



August 17, 2009

To: Highways Committee

From: Will Kempton, Chief Executive Officer

Subject: Update on Project Alternatives for the San Diego Freeway (Interstate 405) Improvement Project

Overview

Staff is presenting information on the viability of the four alternatives under consideration in the environmental phase of the San Diego Freeway (Interstate 405) Improvement Project. Preliminary information is provided on likely right-of-way impacts and funding considerations of the alternatives.

Recommendation

Receive and file as an information item.

Background

The San Diego Freeway (Interstate 405) Improvement Project proposes to add new lanes to Interstate 405 from the Costa Mesa Freeway (State Route 55) to the San Gabriel River Freeway (Interstate 605), generally within the existing right-of-way (ROW).

On January 26, 2009, the Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA) Board of Directors (Board) approved staff's recommendation to consider four alternatives. Alternative 1 proposes to add one general purpose lane in each direction, and Alternative 2 proposes to add two general purpose lanes in each direction. Alternative 3, the high-occupancy toll (HOT) lanes alternative, would add one general purpose lane and one HOT lane in each direction; converting the existing high-occupancy vehicle lane to a HOT lane would result in a total of two HOT lanes in each direction of Interstate 405. From here forward, this alternative will be referred to as the Express Lanes alternative. Alternative 4 would identify improvements related to adding one general purpose lane in each direction that match the currently available funding.

Alternatives 3 and 4 were included to address the significant funding gap between the available funding for the project and the estimated cost to add one or two general purpose lanes, which ranged from \$1 billion to \$2 billion. Currently, less than \$400 million is available in Renewed Measure M (M2) for this project.

Discussion

OCTA staff and the consultant team have been evaluating the viability of the four build alternatives during the last four months. To date, the focus of this evaluation has been on identifying what improvements could be built for the currently available funding (Alternative 4), analyzing the two-lane alternatives (Alternatives 2 and 3) and the extent of associated ROW impacts, and performing a planning-level traffic and revenue analysis to determine the potential for revenue generation from the Express Lanes (Alternative 3).

As a result of engineering performed over the last four months, staff has determined that only a short segment of one lane could be added in each direction with the currently available funding. The consultant team was given a range of \$300 million to \$400 million as an estimate of funding available from M2. The primary reason for the high cost to add even one lane is because every local street overcrossing would need to be reconstructed. There are columns adjacent to the mainline freeway shoulders and there are existing non-standard lanes and shoulders; therefore, it would not be possible to accommodate even one additional lane without impacting the bridges. The commitment in M2 is to add new lanes throughout the corridor, generally within existing ROW, from State Route 55 to Interstate 605, and Alternative 4 may not meet that commitment entirely.

Another area of focus was to look into the viability of the two-lane alternatives (Alternatives 2 and 3) and the extent of potential ROW impacts. The locally preferred strategy (LPS) adopted by the OCTA Board called for the implementation of additional lanes generally within existing ROW. As a result of analysis and engineering performed by the consultant team, it appears that two lanes in each direction (Alternatives 2 and 3) can generally be built within the LPS footprint. Standard lanes and shoulders can be provided throughout the corridor mainline. Further analysis is still needed at certain spot locations and at the local interchanges, but this is a highly positive determination about the viability of both two-lane alternatives from a footprint and ROW standpoint. The slides and oral presentation accompanying the staff report will provide more information on this subject.

The analysis to date also shows that the cost of Alternative 1, one lane in each direction, is approximately \$1.2 billion while Alternative 2, two lanes in each direction, is \$1.7 billion. Given that the M2 revenues for this project are estimated to be about \$400 million, an option is to seek alternative funding to construct the project. Therefore, the concept of Express Lanes is being considered as Alternative 3.

A traffic and revenue analysis is underway to determine the extent of additional funding that could be generated. The Express Lanes facility could significantly alleviate congestion on Interstate 405 by providing additional capacity and by also providing additional choices to commuters. Carpoolers could still use the Express Lanes free or at a discounted rate. Tolling strategies and policies based on vehicle occupancy will be determined at a future date after information is available from the traffic and revenue analysis. The Express Lanes alternative also includes one additional general purpose lane in each direction, for a total of two additional lanes of capacity. The Express Lanes will provide an additional lane to carpoolers and a choice to single drivers who opt to pay to use an uncongested facility when better mobility and trip reliability are desired. Experience with the 91 Express Lanes shows that those who choose to use those lanes come from all income levels. The revenue generated by those who choose to pay a toll will help fund that portion of the project and possibly generate supplemental funds to improve the corridor. Staff will present the outcome of the traffic and revenue analysis to the Board as part of the next project update in September 2009.

Project briefings have been provided to the city councils of Costa Mesa, Fountain Valley, Garden Grove, Huntington Beach, Los Alamitos, Seal Beach, and Westminster, and the Board of Directors for the community of Rossmore. These presentations took place between February and May 2009, and focused on the four alternatives, the status of the project, and the community outreach program. The Interstate 405 Stakeholders Working Group (SWG) was formed and kicked off in May 2009, with the members representing a cross-section of stakeholder interests along the corridor including business, homeowners, chambers of commerce, and others. Two SWG meetings have been held to date in order to obtain input about each of the four alternatives prior to public scoping. Participation from the SWG members has been excellent, and there has been a high level of interactive discussion and positive feedback received about the meetings afterwards.

Under the National Environmental Policy Act and the California Environmental Quality Act, scoping is an early and open process for determining the scope of issues to be addressed and for identifying the range of alternatives, significant issues, and any necessary mitigation measures related to a proposed project.

Notices and advertisements about the public scoping meetings for this project will be sent on September 4, 2009. Four public scoping meetings will be held with one each in Fountain Valley, Huntington Beach, Rossmoor, and Westminster in late September/early October 2009. At these scoping meetings, staff will share information about the project and the four alternatives and gather input to be considered as the project moves into the formal environmental process.

Staff will return to the Board with two future updates on the project. In September 2009, staff will report on the outcome of the initial traffic and revenue analysis and provide information on potential Express Lanes operating and tolling policies. In November 2009, staff will provide information on strategies to implement the project, including a discussion related to operating toll lanes on Interstate 405.

Summary

Staff is providing information on the four build alternatives under consideration for the Interstate 405 Improvement Project to be received and filed.

Attachment

None.

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