




**December 4, 2023**

**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 bicycling and walking 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 include sharing information, encouraging people to walk and bicycle through education and empowerment, and planning of pedestrian and bikeway facilities, developing project concepts, and collecting data for measuring the outcomes of projects and programs. Details on these activities are described below.

### **Discussion**

#### **Ongoing Projects**

OCTA continues its work to deliver meaningful active transportation focused projects that improve the lives and transportation options for residents and visitors of OC. This includes delivering the environmental phase for OC Connect, a proposed multi-use trail along the OCTA-owned former Pacific Electric right-of-way (PEROW) corridor and developing an Electric Bike (e-bike) Safety Action Plan.

**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 PEROW 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). OC Connect is funded by a \$3 million Active Transportation Program (ATP) grant to prepare the environmental analysis, known as the Project Approval and Environmental Document (PA/ED) phase for a Class I bicycle path. The PA/ED phase will define the preferred alignment of the trail by completing 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. OC Connect includes extensive outreach to local stakeholders and the surrounding community through a public outreach and input campaign. Implementation of the project resulting from the PA/ED phase will be at the discretion of the local agencies.

OCTA staff convened a Project Development Team (PDT) to provide critical feedback and technical guidance for the project. The PDT's membership includes staff from OCTA, the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) District 12, California Public Utilities Commission, the City of Santa Ana (Santa Ana) and the City of Garden Grove (Garden Grove), as well as Orange County Parks and Flood Control District. The PDT will meet bimonthly for the duration of the project.

The PDT conducted a site visit to the PEROW corridor on August 23, 2023, to evaluate existing conditions, note site-specific opportunities, discuss project specifics with Garden Grove and Santa Ana city staff and County staff, and finalize observations to be included in a baseline analysis of the project. Attendees for the site visit included staff from Caltrans District 12, Garden Grove, Orange County Public Works/Flood, OCTA, Santa Ana, and the consultant team.

OC Connect will hold two phases of public engagement to interface with the public and the communities directly surrounding the project corridor. The first round of engagement is currently underway and includes introducing OC Connect to the community and soliciting feedback to help inform preferred alignment and preliminary design. Activities planned for the first phase include both in-person and virtual open house events, pop-up tables, a survey, and neighborhood outreach. The first phase of engagement includes meetings with community and city stakeholders. The project team will be meeting directly with both Garden Grove and Santa Ana as well as one-on-one meetings with stakeholders that are in the immediate vicinity of the PEROW. OC Connect is currently scheduled for completion by December 2024.

### E-bikes 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 these findings, the project team will develop recommendations and identify potential funding sources to inform future planning, outreach, and other safety efforts.

A stakeholder committee was convened to provide guidance and feedback throughout the study. Stakeholder committee membership includes cities, community members, County of Orange, law enforcement, local schools, OC Parks, OCTA, and other stakeholders and will meet five times during the 18-month project. The first stakeholder meeting was held in-person on September 24, 2023. This meeting focused on an e-bike ride to expose stakeholders to the experience of riding an e-bike. The discussion included the core components of the project, as well as planning, enforcement, education, and encouragement efforts currently underway.

A survey was sent to a broader group of stakeholders on September 28, 2023. This survey solicited feedback on a range of topics including existing resources for facilitating safe e-bike use, e-bike safety resources that are needed but do not currently exist, and willingness to participate in future e-bike safety efforts. OCTA will also be conducting broader community outreach efforts including presentations, virtual open houses, pop-up tables, and two e-bike rodeo safety events to solicit feedback on e-bike safety and deliver e-bike safety education to residents. These events will begin in early 2024. The project will be completed by December 2024 and a final report and presentation will be provided at that time.

### Completed Projects

OCTA recently concluded work on two projects:

1. The Bicycle Gap Closure Feasibility Study - developed an updated vision for regional bikeway connectivity (Attachment B).
2. The Safe Travels Education Program (STEP) Campaign - delivered Safe Routes to School (SRTS) education and encouragement activities to 25 schools servicing disadvantaged communities (Attachment C).

### Bicycle Gap Closure Feasibility Study

The Bicycle Gap Closure Feasibility Study was funded through a \$200,000 Caltrans Sustainable Transportation grant and was completed in June 2023. The study identified and evaluated feasible bikeway concepts to complete three new regional bikeways branded “the OC Loops”. The OC Loops are comprised of the

OC Central Loop, OC South Loop, and OC Connect. The study is built on prior regional and local planning efforts to identify and develop the OC Loops. These planning efforts included OC Active, the four Orange County Regional Bikeway Strategies, the original OC Loop Gap Closure Feasibility Study, and the OC Loop 70/30 Plan, as well as local bicycle plans. The study developed either feasible bikeway design concepts or provided updated cost estimates for each of the OC Loops. The study also developed concepts for facility upgrades where increased separation from traffic is needed, updated route alignments, and identifies impediments to implementation. These recommendations will support connecting local and regional multimodal infrastructure by working collaboratively with local agency stakeholders and the public.

Once constructed, the OC Loops bikeways will serve as vital infrastructure for residents who walk and bicycle by providing safe connectivity to transit, jobs, and housing. The OC Loops also supports regional efforts to improve air quality and public health, offering comfortable and convenient infrastructure that provides an alternative to driving. OCTA conducted the study in coordination with the County of Orange, local agency staff, Caltrans, and other project partners. The recommendations presented in the study do not supersede planning initiatives by local agencies but instead provide additional considerations and up-to-date information for regional bicycle connectivity. Design, construction, implementation, and maintenance of bikeway corridors will be led by local agencies with support from OCTA. The Bicycle Gap Closure Study report full report can be found on the project website: <https://www.octa.net/programs-projects/programs/plans-and-studies/bike-gap-closure-study/overview/>.

## STEP

The STEP Campaign was funded through a \$500,000 ATP grant and concluded in September 2023. The project was completed in collaboration with the Orange County Health Care Agency (OCHCA), local jurisdictions, participating schools, and the public. The purpose of STEP was to provide 25 public elementary schools in Orange County with SRTS resources, activities, and events to encourage students and families to walk and roll to schools safely and more often. STEP objectives were:

- Engage 25 public elementary schools;
- Serve youth and families in disadvantaged communities;
- Provide a range of walking and biking encouraging activities;
- Provide educational opportunities to the students and family members;
- Strengthen partnerships between transportation, health, and public safety officials; and
- Empower school champions to continue SRTS efforts following the project.

The final report summarizes the program from 2020 to 2023. It includes lessons learned and shares recommendations for the next steps should the program continue or be expanded. The STEP campaign report full report can be found on the project website: <https://www.octa.net/getting-around/active/oc-walk/oc-step/>.

### OCTA Coordination

OCTA continues to coordinate with local agencies and stakeholders on active transportation-related initiatives, issues, and funding opportunities. This includes ongoing coordination with e-bike-related issues, projects, plans, and efforts, ATP funding including OCTA's Complete Streets grant call for projects (call), ATP grant, and State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) funding prioritization, and the new Orange County SRTS Program.

### E-Bike Multimedia

In spring 2023, OCTA developed an e-bike video focusing on traffic laws and responsible riding behavior targeting youth e-bike riders. The video was filmed with social media influencer Goodboy Noah and achieved an extremely broad reach receiving over two million impressions across the Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube platforms. OCTA is developing additional e-bike videos with a continued focus on teenage riders and safety messaging with the added goal of more directly reaching Orange County residents.

OCTA also developed e-bike education materials. These materials include stickers, informational cards, and bicycle hangers. The messages focus on speeding, riding with passengers, stopping distance, and riding etiquette. These materials will be distributed at public events, schools, and retail shops by OCTA, local jurisdictions, schools, and other interested stakeholders. To date, over 20,000 print materials have been requested and OCTA will continue to provide e-bike materials to stakeholders and local jurisdictions.

### E-bike Quarterly Meeting

On September 23, 2023, OCTA hosted the fourth quarterly e-bike coordination meeting with 22 attendees from 11 agencies including law enforcement, cities, and the County of Orange. The meeting focused on updates on e-bike media, enforcement, regulation/ordinances, and planning efforts. The discussion included changes to local ordinances addressing e-bike safety issues such as speeding, riding with passengers, as well as sidewalk and wrong-way riding. Public outreach, primarily to schools, and upcoming and ongoing local planning efforts were also covered. The cities of Huntington Beach, Irvine, Laguna Niguel, and Newport Beach reported that schools now require students to take a course on e-bike safety to receive a sticker permitting them to ride and park an e-bike at schools. Additionally, the City of Huntington Beach is utilizing police

enforcement at a random school every week. Schools and cities using these approaches report improved riding behaviors of children in the vicinity of schools.

### SRTS Program

OCTA and OCHCA completed the SRTS Action Plan in 2021 which recommended establishing a regional SRTS program to continue improving SRTS in Orange County. The OC SRTS Program was established in fall 2023 as a collaboration between OCTA and OCHCA to facilitate and oversee SRTS activities undertaken at the regional level. The OC SRTS Program fosters a transportation system where students can safely walk and bike to school by facilitating the safe and confident use of active modes of transportation. The OC SRTS Program raises awareness in the community about the benefits of active transportation through educational programs and empowering students and parents to safely walk or roll. The program will be maintained jointly by OCTA and OCHCA. OCTA will support project management, grant pursuit and management, and countywide stakeholder coordination. OCHCA will provide subject matter expertise in SRTS activities, targeted stakeholder development within schools and neighborhoods, and direct engagement and activities delivery within schools.

### Complete Streets Program

In August 2022, the Federal Highway Administration required the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) to implement a new project selection process to comply with the latest interpretation of federal regulations for the administration of Congestion Mitigation Air Quality (CMAQ) and Surface Transportation Block Grant (STBG) funds. In December 2022, in advance of the implementation of the new project selection process, the OCTA Board of Directors (Board) authorized \$55 million in STBG and CMAQ funds for a 2023 Orange County Complete Streets Program call. OCTA staff developed a call aimed at improving the built environment to encourage walking and biking, consistent with Board direction, and accounting for the new process which allows SCAG to make the final project selection for CMAQ and STBG funds. The call closed on Thursday, October 5th, with a total of 19 agencies applying for 33 projects totaling \$110 million. OCTA staff will be returning to the OCTA Regional Transportation Planning Committee and Board to provide additional updates in the coming months.

### California Transportation Commission Active Transportation Program Cycle 6

The California Transportation Commission (CTC) approved the final selection of the ATP Cycle 6 grant in June 2023. Orange County applicants were awarded a total of \$112.9 million for 13 projects including two projects totaling \$51.8 million in the statewide award and 11 projects totaling \$61.1 million through the SCAG

Metropolitan Planning Organization share, with input from OCTA. These funds will go to projects such as OCTA's Next STEP SRTS project, the County of Orange's OC Loop Segments P and Q, and a variety of other active transportation projects around the County (Attachment D). Since the 2012 inception of the Bicycle Corridor Improvement Program (BCIP) and the 2013 inception of the ATP, OC agencies have been awarded a total \$50.9 million in BCIP funds and \$213.4 million in funding in support of active transportation projects across the County.

#### La Habra Rails to Trails OC Loop Gap Closure Project

OC Loop Segment A of the OC North Loop, the La Habra Rails to Trails OC Loop Gap Closure Project, will close a 3.1-mile gap in the OC Loop, a portion of Orange County's bicycle network, with a Class I bikeway/multi-use path along an underutilized rail line. This project completes Segment A of the OC Loop from the west La Habra city limit to Palm Street. The OCTA Board approved the request for \$38.23 million in STIP funds for the construction phase in fiscal year 2027-28.

#### Upcoming Projects

OCTA continues to implement active transportation projects and concepts outlined in OCTA's guiding planning documents (i.e., OC Active, SRTS Action Plan, Regional Bikeways Strategies, the Long-Range Transportation Plan, and the Systemic Safety Plan). Staff also continues to apply to grant program opportunities such as the Regional Early Action 2.0 County Transportation Commission Partnership Grant Program (REAP 2.0) and the CTC Active Transportation Cycle 6 Grant Program. OCTA was awarded a total of \$3.95 million in grant funding that will support SRTS, active transportation safety, data collection, and first and last mile connectivity projects. The list of recent grant awards for active transportation projects is provided as Attachment E.

#### **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. Orange County Bike Connectors Gap Closure Feasibility Study Executive Summary
- C. Orange County Safe Travels Education Program (OC Step) Introduction
- D. Orange County ATP Cycle 6 Funding Summary
- E. OCTA 2023 Active Transportation Upcoming Projects Summary

**Prepared by:**



Peter Sotherland  
Active Transportation Coordinator  
(714) 560-5386

**Approved by:**



Kia Mortazavi  
Executive Director, Planning  
(714) 560-5741