



July 19, 2012

To: Legislative and Communications Committee

From: Will Kempton, Chief Executive Officer

Subject: Interstate 405 Focus Group Report

Overview

As part of the Orange County Transportation Authority's outreach efforts for the Interstate 405 Improvement Project, a series of focus groups were conducted by Lawrence Research. The purpose of the focus groups was to obtain feedback on the various alternatives under consideration as part of the environmental review process.

Recommendation

Receive and file the Interstate 405 focus group report.

Background

Focus groups are a qualitative market research tool. While not statistically valid, the discussion in focus groups can provide feedback about perceptions, opinions, and ideas. They can also give valuable insight into misconceptions and offer recommendations as to how to better communicate with the public.

The main goal of the Interstate 405 (I-405) Improvement Project focus groups was to assess public sentiment regarding the alternatives being considered in order to provide the Board with perspectives from people who use the I-405. The discussion also helped examine unanticipated or emerging issues.

Discussion

Lawrence Research conducted three focus groups during the week of June 18, 2012 to ascertain public sentiment toward the various alternatives being considered for the I-405 Improvement Project.

Participants for the focus groups were professionally recruited from within the I-405 commute shed which extends from south Orange County up to

Long Beach. The first focus group included a mix of toll road users and non-toll road users. In order to determine if there was any difference in perceptions towards tolling, the second focus group was made up of non-toll road users and the third included toll road users. Each focus group had nine to 12 participants and lasted approximately two hours.

The objectives of the focus groups were to (1) test the views, reactions, motives and intensity of feelings of the participants on each of the alternatives, (2) identify similarities and differences in perspectives of participants from each of the different focus groups, and (3) help refine public communication messages.

Display boards were created showing the project area, the four alternatives, access points, and traffic projections. The discussion guide used by the facilitator was broken up into eight key segments, with each providing more and more relevant information to the participants:

1. The Problem: Growth and Traffic Projections
2. I-405 Choices: No Build and Three Alternatives
3. Add Traffic Information
4. Add Cost Information
5. Importance
6. Favorability
7. Role Playing
8. Options: Final Ratings

Key Findings

A full report with detailed analysis has been prepared by Gary Lawrence (Attachment A). A summary of the key findings follows.

Virtually every participant acknowledged that improvements are needed in the corridor. When posed with the problem of growth and increased traffic congestion on the I-405, the participants came up with a variety of solutions ranging from rail in the freeway median to widening the freeway, and from adding toll lanes to transit. It is interesting to note that through the discussion and education process during the focus groups, the participants identified the wide variety of options that were previously studied during the I-405 Major Investment Study (MIS).

There was no support for the No Build Option and little support for building one regular lane in each direction (Alternative 1). The preference for all of the focus groups was to build two regular lanes in each direction (Alternative 2), followed by Alternative 3 which adds one regular lane and one toll lane in each direction.

There were misconceptions about how the I-405 could be widened within the existing footprint without taking homes or narrowing the lanes. Also, there was concern about the costs for the build alternatives and the uncertainty of funding for Alternative 2. Some feared that they as taxpayers may be impacted if costs exceed the budget or if toll revenues are insufficient to cover the costs of building the toll facility. Additionally, there were questions about what the toll price would be.

The main themes/comments heard most were:

- Do it all now, not incrementally
- Concern about disruption during construction (how long will it take?)
- Concern about how much the toll charges would be
- Lack of trust in numbers
- Could not believe two additional lanes would fit in existing footprint
- Perception that all the toll roads are doing badly and are jammed during peak times
- Did not like idea of changing the carpool policy from high-occupancy vehicle (HOV) 2+ to HOV 3+
- Most had not heard of Measure M

The main positive points for Alternative 2 included:

- Lower cost
- Less speculative; less chance of loss
- Time savings are not that different
- Better ratio of time saved for money spent
- Almost completely funded right off the bat

The main positive points for Alternative 3 included:

- Choice
- Time savings
- Good for transit
- Have money for other projects

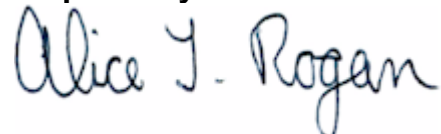
Summary

Focus groups were conducted to assess public sentiment toward the various alternatives being considered for the I-405 Improvement Project. Alternative 2 had the highest support, Alternative 3 had decent ratings, and Alternative 1 had limited support. According to virtually all of the participants, the No Build Option can effectively be taken off the table.

Attachment

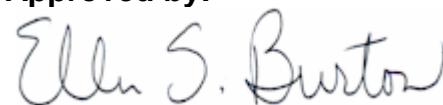
- A. A Qualitative Study of Attitudes Toward I-405 Improvements

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