



June 7, 2021

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

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Overview

The Orange County Transportation Authority coordinates regional active transportation efforts in Orange County. An update on recent and upcoming activities is provided for review.

Recommendation

Receive and file as an information item.

Background

The Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA) Board of Directors receives biannual updates on regional active transportation (bicycling and walking) projects and programs. These efforts support OCTA's vision for a multimodal transportation system.

Discussion

This report provides an update on active transportation education, safety, and evaluation programs and projects. In response to the coronavirus (COVID-19), OCTA has been adapting project and program deliverables to fit the current situation, creatively undertaking public involvement, and evaluating the effects COVID-19 is having on active transportation in Orange County.

Safety

OCTA received two grants related to Safe Routes to School (SRTS) and pedestrian safety efforts. These included the SRTS Action Plan (Action Plan) and the Safe Travels Education Program (STEP) Campaign. These two efforts deliver SRTS activities to schools and increase the reach of SRTS programs countywide.

Both projects foster continued collaboration and partnership between OCTA, school districts, the Orange County Health Care Agency, cities, law enforcement agencies, and the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans).

SRTS Action Plan

The Action Plan evaluated SRTS efforts countywide, delivered SRTS activities to schools, developed a list of action items, and identified potential agencies and organizations to lead future SRTS efforts. The final report (completed in February 2021) includes a summary of engagement activities, a needs assessment for Orange County schools, and recommendations for developing a countywide SRTS Program. The recommendations are categorized into four goals, nine supporting strategies, and 32 implementation actions (Attachment A). The four goals are: establish a countywide SRTS Program, create and sustain lasting partnerships, develop a culture of safety, and fund and implement infrastructure improvements. OCTA is currently working with stakeholders to determine lead agencies for the study recommendations. Staff will return with specific implementation recommendations by the end of the calendar year.

STEP Campaign

The STEP Campaign develops educational and encouragement activities for walking and bicycling at 25 public elementary schools serving disadvantaged communities. A range of activities will be offered based on school interest and time availability for assemblies, walk or bicycle-to-school day events, and training activities. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the project team adapted activities to be compatible with virtual and hybrid schooling. This included developing online modules and educational videos for various age groups focusing on safe walking and bicycling. The project is on partial hold until the end of this school year to accommodate COVID-19 restrictions but will resume outreach and engagement with schools in the upcoming fall 2021 school year. The campaign will continue through November 2022.

System Evaluation

OCTA is undertaking several initiatives to better understand how active transportation users experience Orange County's transportation system. These projects include the Bike Gap Closure Feasibility Study and the Cyclic Counts Program.

Bike Gap Closure Feasibility Study

A comprehensive assessment will evaluate three key bikeway gaps in Orange County. Regional bikeway trails in central and south Orange County, as well as the Cross County Connector bikeway (Attachment B) will be studied. The study will recommend a backbone network that links to other regional and local bikeways. It will also provide grant-ready cost estimates and trail alignments, which can be used by cities to pursue funding opportunities for implementation. The project is funded by \$160,000 in Caltrans Sustainable Community Grant funds and \$40,000 in State Transportation Improvement Program planning, programming, and monitoring funds. The project was initiated in April 2021 and will be completed by spring 2023.

Cyclic Counts Program

This program kicked off in April 2020, and collected bicycle counts at 120 locations throughout Orange County between May 1 and June 6, 2020 (not including Memorial Day weekend). Assessing changes in active transportation travel behavior during the pandemic presented a unique opportunity for data collection. When using this data in the future, it will be noted that it was collected during the pandemic. This data will provide critical information for local agencies for grant applications, evaluation of existing facilities, and assist with decision making about where to locate facilities in the future. Additional counts (approximately 100 locations) will take place during May and June of 2021 to complete the project.

Grant Applications

OCTA submitted an Active Transportation Program Cycle 5 grant application to fund the environmental clearance phase of the Garden Grove-Santa Ana Rails-to-Trails Gap Closure Study (Attachment C). The grant application is to study a potential bikeway on a four-mile section of the Pacific Electric Right-of-Way between Raitt Street and Euclid Street. This project has been consistently identified in planning documents as an important gap closure. The trail would provide direct bicycle and pedestrian access to downtown Garden Grove and Santa Ana, as well as several regional trails in central Orange County. The funding request is for \$3 million and awards will be announced in June 2021.

OCTA also submitted a Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) Sustainable Communities grant application to fund a Bus Stop Safety and Accessibility Study for OCTA's 13 busiest bus stops (Attachment D).

In coordination with the surrounding communities and local stakeholders, this project will identify first/last mile improvements in the areas directly surrounding OCTA bus stops to facilitate better connections between the adjacent communities and OCTA bus stops. The funding request is for \$300,000 and awards will be announced in June 2021.

Summary

OCTA has advanced planning, education, encouragement, and enforcement efforts to improve active transportation throughout Orange County. Coordination and collaboration will continue between SCAG, Caltrans, and stakeholders to encourage and support walking and bicycling within Orange County.

Attachments

- A. Orange County Bike Connectors
- B. Safe Routes to School Action Plan Executive Summary
- C. Project Fact Sheet, Garden Grove-Santa Ana Rails-to-Trails Gap Closure Project
- D. Orange County Transportation Authority, OCTA Bus Stop Safety and Accessibility Study Caltrans Sustainable Transportation Planning Grant/SCAG Sustainable Community Grant 2021/2022 Project Summary

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Safe Routes to School Action Plan Executive Summary

This Safe Routes to School (SRTS) Action Plan (Action Plan) summarizes findings and recommendations for Safe Routes to School support throughout Orange County. The Action Plan recommends that the critical first step in improving SRTS in Orange County is to establish a countywide SRTS Program.

The project team assessed existing SRTS efforts already underway in the County and engaged with stakeholders and those impacted by or interested in supporting safe school travel to learn about opportunities and challenges for SRTS efforts countywide. Results of this engagement and research found that although schools, school districts and cities across Orange County are already conducting a wide range of SRTS activities and improving active transportation infrastructure, they are experiencing challenges with competing priorities as well as a lack of staff resources to dedicate to ongoing SRTS programs. Seventy percent of the County's schools fall into the top two of the three tiers of the Action Plan's needs analysis, demonstrating the opportunity and need for more support for SRTS.

The Action Plan's main recommendations include:

- 1) Establish a countywide SRTS Program,
- 2) Create and sustain lasting partnerships,
- 3) Develop a culture of safety,
- 4) Fund and build safe streets.

This Action Plan includes specific actions and strategies to achieve its four main recommendations, as well as appendices of further resources to support implementation of SRTS activities across the County.

Project Fact Sheet

GARDEN GROVE - SANTA ANA RAILS-TO-TRAILS GAP CLOSURE PROJECT

LENGTH
4 miles

AFFECTED CITIES
Garden Grove and Santa Ana

AT A GLANCE

PROJECT COST:

Approximately \$42,327,000

FUNDING:

Requesting funds for Project Approval & Environmental Document (PA&ED): \$3,000,000

Plans, Specifications, and Estimate (PS&E): \$3,871,000

Right-of-Way Acquisition: \$8,571,000

Construction: \$26,885,000

Fact Sheet Updated 7/2020

For questions, please contact Peter Sotherland, Active Transportation Coordinator at (714) 560-5386 or psotherland@octa.net



Overview

The Garden Grove - Santa Ana Rails-to-Trails Gap Closure is a four-mile Class I multi-use path which will transform 3.1 miles of OCTA-owned former Pacific Electric corridor and 0.85-mile of the Wintersburg Channel. The project is located between the two cities' downtown areas and is surrounded by high-traffic streets and disadvantaged neighborhoods providing a critical connection with public access the trail from 15 different entry points.

Active Transportation Program funds are being sought for the Project Approval and Environmental Document (PA&ED) phase to support advancing subsequent project phases to be led by the cities of Garden Grove and Santa Ana.

Benefits

The Garden Grove - Santa Ana Rails-to-Trails Gap Closure will increase the use of active transportation travel modes, provide a no-cost, zero-emission transportation alternative, enhance safety and mobility for non-motorized users, facilitating travel away from high-speed and high-volume traffic in several disadvantaged communities. This trail project will link two downtown cities and connect to the Santa Ana River Trail, part of 66-mile Class I OC Loop bikeway, which is 88% complete. The OC Loop connects to beaches, 200 parks, 180 schools, three Metrolink stations and 17 cities. Additionally, the project will result in greenhouse gas emissions reduction, improved air quality and public health in communities with higher than average rates of asthma and cardiovascular disease.

