

Orange County Transportation Authority 2025-26 State Legislative Platform

With over three million residents, Orange County is the third most populous county in California and the sixth most populous county in the nation. Orange County is one of the most densely populated areas in the country and is served by one of the nation's busiest transit systems. The Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA) serves as the primary agency responsible for transportation planning in Orange County. OCTA manages a multimodal transportation system, overseeing a range of services including buses, Metrolink commuter rail, paratransit, and freeway improvements, as well as bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, ensuring diverse mobility options for residents and visitors.

The 2025-26 State Legislative Platform serves as a framework document to guide OCTA's legislative, regulatory, and administrative activities in the coming legislative session. The Key Policy Issues section offers guidance on the policy issues that will likely be the focus of the upcoming legislative session. The later sections present guiding policy statements for other major issue areas that may arise during the session. Positions on individual items not directly in this document will be brought to the OCTA Board of Directors for formal action.

Key Policy Issues in 2025-26

A number of significant transportation issues are expected to be discussed in the 2025-26 legislative session. OCTA will focus its advocacy efforts on the following principles.

- a) Support transportation funding investments and policy flexibilities that allow OCTA to provide essential, multimodal mobility improvements and services in order to meet the mobility needs of Orange County;
- b) Seek support for adaptation and resiliency efforts related to the environment for critical transportation infrastructure;
- c) Encourage State leadership, in conjunction with local collaboration, in developing long-term studies related to potential track relocation in the Los Angeles – San Diego – San Luis Obispo (LOSSAN) Rail Corridor;
- d) Support efforts to maximize OCTA's share of transportation and transit funding, especially through distribution formulas and more equitable competitive funding processes;
- e) Support workforce development and training policies that allow OCTA to hire and retain personnel ready to implement the next generation of mobility, including training the workforce for zero-emission vehicles, without creating unfunded mandates;
- f) Oppose policies that would circumvent existing transit operator funding eligibility requirements;

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- g) Support efforts to ensure local control is maintained in policy decisions made by local transportation agency boards in delivering, funding, and operating transportation programs and projects;
- h) Inform the State's Transit Transformation Task Force, created pursuant to SB 125 (Chapter 54, Statutes of 2023), in order to seek improvements to the Transportation Development Act and make recommendations related to transit funding, cost drivers, strategies for workforce retention, and ridership;
- i) Seek to ensure OCTA's projects and programs related to the 2028 Olympic and Paralympic Games are eligible for any related funding assistance, incentives, project delivery tools, and/or regulatory relief;
- j) Support efforts to mitigate costs associated with the development, testing, purchase, and operation of zero-emission transit buses, including an alternative electricity rate structure, tax incentives, and other forms of financial assistance;
- k) Monitor progress of the Sustainable Communities Task Force and potential reforms to implementation of SB 375 (Chapter 728, Statutes of 2008);
- l) Monitor potential legislative proposals to modify Transportation Development Act performance metrics and assess options for replacement frameworks to ensure effective and appropriate performance evaluation and funding eligibility;**
- m) Oppose efforts that would reduce local flexibility, or impose top-down transit service or fare coordination models without full consultation and agreement of affected local agencies;**
- n) Support legislation to amend the implementation of SB 79 (Chapter 512, Statutes of 2025) by updating definitions and making other changes as needed to ensure continued community support for transit projects;**
- o) Support efforts to extend the Federal Transportation Improvement Program approval period to prevent project delivery delays resulting from federal air quality conformity requirements.**

SPONSORED LEGISLATION

Each year, OCTA may concern sponsoring legislation to clarify or address various transportation policy topics that require additional attention. This year, the following policy will require sponsoring legislation:

Sponsor legislation to revise OCTA governing statute to allow operation of a charter bus service to support the 2026 Fédération Internationale de Football Association World Cup and the 2028 Olympics and Paralympic Games.

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I. CAP-AND-INVEST

Previously known as Cap-and-Trade, Cap-and-Invest has been reauthorized through 2045. The Cap-and-Invest agreement includes a tiered structure to facilitate revenue distribution depending on auction proceeds. The California High-Speed Rail Project would receive \$1 billion off the top and then another funding set aside of \$1 billion has been provided for “Legislature Discretionary.” Following those funding commitments, funding is then allocated to traditional ongoing appropriations, which includes important transit programs, such as the Transit Intercity Rail Capital Program (TIRCP) and the Low Carbon Transit Operations Program (LCTOP). Because these programs are to be allocated set amounts each year rather than a percentage of the proceeds, these programs will no longer grow if revenues are higher than anticipated and will be the first to be reduced if revenues do not meet expectations. Over the next year, it is anticipated that there will be further negotiations to refine the revenue distribution structure. To that end, OCTA will advocate for the following:

- a) Protect transit funding provided under Cap-and-Invest to ensure TIRCP and LCTOP are maintained and funded at levels consistent with prior budget allocations to ensure continued certainty for programs and projects;
- b) Ensure that funding for transit, originally provided through SB 125 and later backfilled through the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund in future budget cycles, is fully preserved and allocated in accordance with previous budget appropriations;
- c) Monitor Cap-and-Invest funding for the California High-Speed Rail Project and promote prioritization of bookend projects within allocation decisions;
- d) Encourage regional parity in distribution of any discretionary funding in Cap-and-Invest.

II. IMPLEMENTATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL POLICIES

In order to ensure that the State’s environmental regulations are implemented in an equitable manner, which will both help to reduce emissions and encourage the development of necessary infrastructure to serve California’s growing population, OCTA will:

- a) Support efforts to ensure local flexibility in meeting the State’s greenhouse gas emission reduction goals, including project mitigation requirements;
- b) Support streamlined environmental review and permitting processes for transportation projects and programs to avoid potentially duplicative and unnecessary analysis, while still maintaining traditional environmental protections;

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- c) Work with air agencies and other stakeholders to ensure that air quality determinations and policies do not constrain funding availability or otherwise undermine OCTA's ability to deliver transportation improvements;
- d) Monitor the State's transition to zero-emission vehicle technology to ensure that any corresponding policies adequately address the impact to long-term transportation funding stability;
- e) Oppose lengthening the California Environmental Quality Act process in a manner that would delay mobility improvements;
- f) Oppose efforts to restrict road and highway construction by superseding existing broad-based environmental review and mitigation processes;
- g) Oppose policies that would limit lead agency discretion in the management and oversight of lands set aside for environmental mitigation purposes while promoting advance mitigation planning programs;
- h) Monitor efforts to create a statewide model related to vehicle miles traveled in order to ensure that local modeling is taken into account;
- i) Support efforts related to separate and distinct sand nourishment permits.

III. TRANSPORTATION FUNDING

OCTA will monitor the status of transportation funding in California, promoting the continued stability of existing programs and efforts to address future funding deficiencies to meet transportation infrastructure needs. Given that the State is anticipated to experience a continued deficit, OCTA will work to protect funding dedicated for transportation purposes, including appropriations made in the fiscal year 2025-26 Budget Act for transit operations and capital projects. Key actions include:

- a) Oppose unfunded mandates for transportation agencies, transit providers, and local governments in providing transportation improvements and services;
- b) Oppose cost shifts or changes in responsibility for projects funded by the State to local transportation entities;
- c) Support efforts to treat the property tax of single-county transit districts the same as multi-county districts and correct other Educational Revenue Augmentation Fund inequities between like agencies;
- d) Support the constitutional protection of all transportation funding resources;
- e) Support protecting or expanding local decision-making in programming transportation funds;

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- f) Oppose efforts to reduce local prerogative over regional program funds;
- g) Support efforts to involve county transportation commissions in the development and prioritization of State Highway Operation and Protection Program projects;
- h) Oppose redirecting or reclassifying transportation revenue sources, including earned interest, for anything other than their intended purposes;
- i) Support the implementation of federal transportation programs in an equitable manner that promotes traditional funding levels, programming roles, and local discretion in allocation decisions;
- j) Oppose policies that significantly increase costs, threatening OCTA's ability to deliver projects and provide transit service;
- k) Support removing the barriers for funding transportation projects, including allowing local agencies to advance projects with local funds when state funds are unavailable due to budgetary reasons, and allowing regions to pool federal, state, and local funds in order to limit lengthy amendment processes and streamline project delivery time;
- l) Support flexibility in the application of "disadvantaged" and "low-income" communities to ensure that transportation funding flows to each region's most impacted areas, allowing OCTA to best meet the needs of its local communities;
- m) Support dedicated funding for transit operations, preferably through an ongoing formulaic approach;
- n) Support efforts to reform SB 375 (Chapter 728, Statutes of 2008) to improve the technical processes underpinning target setting and plan development, while also ensuring the reforms do not impact existing transportation funding distribution or eligibilities, or restrict the ability for transportation agencies to implement their projects or programs;
- o) Protect existing transit operations and capital funding while monitoring the implementation of the accountability provisions associated with the funding and inform clarifying legislation as needed;
- p) Oppose linking, reprioritizing, or aligning local and state transportation funding with policies that could significantly hinder a local agency's ability to deliver transportation programs and projects;
- q) Support efforts to maintain the promises self-help counties have made to taxpayers in the implementation of local sales tax measures and oppose mandating specific uses of future sales tax revenues;

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- r) Oppose policies that change existing formula funding structures to redistribute funds in a way that would inhibit a local agency from delivering critical transportation projects and programs.

IV. FISCAL REFORMS & ISSUES

In recent years, the Legislature and Governor have worked collaboratively during the budget process to pass funding bills in a timely manner. Given that the State continues to report lower revenues than projected, uncertainties over future funding levels remain. Therefore, OCTA will:

- a) Monitor the study and development of alternative transportation funding proposals, including the State's road charge pilot program and ensure that efforts are made to address concerns related to equity, privacy, and public support of such proposals;
- b) Oppose levying new and/or increase in gasoline taxes or user fees, including revenue increases on fuel consumption categorized as charges, fees, revenue enhancements, or similar classifications. Consideration of such efforts shall occur when a direct nexus is determined to exist between revenues and transportation projects, and additional revenues are to be controlled by the county transportation commission;
- c) Oppose efforts to decrease the voter threshold requirement for local tax measures for transportation purposes;
- d) Oppose increases to administrative fees charged by the California Department of Tax and Fee Administration on the collection of local sales tax measures;
- e) Support policies that ensure all users of the State's transportation system pay their "fair share" to maintain and improve the system;
- f) Support efforts to restore equitable generation and disbursement of sales tax revenues that support the Local Transportation Fund;
- g) Support the retention of existing and future local revenue sources;
- h) Support reinstating the state sales tax exemption for the purchase of zero-emission buses.

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V. STATE TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM

The State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP), substantially amended by SB 45 (Chapter 622, Statutes of 1997), is a programming document that establishes the funding priorities and project commitments for transportation capital improvements in California. SB 45 placed decision-making authority with the regions by providing project selection for 75 percent of the funding in the Regional Transportation Improvement Program (RTIP). This funding is distributed to counties based on an allocation formula. The remaining 25 percent of the funds are programmed by the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) in the Interregional Transportation Improvement Program (ITIP). OCTA will seek to ensure that the regional focus of the program is preserved. Key provisions to be sought by OCTA include:

- a) Support maintaining the current STIP formula, which provides 75 percent of STIP funding to the locally-nominated RTIP and 25 percent to the ITIP;
- b) Support equitable allocations of transportation funding, such as the north/south formula distribution of county shares and ITIP allocations;
- c) Support efforts to allow a mode-neutral STIP;
- d) Support increased flexibility for the use of STIP funds to support alternative projects, including, but not limited to, transit and goods movement improvement projects.

VI. TRANSIT PROGRAMS

OCTA will continue with its focus on providing safe, reliable, and efficient transit services in Orange County. Although transit has received significant funding infusions over the past decade, uncertainty remains regarding the long-term sustainability of funding availability and eligibility. OCTA will make every effort to minimize additional state obligations to transit operations which lack a sufficient and secure revenue source. To that end, OCTA will focus on the following:

- a) Advocate for a continued strong state role in providing funding for transit operations rather than shifting responsibility to local transportation entities. No additional requirements should be created for operation levels beyond existing capacity, unless agreed to by that entity or otherwise appropriately funded;
- b) Seek additional funding for paratransit operations and transit accessibility capital improvements that support persons with disabilities and senior citizens;
- c) Support efforts to encourage and incentivize the interoperability of transit and rail systems within California;

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- d) Support limiting the liability of transit districts for the location of bus stops (*Bonanno v. Central Contra Costa Transit Authority*);
- e) Support incentives for transit-oriented development projects (i.e., authorize extra credit toward housing element requirements for these developments), including incentives for development;
- f) Support funding and incentives to develop free- or reduced-fare transit programs without impacting existing programs or creating unfunded mandates;
- g) Encourage policies and guidance that incentivize public transit ridership.

VII. RAIL PROGRAMS

Metrolink is Southern California's commuter rail system that links residential communities to employment and activity centers. Orange County is served by three Metrolink lines: the Orange County Line, the Inland Empire-Orange County Line, and the 91/Perris Valley Line. In support of these routes, OCTA owns 48 miles of rail right-of-way in Orange County on which Metrolink operates. OCTA serves as the primary construction lead for major capital improvements on this right-of-way, supported by OCTA's rail capital budget.

In addition, the state-supported Pacific Surfliner intercity passenger rail service, operated by Amtrak and managed by the LOSSAN Agency, provides passenger rail service between San Luis Obispo and San Diego. OCTA has served as the managing agency for the LOSSAN Agency since 2013, providing administrative and management support.

OCTA is also advancing the OC Streetcar Project, the county's first modern streetcar line. Running between the cities of Santa Ana and Garden Grove, it will serve as a vital new connection to regional rail and bus services and is scheduled to begin revenue service in 2026.

While the status and future of these programs is uncertain, OCTA will be watchful to ensure that funding for these rail systems does not impact other transportation funding sources. Key advocacy efforts will emphasize the following:

- a) Support policies that encourage commercial, commuter-based development around passenger rail corridors that includes permanent job creation;
- b) Monitor and evaluate plans and progress of high-speed rail;
- c) Support efforts to provide resources for safety improvements on the rail network in Southern California, including for the implementation, operation, and maintenance of Positive Train Control safety technology;

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- d) Support studying the policies, funding options, and need for rail/highway grade separations, including any impact on existing state highway and transit funding sources;
- e) Support policies that facilitate the development and construction of needed infrastructure projects that support modernization, connectivity, and general system-wide improvements to California's rail network;
- f) Monitor and inform efforts seeking to make reforms to rail planning, governance structure, or operations;
- g) Seek funding and other administrative solutions, such as permit streamlining, to support adaptation and resiliency efforts throughout the rail corridor;
- h) Seek support, funding, and streamlining to manage and address sea level rise, beach erosion, landslides, and other environmental impacts along the rail corridor.

VIII. ROADS & HIGHWAYS

OCTA's commitment to continuously improve mobility in Orange County is reflected through a dynamic involvement in such innovative highway endeavors as the ownership of the 91 Express Lanes and the use of design-build authority on the State Route 22 project and Interstate 405 Improvement Project. OCTA will continue to seek new and innovative ways to deliver road and highway projects to the residents of Orange County and, to that end, OCTA will focus on the following:

- a) Support new and existing alternative project delivery methods, such as design-build, public-private partnership authority, construction manager/general contractor authority, and progressive design build, through expanding mode and funding eligibility while also allowing the appropriate balance of partnership between the State and local agencies;
- b) Support authorizing local agencies to advertise, award, and administer contracts for state highway projects;
- c) Oppose duplicative reporting mandates and efforts to impose additional requirements, beyond what is required in statute, on lead agencies awarding contracts using alternative project delivery mechanisms;
- d) Support streamlining of the Caltrans review process for projects without compromising environmental safeguards;
- e) Support policies that improve signal synchronization programs in order to facilitate street signal coordination, prioritization, and preemption, as well as encouraging the use of intelligent transportation system measures;

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- f) Support management and integration of express lanes to promote consistent and seamless user experience;
- g) Support studying the development and safe operation of autonomous vehicles and related technologies;
- h) Support preserving local discretion and flexibility in the development of the congestion management program.

IX. TOLLED & MANAGED LANES

OCTA's commitment to continuously improve mobility in Orange County is reflected through a dynamic involvement in such innovative highway endeavors, including both the ownership of the 91 Express Lanes, a ten-mile toll facility on State Route 91, extending from State Route 55 to the Orange/Riverside County Line, and the 405 Express Lanes, which operates two lanes in each direction from State Route 73 to the Interstate 605.

Because many agencies are discussing the increased use of managed lane facilities, there remains a need to advocate for local flexibility and input. To ensure the continued success of the 91 Express Lanes, the 405 Express lanes, and for toll policy moving forward, OCTA will:

- a) Oppose efforts to divert revenues from toll facilities for purposes not directed by the responsible governing board;
- b) Support policies that allow OCTA, and its partners, to efficiently operate and maintain the 91 Express Lanes and the 405 Express Lanes;
- c) Support efforts to preserve local flexibility in the administration of toll lanes and encourage the State to work with OCTA on operating policies to ensure seamless system operation;
- d) Oppose the construction or operation of toll facilities that are inconsistent with local long range transportation plans;
- e) Oppose the construction or operation of toll facilities that fail to respect existing local transportation projects and funding programs;
- f) Support customer privacy rights while maintaining OCTA's ability to effectively communicate with customers and operate the 91 and 405 Express Lanes;
- g) Support the use of innovative means to enhance toll agency enforcement efforts;
- h) Support collaborative solutions to high-occupancy vehicle lane degradation that protect local funding, have regional transportation agency support, and avoid transportation funding diversion;

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- i) Support efforts to improve the interoperability of the different toll systems across the State in order to ensure fair and efficient toll operations while affirming user privacy protections;
- j) Inform discussions related to revising toll evasion penalties, toll exemptions, and other changes to enforcement strategies and mechanisms in order to maintain local control, opposing efforts that will hinder the ability to meet congestion management and financing requirements;
- k) Support policies that protect the process prescribed in AB 194 (Chapter 687, Statutes of 2015), which authorizes regional transportation agencies to develop and operate toll facilities, and ensure it is maintained in its application on future toll facilities.

X. GOODS MOVEMENT

The twin Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach are considered two of the nation's busiest ports, vital to California's economy and the surrounding region because goods are shipped to and through the surrounding counties. While the State's goods movement system is the most robust in the nation, it is continually challenged by competing goods movement systems in other states. In order to continue to compete and engage in the global marketplace, California must continue to enhance its goods movement system, while at the same time be cognizant of taking the necessary actions to mitigate any negative impacts to local communities. Key positions include:

- a) Support improvements to facilitate the movement of intrastate, interstate, and international trade beneficial to the State and Orange County's economy;
- b) Support policies that will aid in the development, approval, and construction of projects to expand goods movement capacity and reduce congestion;
- c) Ensure that control of goods movement infrastructure projects and funding is retained at the local level;
- d) Seek mitigation for the impacts of goods movement on local communities;
- e) Pursue ongoing, stable sources of funding for goods movement infrastructure;
- f) Support additional funding and policy reforms to aid in expediting transportation projects to address supply chain concerns;
- g) Ensure any effort to establish a container fee program dedicates funding to projects that mitigate the impact port activity may have on local communities, informed by input from local and regional agencies.

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XI. ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION

Active transportation projects and programs, which encourage greater mobility through walking and bicycling, have grown in popularity due to the environmental, health, and cost savings benefits. OCTA continues to study, plan, and fund active transportation projects and programs as part of its mission to provide Orange County with an efficient and multi-modal transportation system. Key positions include:

- a) Support policies to increase the visibility and safety of users engaged in active transportation;
- b) Support creative use of paths, roads, flood channels, and abandoned rail lines using existing established rights-of-way to promote bicycles trails and pedestrian paths, in coordination with any local agency with jurisdiction over those properties;
- c) Support funding and programs or policies that encourage the safe operation of an integrated multimodal system, which includes the interaction between roadways, rail lines, bikeways, and pedestrian ways, and the users of those facilities;
- d) Support streamlined active transportation funding programs;
- e) Seek funding and support policies and projects to increase safety requirements related to the utilization of electric bicycles.

XII. ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

In recent years, there have been many efforts to reorganize or restructure transportation programs and local agency responsibilities. OCTA will continue to monitor policies that would significantly affect the way in which it operates, with a focus on maintaining local control and continued partnerships in order to advocate for the following principles:

- a) Support preserving the role of county transportation commissions, as consistent with existing law, in the administration of transportation programs;
- b) Oppose proposals that reduce the rights and responsibilities of county transportation commissions in planning, funding, and delivering transportation programs;
- c) Oppose policies that unnecessarily subject projects to additional reviews and project selection approvals that could adversely affect delivery timelines and processes;
- d) Support partnerships with alternative mobility providers that allow for adequate information sharing while also respecting the planning efforts of local agencies;
- e) Support efforts to increase the flexibility of funds used for motorist service programs.

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XIII. EMPLOYMENT ISSUES

As a public agency and one of the largest employers in Orange County, OCTA balances its responsibility to the community and the taxpayers to provide safe, reliable, cost-effective service with its responsibility of being a reasonable, responsive employer. Key advocacy positions include:

- a) Oppose efforts to impose state labor laws on currently exempt public agencies;
- b) Oppose policies that circumvent the collective bargaining process;
- c) Oppose policies adversely affecting OCTA's ability to efficiently and effectively deal with labor relations, employee rights, benefits, including pension benefits, the California Family Rights Act, and working conditions, including health, safety, and ergonomic standards for the workplace;
- d) Support efforts to reform and resolve inconsistencies in the workers' compensation and unemployment insurance systems, and labor law requirements that maintain protection for employees and allow businesses to operate efficiently;
- e) Support workforce development policies that facilitate a more efficient talent acquisition process;
- f) Support policies that encourage ridesharing, teleworking, vanpool, and related congestion relief programs for Orange County commuters.

XIV. TRANSPORTATION SECURITY & EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

As natural and man-made disasters continue to threaten transportation systems around the world, significant improvements have been, and continue to be, carried out to enhance the safety, security, and resilience of transportation infrastructure in the United States. As Orange County's bus provider and a Metrolink partner, OCTA understands the importance of ensuring the safety and security of our transportation network and protecting our customers. OCTA maintains a partnership with the Orange County Sheriff's Department to provide OCTA Transit Police Services for the bus and train systems in Orange County and continues to be actively involved in a variety of state and regional preparedness exercises in support of first responders. The development of a new Transit Security and Operations Center is also underway to enhance security efforts and further the resiliency of the Orange County transit system.

Additional safety and security measures require additional financial resources. Consequently, OCTA's advocacy positions will highlight:

- a) Support state homeland security and emergency preparedness funding and grant programs to local transportation agencies to alleviate financial burden placed on local entities;

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- b) Support policies that balance retention mandates of video surveillance records to reflect current reasonable technological and fiscal capabilities;
- c) Support technological advances in order to increase the safety of public transportation passengers and operators;
- d) Support policies that aim to enhance transit services and the overall safety and security of transit riders, public transit employees, and on-road vehicles while avoiding undue burden on transportation agencies to implement unfunded safety measures.

XV. ADMINISTRATION/GENERAL

General administrative issues arise every session that could impact OCTA's ability to operate efficiently. Key positions include:

- a) Oppose policies adversely affecting OCTA's ability to efficiently and effectively contract for goods and services, conduct business of the agency, and limit or transfer the risk of liability;
- b) Support efforts to provide greater protection of OCTA's computer and information security systems;
- c) Support establishing reasonable liability for non-economic damages in any action for personal injury, property damage, or wrongful death brought against a public entity based on principles of comparative fault;
- d) Support consistent campaign contribution limits as applied to both elected and appointed bodies;
- e) Monitor proposed changes related to the Ralph M. Brown Act, and other statutes governing public meetings, including the expanded use of technology;
- f) Support equitable policies to ensure that the inclusive public engagement, planning, and delivery of mobility improvements best serve all residents of Orange County;
- g) Oppose policies that create undue burden on transportation procurement practices or restrict ability to maintain local governing board award authority;
- h) Oppose efforts that create duplicative reporting requirements.