



November 4, 2024

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

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Overview

The Orange County Transportation Authority coordinates regional active transportation efforts with local jurisdictions, key stakeholders, and the public. An update on recent and upcoming activities is provided.

Recommendation

Receive and file as an information item.

Background

The Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA) is engaged in regional active transportation projects, programs, and planning in Orange County (OC). These efforts support OCTA's vision for a balanced multimodal transportation system. To realize this vision, OCTA works with local jurisdictions, stakeholders, and the public to advance the development of safe, accessible, and connected bicycling, walking, and other active transportation mode networks. Updates on the Electric Bicycles (E-bike) Safety Action Plan (Plan), Next Safe Travels Education Program (Next STEP), and additional active transportation efforts are discussed below.

Discussion

E-bikes Safety Action Plan

In July 2023, OCTA began the Plan to address gaps in e-bike safety resources at local, regional, and state levels. The Plan proposes strategies to close these gaps and identifies potential funding sources to facilitate future safety initiatives and outreach efforts.

The project team conducted an inventory of available e-bike data and non-infrastructure safety resources for e-bike riders in OC. The data assessment process included identification of gaps in e-bike data, particularly collision and injury data, as well as e-bike ridership data.

The non-infrastructure inventory used a multi-step process including a survey, interviews, and a literature review. The project team distributed a survey to stakeholders across the County to assess local resources and needs. Staff received responses from 51 OC jurisdictions, law enforcement agencies, retailers, and other local stakeholders involved in e-bike safety efforts. Staff then utilized interviews with e-bike stakeholders and public input to gather deeper insights into the challenges and opportunities presented by e-bike use. Through the data and non-infrastructure analyses, the following key gaps and challenges were identified:

- Collision and injury data specific to e-bikes is limited. Currently, there is not a standard and/or dedicated e-bike coding for collisions, leaving it up to local agencies to add coding on their systems without consistency between agencies.
- While e-bike ridership is increasing, count data is limited and constrained by the difficulties in distinguishing e-bikes from pedal bicycles.
- National e-bikes sales trends show year-over-year increases in units sold, but sales data on a local and regional level are not accessible.
- Local agencies are responding to the growing e-bike use with a desire to manage safe operation by implementing ordinances; most agencies have Active Transportation Plans (ATP), but ATPs often do not specifically address e-bikes at a planning, engineering, and/or programmatic level.
- Education and encouragement efforts are not consistent countywide or within the same school district. Existing efforts include e-bike permits/registration for students, presentations from law enforcement, e-bike rodeos, and youth-focused messaging and educational campaigns.
- Enforcing safe e-bike riding behavior has been a challenge for local law enforcement due to limited resources and capacity.
- Retailers surveyed by the project team are not currently providing educational materials to customers who purchase e-bikes nor were they willing to share sales data with the OCTA project team.

Using stakeholder input, public outreach, data gap analysis, and current e-bike safety efforts and policies, the Plan recommends actions in six key goal areas: infrastructure, legislation, collisions and injuries, ridership, education/encouragement, and retail collaboration. Each goal area is accompanied by strategies and recommended actions to move towards safe e-bike use in OC.

Recommendations identified in the Plan include:

- Infrastructure: Continue to advance bikeway infrastructure, particularly protected infrastructure, which fosters safe e-bike riding.
- Legislation: Promote e-bikes as a sustainable transportation mode and encourage safe adoption of active modes.
- Collision and injuries: Build understanding of crash and risk factors, especially those that result in severe injury or fatality.
- Ridership: Understand growth trends and hot spots for e-bike use.
- Education/encouragement: Target behavior change for key groups affected by e-bike safety issues.
- Retailer collaboration: Leverage e-bike retailers for outreach and data collection.

The final E-bike Safety Action Plan will be completed and made available to stakeholders and the public by the end of 2024.

Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Program

In fall 2023, OCTA and the Orange County Health Care Agency (OCHCA) established the OC SRTS Program. The program promotes and facilitates safe walking, bicycling, and other active modes of transportation for students traveling to and from schools. OCTA's SRTS webpage offers resources such as planning tools, maps, and educational materials to assist schools and parents as well as linking to useful OCHCA resources. Additionally, the site highlights success stories that showcase local efforts to improve safe student travel across OC. OCTA and OCHCA continue to look for methods to support cities and schools to improve safe active transportation access to schools. The Next STEP, as well as a portion of the Active Transportation Education and Engagement Support events, are being completed in support of the OC SRTS Program.

Next STEP

In June 2024, OCTA, in partnership with OCHCA, launched Next STEP in support of the OC SRTS Program. Next STEP partners with local city staff and police to promote walking and bicycling education, evaluate infrastructure needs, and encourage safe travels and will be implemented in 25 eligible public elementary schools across OC. Next STEP is funded by an \$850,000 California Transportation Commission ATP grant and a \$1.25 million Southern California Association of Governments Regional Early Action Planning (SCAG REAP 2.0) grant. Using the eligibility criteria established in the SRTS Action Plan, school recruitment efforts to identify and select 25 participating schools began in September 2024. School selection takes into account active transportation safety around and near a school, how well the transportation network supports walking and bicycling to school, and community need. OCTA will highlight participating schools and activities on the project website once recruitment is complete.

Active Transportation Education and Engagement Support

The Active Transportation Education and Engagement Support project began in summer 2024. The project includes conducting a series of education, engagement, and safety activities aimed at empowering residents with the knowledge and tools to safely and confidently use bicycling and walking as a viable mode of transportation. The project team will attend community events, conduct bike rodeos, develop online education modules, and deploy mobile street team ambassadors to distribute safety materials to the public. This project is funded with a \$400,000 SCAG REAP 2.0 grant. To date, the project team has attended the following events:

- September 14, 2024: Fiestas Patrias in the City of Santa Ana
- September 21, 2024: Fourth District Supervisor Chaffee's Community Bike Ride to Raise Prostrate Cance Awareness in the City of Fullerton
- October 9, 2024: Walk to School Day at Washington Elementary School in the City of Santa Ana

OCTA staff is working with local jurisdictions and stakeholders to identify additional community events that support and provide an opportunity for active transportation engagement. The project will end in April 2026.

OC Bicycle Counts

OCTA is collecting bicycle count data from 450 locations on roads and bicycle paths across the county and updating the OCTA bicycle counts database. This data supports active transportation in the region by providing data for analysis, grant applications, and project development. Data collection took place from June 2 to June 30, 2024, and will also take place from May 1 to May 20, 2025. Counts are taken at each location on one weekday and one weekend day during the collection period. The count information includes a range of data categories such as direction of travel, sidewalk vs. street usage, electric vs. non-electric bicycles, and helmet usage. In spring 2024, OCTA created a web-based platform for local agencies to request counts at specific locations, a process which will be used again for the 2025 counts. The final 2024 bicycle count data has been incorporated into the database and is available to cities by request.

OC Connect

OCTA, in partnership with the cities of Santa Ana and Garden Grove, as well as the California Department of Transportation and Orange County Public Works, is planning a four-mile Class I shared-use path between Santa Ana Boulevard and downtown Garden Grove. As part of this effort, OCTA is undergoing the Project Approval/Environmental Document Phase that is expected to be complete by June 2025.

OCTA Coordination

E-bike Multimedia

In 2024, OCTA created three videos that use concise messaging and humor to help parents and children understand the importance of e-bike safety. The videos were promoted on four social media platforms: Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and Twitch. Using these social media methods, the video reached 1.3 million people (the video appeared on their feed or the media they were viewing) and the video was played over 170,000 times. OCTA used a new distribution approach by purchasing advertisement time at movie theaters across the County, including the Anaheim Garden Walk 6, Century Huntington Beach and XD, Brea 22 East, Aliso Viejo 20 with IMAX, and Yorba Linda IMAX10. The videos were played over 33,000 times during movie previews and advertisement time in the theater lobby area. The videos are currently available on YouTube, Amazon, and OCTA's e-bike website <https://www.octa.net/getting-around/active/oc-bike/e-bikes/>. OCTA recently procured a new two-year contract to develop additional e-bike safety videos over the next two years.

OCTA maintains an e-bike webpage to enhance public understanding of e-bike safety guidelines, benefits, and regulations. The webpage provides e-bike safety basics, rules of the road, and other safety information. OCTA also promotes local safety initiatives, such as the California Highway Patrol's e-bike training module and the OC bikeways map. Staff is also finalizing a searchable database that provides plain-language versions of all local e-bike ordinances to make it easier to understand the responsibilities of being an e-cyclist in all jurisdictions within OC.

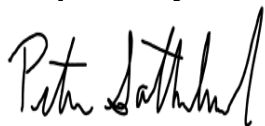
Summary

OCTA supports efforts to improve active transportation throughout OC. This includes ongoing education, encouragement, engineering, and evaluation efforts for active transportation. Coordination and collaboration will continue between state, regional and local agencies, key stakeholders, and the public to encourage and support safer walking and bicycling in OC.

Attachment

- A. Bicycle and Electric Bicycle (e-bike) Ordinance(s) by Agency

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