



August 28, 2025

To: Regional Transportation Planning Committee

From: Darrell E. Johnson, Chief Executive Officer

Subject: 2026 Long-Range Transportation Plan Development

Overview

The Orange County Transportation Authority has initiated development of the 2026 Long-Range Transportation Plan, which defines the long-term vision and investment priorities for Orange County's transportation system through the year 2050. The plan is updated every four years and provides Orange County's required input to the Southern California Association of Governments' Regional Transportation Plan and Sustainable Communities Strategy. This report provides an update on early development activities, including challenges and goals that will help guide the development of scenarios and evaluation criteria.

Recommendation

Receive and file as an information item.

Background

The Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA) is underway with the development of the 2026 Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP), which will guide the OCTA's long-term transportation planning through the year 2050. The LRTP is a 25-year planning document that is updated every four years. The LRTP will evaluate current commitments, assess future travel needs and financial forecasts, incorporate public and stakeholder input, and identify key challenges and strategies through 2050. These inputs inform the LRTP's core outputs, which include the plan's long-term goals, a list of preferred projects, evaluation of system performance, and a short-term action plan to guide near-term planning. The LRTP also serves as Orange County's required input to the Regional Transportation Plan/Sustainable Communities Strategy (RTP/SCS) developed by the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG). Inclusion in the RTP/SCS is a critical step for positioning projects for state and federal funding.

Discussion

The five key challenges outlined below will influence Orange County's future transportation needs and were used to inform the development of the draft LRTP goals.

Shifting Mobility Trends

Travel patterns across Orange County continue to evolve, driven by a combination of growing electronic commerce (e-commerce), rise of electric vehicles and bicycles, and other emerging technologies. Flexible and hybrid work schedules have contributed to the spread of peak-hour demand, resulting in reduced congestion during traditional commute times in some corridors, but more unpredictable travel patterns throughout the day. In parallel with these trends, the number of commuters traveling into Orange County for jobs continues to grow. In 2024, approximately 293,000 daily work trips originate from outside Orange County, accounting for 16 percent of all work trips within the County. By 2050, this number is projected to increase by 15 percent, with the largest share of outside trips coming from Los Angeles County.

Post-pandemic travel demand has rebounded at different rates and in different ways across modes, reflecting changes in how and when people choose to travel. Additionally, increased freight and e-commerce activity has contributed to congestion, competition for curb space, and heightened safety concerns, such as more frequent conflicts between delivery vehicles and pedestrians or bicyclists and increased double parking. These shifting travel patterns present new challenges for forecasting demand and require more flexible approaches to planning and delivering services that meet the County's diverse needs across all travel modes.

Built Out Roadways

While the latest demographic projections indicate a modest three percent population growth by 2050, employment is expected to grow by ten percent and housing by 13 percent. Together, these trends are increasing overall travel demand on Orange County's transportation system, particularly along key corridors and around job centers.

In contrast, opportunities to expand roadway capacity are limited. Existing land uses, right-of-way constraints, and the rising financial and environmental costs associated with large-scale capital infrastructure projects make capacity expansion increasingly difficult.

These limitations highlight the importance of accommodating more trips within the existing transportation right-of-way and infrastructure. As congestion grows, maintaining system performance will rely increasingly on strategies that improve

operational efficiency and maximize people-throughput for various modes of transportation.

Increasing Risks to System Resiliency

OCTA's Climate Adaptation and Sustainability Plan, completed in 2024, identifies several climate-related hazards to the system, including air quality, flooding, severe weather, storm surge, extreme heat, and wildfires. These events can create safety hazards for the traveling public, threaten Orange County's transportation infrastructure, cause service disruptions, and increase maintenance and operations costs. OCTA has a strong track record of protecting public safety and maintaining service during past disruptions. However, the increasing frequency and severity of extreme weather events will continue to test the system's resilience.

At the state level, ambitious goals have been set over the last two decades to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and vehicle miles traveled. While OCTA continues to implement projects and strategies that support these goals, achieving them remains challenging due to the high cost of emerging technologies and evolving state and federal requirements.

Evolving Funding Landscape

With the Measure M2 (M2) sunset in 2041, there is uncertainty around the future of locally controlled revenue for transportation investments. In the 2022 LRTP, M2 accounted for nearly a quarter of the total projected revenue. The 2026 LRTP cycle extends the planning horizon to 2050, the sunset of M2 will present a significant funding shortfall that must be addressed.

Adding to the funding challenges, state and federal funding programs are becoming increasingly restrictive. For example, the Surface Transportation Block Grant, and Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality programs, which were previously allocated by formula, are now awarded by SCAG through a competitive process that selects projects based on alignment with regional priorities. Rising construction and maintenance costs further complicate these issues and require ongoing reassessment of long-term financial strategies and project prioritization.

Access to Economic Opportunities

Reliable access to transportation is essential to economic vitality and workforce mobility. Major job centers in Orange County continue to attract a growing regional workforce but often remain difficult to access by modes other than driving. This can create barriers for individuals who may not have access to a personal vehicle and depend on other travel options.

First- and last-mile gaps, limited transit coverage in some areas, and rising transportation costs continue to disproportionately affect transit-dependent populations. Addressing these conditions presents an opportunity to strengthen the County's economic growth and quality of life through investments that improve transportation access to jobs, education, and essential services.

Proposed LRTP Goals

In response to the key challenges outlined above, staff has identified four goals to guide the development of the 2026 LRTP. The overarching goals are consistent with those established in the 2022 LRTP with an updated emphasis to reflect evolving priorities. These goals will inform the 2026 LRTP development.

- Expand Multimodal Capacity – continue to invest in an integrated transportation network that supports all travel modes.
- Improve Operations – enhance safety, efficiency, and reliability for daily travel and goods movement.
- Enhance Accessibility – improve access to jobs and key destinations through convenient and affordable transportation options.
- Strengthen System Resiliency – develop a sustainable transportation system that can withstand climate risks, economic uncertainties, and other disruptions.

Public Engagement

In addition to the challenges and goals, community input is a critical component in shaping scenarios and strategies that will guide the development of the LRTP. The LRTP outreach efforts are intended to inform the audiences about current challenges and emerging issues, and to gather input on potential transportation options and priorities.

To ensure broad reach and participation from across the County, OCTA will implement a combination of traditional and innovative outreach methods. Engagement efforts will target the general public, stakeholders, community-based organizations, advisory groups (such as the Citizens Advisory Committee and Diverse Community Leaders), and city and elected officials.

Outreach tools will include social media, online surveys, webinars, pop-up events, roundtables, and a telephone townhall. The first phase of outreach is tentatively scheduled to begin on September 10, 2025. Survey and outreach materials will be multilingual to reach a wide and representative audience.

Milestones and Schedule

The 2026 LRTP is currently in the early development phase, with efforts focused on refining goals and preparing for scenario development, revenue forecasting, and performance analysis. A draft of the 2026 LRTP will be presented to the Board of Directors (Board) to review findings and provide input prior to the release of the draft plan to the public in summer 2026. The final LRTP is scheduled for Board consideration in fall 2026 to align with SCAG's RTP/SCS timeline.

Summary

Orange County's transportation system continues to face new and evolving challenges. While OCTA's transit services, M2 investments, and other committed projects provide a strong foundation, additional strategies will be needed to address shifting travel patterns, climate risks, and long-term funding gaps. The draft goals outlined in this report provide a strategic framework for guiding investment and policy decisions in the 2026 LRTP.

Attachment

None.

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