

**Staff Evaluation of Services Provided by
Potomac Partners, DC for 2024**

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 2024. 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: Good

Both the House and Senate continued to entertain requests for earmarks this year, rebranded as “community project funding” (CPF) requests in the House and “congressionally directed spending” (CDS) requests in the Senate. Subject to added transparency requirements and limitations on overall amounts a member could request, PPDC ensured OCTA projects and programs were included. In the final fiscal year (FY) 2024 appropriations bill, OCTA received almost \$11 million in earmarks for projects including the Orange County (OC) Loop, the State Route 91 Project and the Coastal Rail Corridor Relocation Study. For FY 2025, PPDC worked equally diligently to submit several OCTA proposals, and successfully ensured these proposals were included in draft FY 2025 appropriations bills. This includes funding for the Interstate 5 Improvement Project and the Katella bridge. 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 projects for several programs authorized by the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, including the National Infrastructure Project Assistance Program and the National Significant Multimodal Freight and Highway Projects program. The bulk of the applications submitted this year were to address immediate risks along the Los Angeles – San Diego – San Luis Obispo (LOSSAN) Rail Corridor.

PPDC also worked to garner support for a joint application between OCTA and the Los Angeles Metropolitan County Transportation Authority for funding under the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Climate Pollution Reduction Grant. Ultimately, this request was not funded, with EPA instead selecting a \$500 million application submitted by the South Coast Air Quality Management District (SCAQMD). It is currently unclear if OCTA will be a beneficiary of those funds, with it expected that SCAQMD will distribute the funding regionally via a competitive process. OCTA will coordinate with regional partners to inform this process.

OCTA Policy Engagement

Effort: Very Good; Outcome: Very Good

One of the most significant risks to transportation funding this year was pending action by the EPA to disapprove air quality plans for the SCAQMD area. This disapproval had the potential to lead to significant sanctions, including the withholding of transportation funding for agencies in the region. PPDC was consistently at the table during these conversations, providing key information to those leading negotiations on this topic, including Senator Alex Padilla (D-CA) and Representative Pete Aguilar (D-San Bernardino). Ultimately, agreement was reached between EPA, SCAQMD and others which prevented sanctions. However, going forward, if the conditions of this agreement are unable to be fulfilled or if a new Administration changes policies, the threat to transportation funding could again be present.

PPDC also helped inform efforts by OCTA to streamline protections for the LOSSAN Rail Corridor, including obtaining letters from both Representative Mike Levin (D-Oceanside) and Representative Katie Porter (D-Irvine) seeking an expediting permitting process by the United States Army Corps of Engineers. While this process is still being discussed, these efforts led to greater attention to this issue and heightened scrutiny to processes that could be used to expedite permits.

A variety of other issues were informed by PPDC this year including funding and regulatory reform efforts to prepare for the 2028 Olympics in Los Angeles, insight into the future of Buy America Bond subsidies, and the continuation of the Alternative Fuel Tax Credit for transit agencies. It is expected these policy issues will continue into the next session of Congress.

General Services

Effort: Very Good; 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 offices to discuss project submittals for CPF and CDS requests. These meetings allowed OCTA to discuss upcoming projects and align each delegation member's priorities with funding requests. This also helped lay the foundation for any requests that may be submitted in 2025.

Further, as work continued to advance project delivery to protect the LOSSAN Corridor, PPDC not only secured meetings with relevant delegation offices to discuss strategies for advancing funding and construction, but also assisted in securing support letters, briefed congressional leadership on project and funding status, and helped navigate regulatory challenges.

PPDC continued work to keep relevant offices and staff in DC apprised of OCTA projects and priorities, including the Interstate 405 Improvement Project, OC Streetcar and the Innovative Clean Transit Regulation. Coordinated messaging with Metrolink

was also made via PPDC to advance policies related to the In-Use Locomotive regulation and need for sustainable rail operating funds.

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 transportation advocacy groups.

Overall Rating

Effort: Very Good; Outcome: Very Good

PPDC's efforts overall are rated as very good 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.