




July 1, 2024

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

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 and programs 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 and walking networks. OCTA's recent efforts focus on preparing the OC Connect trail project for delivery by the cities of Santa Ana and Garden Grove and the Electric Bicycle (e-bike) Safety Plan. Updates on these projects and a summary of additional active transportation efforts are discussed below.

Discussion

OC Connect: Garden Grove-Santa Ana

In July 2023, OCTA initiated the evaluation of a proposed bicycling and walking trail along 3.1 miles of the Pacific Electric Right-of-Way corridor between Raitt Street in the City of Santa Ana and Euclid Street in the City of Garden Grove and 0.85 miles of the Wintersburg Channel, known as OC Connect (Attachment A). The environmental analysis of OC Connect is funded by a \$3 million Active Transportation Program (ATP) grant for a Class I bicycle path. This project phase is also known as Project Approval and Environmental

Document (PA/ED). The PA/ED phase will define the preferred alignment of the trail by completing the preliminary design, determining the trail's feasibility, estimating project costs, and determining what, if any, avoidance or mitigation measures must be taken to complete the project. The outreach efforts for OC Connect include extensive communication with local stakeholders and the surrounding community. Upon completion of the environmental analysis, the project will be ready for the plans, specifications, and estimates (PS&E) phase of the project.

The OC Connect project team conducted Phase I of public outreach between the end of October 2023 and the middle of December 2023. The goal of this phase was to assess the public's walking and bicycling habits, gauge their interest in a variety of trail amenities, and prioritize design criteria being used by the project team to vet various trail alignments and alternatives. The project team used various methods to interface with the public, including a survey, an interactive story map, two public meetings (one virtual and one in-person), five pop-up tables at community events, social media engagement, development and distribution of a communications resource's toolkit to 51 local organizations, digital noticing, and a two-part interview with Vietnam America Television. Outreach activities and materials were made available in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese and focused on the areas immediately surrounding the project in the cities of Garden Grove and Santa Ana. A Phase I outreach summary is included in Attachment B. Phase II of public outreach is underway, beginning with a neighborhood meeting on June 29 at Rosita Park in the City of Santa Ana, continuing with a neighborhood meeting with Nina Place residents in the City of Garden Grove on July 13, and concluding in the fall with more general public feedback before the project is concluded.

Concurrent with the public outreach, the project team held one-on-one meetings with both internal and external project stakeholders to introduce the project, discuss alignment and amenity options, and identify and troubleshoot any potential issues. Stakeholders included the City of Garden Grove, the City of Santa Ana, Orange County Flood Control, California Department of Transportation District 12, OCTA Streetcar, OCTA Garden Grove Bus Base, the California Public Utilities Commission, as well as community stakeholder groups such as the Artesia Pilar Neighborhood Council and schools and businesses in the area. The project team maintains an ongoing dialogue with all stakeholders as the environmental document and design plans are further developed and refined.

The project team has completed the draft 35 percent design plans, which are currently being reviewed by project stakeholders. The design plans include plan and typical section elements for the entirety of the trail with enough detail to complete the requisite engineering and technical studies as well as the

environmental documents. Implementation of the project resulting from the PA/ED phase will be at the discretion of the local agencies.

Finally, a key element identified in the project is the original Red Car Pegram truss bridge spanning the Santa Ana River. The project team completed a structural evaluation report and advanced planning study for the structure and determined that the bridge will be reusable with minimal impact on the existing structure. Retrofits will be necessary, including replacement of the existing bearings consistent with the state's Seismic Retrofit Guidelines, raising of the bridge by approximately 4.5 feet to provide a minimum 12.5-foot clearance for maintenance and emergency vehicles under the bridge, replacement of bridge decking for active transportation use, and installation of safety railing along the length of the bridge.

Funding for the subsequent PS&E phase of the project has been secured through \$3,900,000 of state funds through the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program, a \$1,000,000 Environmental Protection Agency grant for site assessment and cleanup, a \$750,000 earmark from Congressman Lou Correa for the design of the upgraded bridge, and a \$350,000 Department of Toxic Substances Control grant for the Phase II Environmental Site Assessment. The final cost estimate for design activities is pending; however, staff believes OC Connect has the funding necessary to complete the design phase.

E-bike Safety Action Plan

OCTA initiated the E-bike Safety Action Plan in July 2023 to identify gaps in existing e-bike safety resources at the local, regional, and state levels. Based on the findings from the plan, the project team will develop recommendations and identify potential funding sources to inform future planning, outreach, and other safety efforts.

The project team conducted both a data source inventory and a non-infrastructure inventory of e-bike-related resources and initiatives both within and affecting e-bike use in Orange County. Both of these efforts included literature and data availability reviews, coordination and interviews with local, regional, and statewide e-bike stakeholders, as well as e-bike retailers.

The data source inventory reviewed available e-bike data and highlights several areas that lack consistent and uniform tracking of key e-bike safety metrics. The inventory clarifies areas where data are available, consistent, and support decision making for safe e-bike operation. Key takeaways include:

- Collision and injury data specific to e-bikes is limited. There is not currently a standard and dedicated e-bike coding for collisions, leaving it

up to local agencies to add coding to their reporting systems without consistency between agencies.

- While agencies report higher ridership, actual count data is limited due to difficulties in distinguishing e-bikes from pedal bicycles and lack of resources for consistent bicycle counts.
- National e-bikes sales trends show year-over-year increases in units sold, but sales data on a local or regional level are not readily accessible from individual and consolidated sources.
- Local agencies are responding to the growing usage of e-bikes with a desire to manage safe operation by implementing ordinances; most agencies have ATP, but ATPs often have yet to incorporate direct attention toward e-bikes from a planning, engineering, and/or programmatic level.

The non-infrastructure inventory was based on the analysis of a survey distributed to stakeholders around the County and answered by 51 Orange County jurisdictions, law enforcement agencies, regional agencies, retailers, and other local stakeholders involved in e-bike safety efforts. The inventory also incorporated interviews conducted with e-bike stakeholders to gain additional insight into the challenges and opportunities presented by e-bikes.

Key themes identified across non-infrastructure efforts included:

- A focus on providing education and encouragement to school-aged youth in partnership with law enforcement.
- Providing hands-on opportunities to build safety skills at bike rodeos.
- Increasing enforcement through warnings and/or tickets, and sharing informational resources online and in-person.
- Potential for collaboration with e-bike retailers on e-bike safety.
- Importance of parent engagement and participation in youth rider e-bike safety.

An e-bike safety rodeo was held at Niguel Hills Middle School on May 18. For those who weren't able to attend the in-person event, two virtual e-bike safety workshops were held over Zoom on June 4 and on June 13. The project team will continue its community outreach efforts with another e-bike safety rodeo in late summer. The purpose of these rodeos is to solicit feedback on e-bike safety and deliver e-bike safety education to the public. Event promotion will again be posted on OCTA's social media, On the Move blog, and an eblast to the OCTA database. In addition, communication toolkits will be sent to local jurisdictions.

Regional Early Action Planning (REAP) 2.0 Projects

OCTA applied for and received \$2.15 million in California Department of Housing and Community Development funds through the Southern California Association

of Governments' REAP 2.0 grant program (Attachment C). The REAP 2.0 funds are subject to the Governor's Budget and Legislative approval. In the event the REAP 2.0 funds are not included in the approved Governor's Budget, OCTA will prioritize and locally fund projects as appropriate.

Ongoing Active Transportation Efforts

OCTA staff undertake a variety of projects and initiatives in support of active transportation throughout the County. A summary table of other major initiatives, in addition to what is included in the staff report, can be found in Attachment D.

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.

Attachments

- A. OC Connect Fact Sheet
- B. Survey Results and Outreach OC Connect
- C. OCTA 2024 Active Transportation REAP 2.0 Award Summary
- D. Active Transportation Initiatives

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