanding. All deferred and punch-list items must be completed before final acceptance. Final acceptance is currently scheduled for June 2026, but it is at risk of getting delayed. Staff will report on the status of final acceptance in the following report.

OCTA staff has also been supporting RCTC in implementing the occupancy detection system (ODS) on the Riverside segment of the 91 EL. The ODS enables RCTC to verify that at least three occupants are present during travel. If fewer than three occupants are present, the carpool discount will not be given, and a \$5 occupancy correction fee will be added. The ODS went live on August 4, 2025, and staff has been working collaboratively with CUSA to ensure that the system accurately assesses tolls and fees for users who do not meet the occupancy requirements. Staff will continue to work with CUSA on customer communication, system monitoring, and overall ODS oversight.

During the reporting period, OCTA and RCTC staff worked with CUSA to monitor system changes that remove the zero-emissions vehicle (ZEV) discount as approved by the Board on September 8, 2025. Customers were provided with the ZEV discount until December 31, 2025, as a courtesy and to allow for ample time for communications to be sent and system changes to be completed. All the system changes were completed before the end of the year, and the discount

was discontinued as of January 1, 2026. Staff monitored changes to the system and applied any associated penalties resulting from issues to the appropriate KPI scorecard.

In addition, staff completed the refresh of the traffic operations center (TOC) in the City of Anaheim by replacing dated furniture with modern ergonomic furniture. The new furniture allows TOC staff to sit or stand while completing duties, reducing fatigue and improving visibility of the video wall. Staff also negotiated a new service agreement with Daktronics to ensure the changeable message signs (CMS) are properly maintained throughout the year. The CMS' are used to display toll rates and messages to motorists. The new CMS agreement was procured at a lower rate than prior agreements due to the long-standing partnership with the CMS vendor.

Looking at the Quarter Ahead

OCTA 91 EL staff will focus on completing the punch-list items for the BOS acceptance, while continuing to assist and monitor ODS performance on the RCTC segment. Staff will also continue to review BOS and CSC operations and apply the applicable KPIs to the monthly scorecards. Lastly, OCTA staff will work with RCTC to complete the planning and cost projection for the future BOS options for the 91 EL. Staff will report on the status of these BOS options for the in the following report.

Summary

An operational report for the 91 Express Lanes for the period ending March 31, 2026, is provided for the Board of Directors' review. The report provides a summary of key operational and financial activities.

Attachments

- A. 91 Express Lanes, Key Performance Measures, March 2026
- B. 91 Express Lanes Status Report, March 2026

Prepared by:



Anthony Rodriguez
Project Manager III,
Express Lanes
(714) 560-5752

Approved by:



Kirk Avila
General Manager,
Express Lanes Programs
(714) 560-5674