

**Staff Evaluation of Services Provided by
Potomac Partners, DC for 2025**

The following narrative provides specific information with respect to major issues addressed by Potomac Partners, DC (PPDC) as the Orange County Transportation Authority's (OCTA) primary federal legislative advocate for 2025. Each issue has been evaluated based on effort and outcome using a rating of excellent, very good, good, fair, or poor.

Appropriations and Grant Funding Opportunities

Effort: Excellent; Outcome: Very Good

This year, Congress was unable to reach agreement on a fiscal year (FY) 2025 appropriations bill, instead opting for a full-year continuing resolution. This effectively negated all pending community project funding (CPF) and congressionally directed spending (CDS) requests for that year. PPDC has been successful in having two projects submitted – the Interstate 5 Improvement Project by Representative Kim (R-CA) and the Katella Bridge by Representative Correa (D-CA). As Congress entered negotiations for the FY 2026 appropriations bill, both the House and Senate continued to entertain requests for CPF and CDS requests. As part of this process, PPDC ensured OCTA projects and programs were included that were pending as part of the FY 2025, to the extent funding need continued to exist. This included the resubmittal of the Interstate 5 Improvement Project by Representative Kim. PPDC also worked with Representative Kim to submit an additional project – the State Route 55 Improvement Project (Interstate 5 to State Route 91). In addition, Representative Min (D-CA) submitted a CPF on behalf of OCTA for the deployment of advanced transportation controllers, and Representative Levin (D-CA) submitted a request for the Interstate 5 Improvement Project between Avenida Pico and the San Diego County line. While an appropriations bill has yet to be passed, the fact that PPDC was able to get these projects included in the draft omnibus bill demonstrates a high potential for successful inclusion in the final FY 2025 appropriations bill.

Related to discretionary grants, PPDC again led efforts to secure support from delegation members for projects pursued by OCTA. This included obtaining support from Representative Levin in maintaining full funding of the Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements grant for the emergency work along the Los Angeles – San Diego – San Luis Obispo (LOSSAN) Rail Corridor. As a broader effort, PPDC also maintained continuous contact with key Department of Transportation staff to maintain funding commitments to OCTA.

OCTA Policy Engagement

Effort: Excellent; Outcome: Excellent

The focus of this year was largely on informing surface transportation reauthorization legislation, focusing on OCTA priorities adopted by the Board of Directors, including resetting the distribution of Surface Transportation Block Grant (STBG) and Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) funds, permit streamlining, and increased formula funding. To advance these efforts, PPDC secured support via testimony or written materials from several delegation members as part of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee (T&I Committee) input process. This effort translated to language being submitted early for consideration and helped inform a delegation letter from Orange County members to Senator Padilla (D-CA) and Senator Schiff (D-CA) supporting similar action within the Senate. PPDC was able to have repeated, direct conversations with the T&I Committee staff drafting the bill, remaining nimble throughout the process as questions came up. This direct line of communication was invaluable to allow staff a greater understanding of the issue, while also informing broader conversations about increased formula funding. OCTA had a direct seat at the table through these conversations due to PPDC's relationships. Similarly, within the Department of Transportation, PPDC had opportunities to inform reauthorization priorities, highlighting this issue, in addition to other permitting challenges such as on the LOSSAN Rail Corridor.

To further education on this issue, PPDC secured a visit from Representative David Rouzer (R-NC), Chair of the House T&I Committee's Subcommittee on Highways and Transit, and member of the House T&I Committee's Subcommittee on Railroads, Pipelines and Hazardous Materials, to Orange County. Representative Rouzer and his staff were not only able to directly see OCTA projects of significance, including the Interstate 405 Improvement Project and work on the LOSSAN Rail Corridor, but were also able to hear directly about the STBG/CMAQ proposal while discussing the potential for additional formula transportation funding.

Beyond surface transportation reauthorization and the STBG and CMAQ issue, PPDC also led efforts to secure support on a variety of policy issues. This includes letters from delegation members, such as Representative Tran (D-CA) to seek a role for OCTA on the LA 2028 Olympics Games Mobility Executive group.

General Services

Effort: Excellent; Outcome: Very Good

In 2024, PPDC was again successful in securing necessary meetings requested by OCTA to advance policy priorities. This included meetings with Orange County delegation, congressional leadership, and committee staff to discuss surface transportation reauthorization, funding priorities, and permit challenges. These meetings occurred over four trips OCTA staff made to Washington, D.C. this year. In addition, PPDC arranged for the visit from Representative Rouzer.

As the new Administration began and released several policy directives within a truncated period of time, PPDC communicated regularly so OCTA understood background on rapidly changing policy priorities. This communication was critical to navigating OCTA responses.

PPDC continued work to keep relevant offices and staff in Washington, D.C. apprised of OCTA projects and priorities, including the Interstate 405 Improvement Project, OC Streetcar, and work along the LOSSAN Rail Corridor. Coordinated messaging with Metrolink was also made via PPDC to advance policies related to funding and surface transportation reauthorization.

PPDC also worked on several other issues on behalf of OCTA, including promptly responding to questions from federal delegation members and advising on new policy proposals. This included participating in meetings requested by Orange County delegation staff and in tracking policy proposals by committee staff.

Overall Rating

Effort: Excellent; Outcome: Very Good

PPDC's efforts overall are rated as excellent based on responsiveness, time dedicated to advocating for, and advancing of, OCTA's positions and policies, timeliness of information, assisting in building cooperative relationships with Congress and members of the Administration, and availability. PPDC's outcomes overall are rated as very good based on the outcomes of the issues discussed.