

Meeting of Sept. 12, 2016

\$3 million awarded to improve Orange County's water quality

The Orange County Transportation Authority board recently allocated nearly \$3 million to improve water quality in Orange County.

The environmental cleanup program is funded through Measure M, a half-cent sales tax approved by Orange County voters in 2006 for transportation improvements. The program awards money on a competitive basis to cities and the county for projects that reduce the impacts of water pollution related to transportation.

After reviewing 29 applications from 22 cities and the county, the OCTA board approved to make \$2.8 million available for 16 projects focused on removing visible pollutants, such as litter and debris, from roads before they reach waterways. These projects include purchasing or upgrading screens, filters and inserts for catch basins, as well as other devices designed to remove pollutants.

The following cities, along with the county, received funding: Aliso Viejo, Anaheim, Brea, Buena Park, Fullerton, Huntington Beach, La Habra, Lake Forest, Mission Viejo, Orange, Placentia, Tustin and Westminster.

The OCTA board has approved funding for 122 projects since the inception of this program in 2011, totaling just more than \$14 million. It is estimated that more than a million cubic feet of trash has since been captured as a result of the installation of these devices.

Major bus service changes coming to Orange County Oct. 9

The OCTA board approved the October service change program, which will go into effect Oct. 9.

The October service change marks the second and final round of major route changes detailed in OCTA's OC Bus 360° plan. The plan seeks to improve the bus system and increase ridership by 1.3 million riders over the next three years through a number of initiatives, including shifting service from low-performing routes to areas where there is higher demand.

Routine adjustments are being made to 18 routes countywide, and 22 routes will be affected by the OC Bus 360° plan. Seven routes will have significantly improved schedule frequencies, while 12 routes will be discontinued wholly or in part.

Along with the changes in bus service, Measure M Project V Community Circulator projects are being developed to replace and supplement routes that have been discontinued or changed. Mission Viejo's Blue Line service will launch Oct. 10, while Westminster's Little Saigon Circulator is scheduled to launch Oct. 31. Services in San Clemente and the County of Orange Ranch Ride are still being developed.

Also included in the October service change is a reduction in the price of OCTA's day pass. The pass, currently \$5, will cost \$4 for a six-month promotional period. This marks the first time in OCTA's history that a bus fare has been decreased.

Options to address reduction in bus program revenue discussed

The OCTA board received a presentation on and discussed options to address a reduction in bus program revenue.

Based on the board's adoption of a new sales tax forecasting methodology, it is projected that the bus program will receive \$1 billion less in Transportation Development Act sales tax revenue over the next 20 years. In addition, continued decreases in ridership have led to declining fare revenue, and State Transit Assistance funding has continued to decline.

The board has taken several actions in the past to reduce costs to offset the impacts of revenue shortfalls, including reducing service levels by 20 percent, reducing the bus fleet by 20 percent, extending the useful life of the large bus fleet to 14 years and outsourcing up to 40 percent of fixed-route service.

In order to align ongoing expenditures with forecasted sales tax revenue, several options have been developed for consideration:

- Decrease service hours equivalent to loss in sales tax revenue
- Use capital reserves to backfill loss of revenue
- Implement a combination of the following: rethink feeder and express services, extend the useful life of large buses to 18 years, contract out additional service, implement zone-based ACCESS fares, reduce service to most productive routes, increase use of Measure M funds for the bus program

These options will be incorporated into the fiscal year 2017 Comprehensive Business Plan, which is expected to be presented to the board in November.

Board receives M2020 Plan update

The board received an update on OCTA's M2020 Plan, along with a draft Next 10 plan which covers all Measure M projects and programs that can be accomplished between now and 2026.

The M2020 Plan was approved in September 2012 in response to the financial impacts of the Great Recession to accelerate the delivery of all Measure M projects through the year 2020. The adoption of the new sales tax revenue forecasting methodology this year prompted the need to revisit the assumptions built into the plan.

While only in year four of the eight-year plan, OCTA has made major progress and has accomplished, or is on track to accomplish, all 14 of the objectives outlined in the M2020 Plan, with the exception of the SR-55 freeway project between I-5 and I-405.

Looking forward, a Next 10 plan is currently being developed to provide a framework on program and project delivery for the next 10 years. The Next 10 plan is intended to ensure OCTA's commitment to Orange County voters, keep the freeway program moving, continue to invest in streets and roads, advance rail and transit options and uphold the Measure M environmental agreement. The Next 10 plan is expected to be presented to the board in November.