



**December 3, 2025**

**To:** Finance and Administration Committee

**From:** Darrell E. Johnson, Chief Executive Officer

**Subject:** 91 Express Lanes Update for the Period Ending –  
September 30, 2025

### **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 September 2025, trips increased by 4.5 percent, reaching 1.86 million, on the 91 Express Lanes in Orange County. This report focuses on the operational and financial activities for the period ending September 30, 2025.

### **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-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 utilizes congestion management pricing, adjusting tolls 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 September 2025 was 1,860,050. This represents a daily average of 62,002 vehicles. This is a 4.5 percent increase in total traffic volume from the same period last year when traffic levels totaled 1,779,350. For the 12 months ending September 2025,

## **91 Express Lanes Update for the Period Ending – Page 3 September 30, 2025**

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traffic volumes totaled 22.2 million, representing a 3.8 percent increase from the same period in the prior year. The carpool percentage for the period ending September 2025 was 23.1 percent.

### **Gross Potential Toll Revenues (GPTR)**

GPTR for the month of September 2025 was \$6,298,589, which represents an increase of 10.8 percent from the prior year's total of \$5,686,953 for the month of September 2024. 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 over \$71 million, representing a 5.8 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. The Toll Policy also requires an annual toll adjustment for inflation every July 1st for all hours that have not been adjusted in the previous 12 months. The inflation adjustment is three percent, rounded up or down to the nearest five-cent increment, and took effect on July 1, 2025. As of September 2025, toll rates ranged from a minimum of \$1.90 to a maximum of \$9.10.

### **Number of Accounts and Transponders**

The number of active accounts totaled 186,091, and 745,885 transponders were assigned to those accounts as of September 30, 2025. Over the past 12 months, the number of accounts increased by 5,662, while the number of transponders in circulation increased by 19,410. 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 September 30, 2025, 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. A \$7.16 million debt payment was made

on August 15, 2025, and the next scheduled debt service payment is on February 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 \$11.9 million as of September 30, 2025.

In addition to the required debt reserve funds, the OCTA Board elected to establish two additional reserve funds. An internal capital projects fund has a balance of \$31.5 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 interchanges, on- and off-ramps, and bridges along SR-91 between east of SR-55 (Acacia Street) and west of State Route 57 (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 is currently in the bid phase and is anticipated to start construction in late 2025, and the middle segment is in the final design phase. All three segments of Project I are anticipated to be completed by mid-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 \$253.5 million and is used for project expenses as they are incurred. Lastly, OCTA has approximately \$43.3 million set aside in excess toll revenues 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 2024 through June 2025 (fiscal year 2024-25). These KPI damages are a result of OCTA and RCTC identified performance issues with the BOS and CSC, totaling \$666,061 for both agencies.

Of the \$666,061, the total penalties amounted to \$330,879 for OCTA. Of this amount, \$168,652 was attributed to BOS performance, of which \$38,772 was waived and \$129,880 was assessed. The remaining \$162,227 of KPI damages was attributed to the CSC performance failures, of which the full amount was assessed in the corresponding monthly invoices. Staff is working on finalizing the KPI damages for July 2025 through September 2025, which will be reported in the following quarterly report.

Attachment A summarizes some of the KPIs of the CSC over the past 12 months. The KPIs for service level for the speed of answer (KPI 5) and abandon rate (KPI 6) were not achieved due to an increase in calls because of the timing of customer notifications, along with a high absentee rate on Mondays. To address the customer notifications, CUSA is currently reviewing the communication schedule to determine a more optimal timing for message delivery. Additionally, to mitigate the impact of high absenteeism on Mondays, CUSA offers an incentive program designed to promote consistent attendance. These corrective measures have shown improvement in meeting KPI 5 and KPI 6, as both were fully met in July 2025. In August and September 2025, KPI 5 was missed only four times, and KPI 6 was missed only one time.

Operational Acceptance Testing (OAT) was passed in June 2025. Since then, staff has been working closely with CUSA to address deferred and punch-list items. As of September, 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. Staff will report on the status of final acceptance in the following report.

OCTA and RCTC progressed in the upgrade project for their video wall and advanced traffic management system (ATMS) in the Traffic Operations Center (TOC). The ATMS was commissioned in July 2025 and began OAT. Staff from both Agencies have been working with the ATMS provider to address issues and make improvements to the system to improve usability for the TOC. Staff will continue to oversee the project and report on the outcome of acceptance in the following report.

OCTA staff has also been supporting RCTC with the implementation of 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. OCTA and RCTC updated the 91 EL user agreement to incorporate the new ODS changes and distributed the agreement to all account holders more than 30 days before implementation. 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.

#### Looking at the Quarter Ahead

Staff will continue to work on OAT with the ATMS and complete implementation and testing. The ATMS project is expected to begin the operations and maintenance phase in the coming months. During this period, OCTA will also continue to provide support to RCTC for monitoring the ODS. Additionally, staff will begin planning a recognition and celebration of the 30th anniversary of the 91 EL operations since its opening by CPTC. Updates on these items will be provided in the following report.

***Summary***

An operational report for the 91 Express Lanes for the period ending September 30, 2025, 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, September 2025
- B. 91 Express Lanes Status Report, September 2025

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