



September 29, 2008

To: Highways Committee
From: Arthur T. Leahy, Chief Executive Officer
Subject: South Orange County Major Investment Study – Recommended Locally Preferred Strategy

Overview

The Orange County Transportation Authority is nearing completion of a major investment study for the south Orange County area. The effort spanned over two years and includes input from stakeholders and policymakers in south Orange County. The recommended locally preferred strategy is presented for review and consideration.

Recommendations

- A. Accept the locally preferred strategy recommendations from the Policy Advisory Committee.
- B. Establish the Renewed Measure M freeway plan as a priority for improving transportation in south Orange County followed by additional proposed improvements to the Santa Ana Freeway (Interstate 5) and the San Diego Freeway (Interstate 405), as defined in the locally preferred strategy and based on funding availability.
- C. Continue to evaluate the feasibility of the locally preferred strategy by: (1) working with the Transportation Corridor Agencies and the California Department of Transportation to maximize the efficiency of south Orange County's freeway and toll road facilities; (2) affirming local agencies' decisions to further study east-west arterial improvements identified in the locally preferred strategy; and, (3) conducting a comprehensive review of the Master Plan of Arterial Highways improvements with the input of local agencies.
- D. Seek further public input on the transportation concepts included in the locally preferred strategy through the Long-Range Transportation Plan update starting in late 2008.

Background

In October 2005, the Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA) launched the South Orange County Major Investment Study (SOCMIS). The study's objective was to develop consensus on a locally preferred strategy (LPS) of long-range, multi-modal transportation improvements. This major investment study (MIS) follows a three-phase process, with the same set of tasks and decision milestones as other MISs previously conducted in Orange County. In Phase I of the study, the SOCMIS Mobility Problem and Statement of Purpose and Need, as well as 14 initial alternative strategies were approved by the Board of Directors (Board) for screening on May 14, 2007.

Phase II of the study involved screening of this initial set of alternative strategies. On October 22, 2007, the Board approved a reduced set of six alternative strategies for more detailed evaluation. The third and final phase of this study identifies and recommends a LPS for the SOCMIS study area, which is presented in this report. The SOCMIS also included an extensive public involvement program that continued throughout the life of this study. OCTA is committed to encouraging public involvement and seeking input throughout the transportation planning process. Attachment A provides an overview of OCTA's outreach activities to date.

Discussion

The purpose of Phase III of this study was to identify, through additional technical analysis as well as public input, the best performing elements of the reduced set of six alternative strategies and package them into a final LPS. The information produced during the evaluation of alternatives was then used to provide the technical rationale and basis of discussion for developing the LPS. Community and agency input on the various high performing elements was sought to help identify the final package of improvements recommended to be included and moved forward in a LPS. The draft SOCMIS Evaluation of Alternatives Report Executive Summary is included in Attachment B.

The Policy Advisory Committee (PAC) reached consensus for a LPS on July 16, 2008. The LPS includes arterial, freeway/toll road, and transit system improvements and addresses all modes of transportation in the south Orange County study area. The following is a summary of the draft LPS recommendation, beginning with the future year baseline improvements. Details on these improvements are included in Attachment C.

- Future Transportation Baseline (2030) – This defines what projects are already funded and/or committed within the study area for implementation prior to 2030. Examples of major committed infrastructure include: completion of Foothill Transportation Corridor (State Route 241), 30-minute Metrolink service, as well as several arterial improvement projects such as the completion of Avenida La Pata between San Juan Capistrano and San Clemente.
- Transportation System Management/Transportation Demand Management (TSM/TDM) – These are lower cost improvements that can be implemented relatively quickly in the study area. The TSM/TDM improvements aim to maximize use of existing transportation infrastructure. Examples include merging lanes and signal coordination along major arterials. Also included are increases in transit service, access improvements to rail stations, and non-motorized transportation options (e.g., bike and pedestrian facilities).
- Arterial System – These are proposed improvements to the arterial system as well as the identification of strategies to address east-west capacity needs to keep pace with growing traveling demand in the rapidly developing areas of southeast Orange County. Any future study of local east-west arterial concepts will be at the discretion of the affected local governments and would need to include extensive public outreach.
- Freeway and Toll Road System – This would add lanes to the freeway system in locations that experience the most severe levels of freeway congestion. It would also achieve a better balance between the freeway system and the toll road system by widening the toll roads in the study area and by reducing the price of tolls for users. This portion of the LPS emphasizes the benefits provided by the Renewed Measure M freeway program.
- Bus Transit System – These are enhancements to the existing bus service and the introduction of new types of bus transit services to address a variety of travel markets within the study area. Proposed transportation features would include better local and express bus services by increasing frequency and expanding geographic coverage, investing in community based shuttles, adding new beach buses and special event shuttles, and introducing bus rapid transit service.

- Rail Transit System – These are enhancements that would improve travel times and trip reliability. Some of the proposed transportation features include double tracking the Los Angeles - San Diego - San Luis Obispo Rail Corridor on a new alignment, addressing the area that is currently single track, and increasing passenger rail service by adding more round trip trains, more weekend trains between Los Angeles and San Diego counties, and a potential new train station at Lake Forest.

One of the main objectives of the SOCMIS was to reduce the amount of traffic congestion building up on the major arterials and freeways in the study area while minimizing community impacts. If all elements were constructed by 2030, mobility improvements would be realized over the baseline condition. The LPS eliminates more than half of this traffic congestion (an estimated 58 percent reduction in vehicle hours of delay) through a multimodal investment in arterials, freeways, toll roads, and transit.

Mobility benefits include (approximately):

- Fifty-five to eighty percent improvement in average speeds on the major arterials during the morning peak period;
- Thirty percent improvement in average speeds on the freeway system during the morning peak period; and
- Thirty-five percent increase in daily transit ridership.

The total capital cost estimate for the recommended draft LPS is \$12.5 billion (2008). As with all major investment studies, the plan exceeds available funding and is intended to provide a vision so needed funding can be identified and sought in future years. This estimate is intended to illustrate the total cost if everything being recommended in the strategy, including projects resulting from studies such as of east-west arterials, were constructed. The SOCMIS is not suggesting that all the elements included in the draft LPS can be built; rather, that these decisions be made sequentially throughout the planning process. If approved, this would be pursued through focused locally-led studies as well as through OCTA's Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP).

The PAC accepted the findings of the SOCMIS identified in the LPS discussed above and in Attachment C, while not necessarily endorsing all of the east-west arterial elements of the strategy that will require further study. Consequently, the PAC approved a two-part recommendation for the LPS, clearly separating elements that require additional study prior to moving forward into subsequent phases of project development. The PAC recommendations are shown in Attachment D.

Staff recommends that the Highways Committee accept the LPS recommendations from the PAC. These recommendations include seeking further public input on the transportation concepts included in the LPS through the LRTP update starting in late 2008. This will also allow regional projects with public support and identified funding to move forward into the next update of the Southern California Association of Governments' Regional Transportation Plan.

Another recommendation relates to establishing the Renewed Measure M freeway plan as a priority for improving transportation in south Orange County followed by additional proposed improvements to the Santa Ana Freeway (Interstate 5) and the San Diego Freeway (Interstate 405), as defined in the LPS and based on funding availability. The technical analysis and public outreach results underscore the need and support to move forward with these projects in an expeditious manner and subject to funding availability.

Finally, the recommendations include further study of the LPS by: (1) working with the Transportation Corridor Agencies and the California Department of Transportation to maximize the efficiency of south Orange County's freeway and toll road facilities; (2) affirming local agencies' decisions to further study east-west arterial improvements identified in the LPS as a starting point; and, (3) OCTA conducting a comprehensive review of the Master Plan of Arterial Highways improvements with the input of local agencies. These further studies will help make decisions on whether these concepts should move forward into the project development and funding process. For example, the concept of a new east-west roadway between Interstate 5 (I-5) and Antonio Parkway as well as considering direct ramp connections to San Joaquin Transportation Corridor (State Route 73) and I-5 offers extensive transportation benefits to south Orange County. However, it is not clear if these benefits merit the costs and potential impacts. As a result, further study is recommended.

Summary

OCTA is working to develop strategies to improve travel in the south Orange County area. The Draft SOC MIS LPS is presented for Board review and consideration.

Attachments

- A. South Orange County Major Investment Study (MIS) Overview of Outreach Activities, August 2008
- B. Draft South Orange County Major Investment Study Final Evaluation Report – Executive Summary, September 2008
- C. Draft Locally Preferred Strategy (LPS) for South Orange County MIS Study Area
- D. South Orange County Major Investment Study Policy Advisory Committee Locally Preferred Strategy Recommendations

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