



December 5, 2022

To: Regional Planning and Highways Committee

From: Darrell E. Johnson, Chief Executive Officer

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Subject: Active Transportation Program Biannual Update

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 oversees regional active transportation (bicycling and walking) projects and programs in Orange County. 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, comfortable, and connected bicycling and walking networks. Key elements of OCTA's efforts include sharing information, encouraging people to walk and bike (education/encouragement), planning and conceptual design of pedestrian and bikeway projects (engineering), and collecting data for measuring projects and programs (evaluation). Details on these activities are further described below.

Discussion

Electric Bicycles (e-bikes)

OCTA continues its work related to e-bikes use in Orange County. This includes data gathering, interagency coordination, and developing education and encouragement materials. E-bikes are included in OCTA's Cyclic Counts program and play a role in ongoing planning studies.

E-bike Multimedia

Over the last several months, OCTA developed an e-bike video with a local social media influencer. The video aims to reach preadolescence and adolescent e-bike riders to deliver basic e-bike safety and courtesy messaging accessible to that age group. OCTA will develop additional video materials to reach other user groups.

OCTA is also developing printable e-bike materials available for public use. These materials focus on speeding, riding with passengers, stopping distance, and riding etiquette. The materials will be distributed at public events, schools, and retail shops. Once the print materials have been finalized, OCTA will make the high-resolution files available to stakeholders upon request so they can be distributed further.

E-bike Quarterly Meeting

On October 3, 2022, OCTA hosted the first of what will be a quarterly e-bike coordination meeting for local jurisdictions. The October meeting brought together 13 cities, with 23 total attendees. The meeting focused on city staff discussions on e-bike trends, resources, concerns, and best practices. Below are some of the key takeaways discussed at the meeting.

Areas of greatest concern:

- Concerns with class III or unclassified e-bikes because of their speed, weight, and riding in close proximity to other slower-moving cyclists or pedestrians on sidewalks and bike paths,
- E-bike riders' adherence to traffic laws: speed, wrong-way riding, stopping at intersections, sidewalk riding, and passenger riding
- The riding behaviors of teens,
- Lack of infrastructure and space for e-bikes to operate, and
- The risk of missing an opportunity to support a new fast-growing transportation mode by focusing solely on regulating use rather than also fostering safe behavior or providing adequate infrastructure.

Guidance and resources requested:

- Up-to-date website resources,
- Ridership and crash data,
- Safety education materials (print),
- Safety education events, and
- Sample ordinances/best practices.

OCTA has developed several e-bike-related resources and will continue to develop associated materials for local jurisdictions. All meeting attendees expressed interest in continuing regular e-bike coordination meetings and committed to working on facilitating responsible e-bike use in Orange County.

E-bike Safety Plan

In partnership with local stakeholders, OCTA will develop a plan focusing on analyzing the gaps in existing resources, approaches, and strategies at the local, regional, and state levels regarding e-bike safety, and developing recommendations for how best to address these gaps towards guiding local e-bike safety efforts. The study will also include e-bike safety events, stakeholder engagement, and community outreach. The project will begin by the end of the fiscal year.

Project Updates

Staff is also working on multiple planning and engineering studies to improve bicycling and walking networks. This includes delivering the environmental documentation and preliminary engineering for a proposed bikeway between the cities of Garden Grove and Santa Ana, as well as envisioning the expansion of the successful OC Loop. These efforts are further described below.

Garden Grove – Santa Ana Rails to Trails

This study will complete the project approval and environmental document for a proposed active transportation facility along the OCTA-owned, former Pacific Electric Right-of-Way (PEROW). The corridor runs 3.1-miles along the PEROW corridor between Raitt Street and Euclid Avenue and includes a spur running south along 0.85 miles of the Wintersburg Channel that would connect to Hazard Avenue (Attachment A). Funding is provided through a \$3 million State Active Transportation Program (ATP) Cycle 5 grant. The project will involve close coordination with the cities of Garden Grove and Santa Ana, Orange County Flood Control, and internal OCTA stakeholders. Key tasks within the scope of work include a baseline analysis of the corridor, agency coordination, preliminary engineering studies, environmental documentation, and public outreach. Key challenges for the project will be the potential creative reuse of the historic PEROW bridge at the Santa Ana River, spanning the Santa Ana River and roadway crossings. The project will begin in spring 2023 and be completed in approximately two years. The completion of this project will support the advancement of subsequent project implementation phases.

Bike Gap Closure Feasibility Study

The Bike Gap Closure Feasibility Study is evaluating potential alignments for three key regional bikeways including the OC Central loop, the OC South Loop and the OC Connect (Attachment B). Study recommendations will be available to local agencies for the pursuit of funding opportunities. The project team is developing draft concepts and cost estimates. Currently, a second round of jurisdictional stakeholder meetings to review draft concepts is being conducted and staff continues to participate in pop-up events around the County to engage with the public. A second public webinar to update the community and solicit feedback on the proposed gap closure segments will be scheduled prior to the end of the project. The project team will be returning to the OCTA Technical Advisory Committee and the Citizens' Advisory Committee's Bicycle and Pedestrian Active Transportation Subcommittee with the study report in early 2023. The project is funded by \$200,000 in California Department of Transportation planning grant funds.

Ongoing Education

Safe Travels Education Program (STEP)

The STEP Campaign focuses on the implementation of safe routes to schools. The STEP Campaign is funded through a \$500,000 ATP Cycle 4 grant. The project is a collaboration between OCTA, the Orange County Health Care Agency, and local partners and stakeholders that include schools, local jurisdictions, and the public.

This project is developing and delivering education and encouragement activities for walking and bicycling to 25 public elementary schools (Attachment C) serving disadvantaged communities. It is scheduled to continue through November 2023. In response to the coronavirus pandemic, the project team adapted some activities to be compatible with virtual and hybrid schooling. The resources, such as videos on bicycle safety, maintenance, and walking safety are posted on the project webpage and are available for public use. During fall 2022, the project team hosted the first round of local Safe Routes to Schools (SRTS) Committee meetings for each of the participating schools along with participation from cities, parents, and school district staff. The project team will hold two more rounds of meetings to help develop institutions at the school and city levels to support SRTS activities. The team continues to provide in-school program activities to students and parents at participating schools. These activities include bicycle skills classes, parent-teacher association meetings, assemblies, and other safety efforts.

Upcoming Call for Projects

OCTA is in the process of developing a replacement for the Bicycle Corridor Improvement Program. The new program will focus on advancing complete streets projects put forward by local agencies. OCTA anticipates that the complete streets program will open the call for projects in summer 2023.

Summary

OCTA supports efforts to improve active transportation throughout Orange County. This includes continued 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 within Orange County.

Attachments

- A. Garden Grove - Santa Ana Rails to Trails
- B. OC Loops – Bike Gap Closure Study
- C. OC STEP Campaign Participating Schools

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