

Meeting of Aug. 12, 2019

Measure M Working to Preserve the Environment

The Orange County Transportation Authority board received an update on the agency's Freeway Environmental Mitigation Program.

The program is a comprehensive effort to offset the environmental impacts of freeway construction projects by preserving large swaths of valuable habitat to protect the plants and wildlife that live on the land and provide connectivity to other natural lands.

The program allocates funds from Measure M – the county's half-cent sales tax for transportation improvements, also known as OC Go – to acquire land and fund habitat restoration projects in exchange for streamlined approvals from environmental agencies for freeway improvement projects throughout Orange County.

OCTA has purchased seven open space properties through the program, totaling 1,300 acres. The land will be preserved in perpetuity. A total of 12 restoration projects have also been funded throughout the county to return existing conservation lands to their native state.

Approximately \$30 million has been spent on acquisitions and \$10 million on more than 350 acres of habitat restoration activities.

For more information on OCTA's open space properties or to sign up for a future guided hike, visit preservingourlegacy.org.

\$40M OK'd to Help Ease Traffic Through Measure M

The OCTA board approved a \$40 million call for projects that will enhance street operations and reduce congestion in Orange County.

Cities and the county can propose projects through the Measure M Regional Capacity Program and the Regional Traffic Signal Synchronization Program to improve traffic flow and provide intersection improvements.

Both competitive programs are funded by OC Go. OCTA approved up to \$32 million for street improvements and up to \$8 million for signal synchronization projects.

The Regional Capacity Program funds intersection improvements and other projects to help reduce congestion. The signal synchronization program provides funding to time traffic lights on long stretches of streets that can run through multiple cities throughout the county.

Project applications are due by Oct. 24 and are expected to be selected by the board in the spring.

Local Transit Projects Meeting Community Needs

The OCTA board also received an update on community shuttles operated by cities throughout the county.

The shuttles are funded by Project V, a competitive program under OC Go. The goal of the program is for cities to develop and implement transit services that complement regional bus and rail services, and better suit local needs in areas not adequately served by regional transit.

All Project V services must average six passenger boardings per hour during the first year of operation, and average 10 boardings per hour after that first year. Most of the 19 services in operation between October and March either met or exceeded their respective performance standards. The special event services – including in La Habra, Laguna Beach and San Juan Capistrano – saw particularly strong ridership, with an average of 35 boardings per hour.

To date, the OCTA board has approved 28 Project V services and programmed \$41.5 million in funding to support the services. Interest from cities to start new services is strong, so the OCTA board is expected to request new project applications from cities and the county later this year.