

# PRESS RELEASE



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **I-405 Widening Project**

The 405 freeway as it passes through Seal Beach is one of the most highly travelled intersections in Southern California. It's an intersection because the 405, 605, and 22 freeways meet here and bring a host of regional traffic through the area. The Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA) is constructing the West County Connectors (WCC) Project, which adds carpool connectors between those freeways. The project also tears down and replaces the 7<sup>th</sup> Street, Valley View, and Seal Beach Boulevard bridges. The construction can be problematic and cause delays while in progress, but when complete is expected to help move traffic through the area more efficiently.

In Orange County we are fortunate to participate in the Measure M Program, as we have some of the best freeways in the state and OCTA does a great job of delivering these projects. The West County Connectors Project is scheduled to be completed in 2014. Residents may not be aware that this is the first of two planned projects by OCTA. The second project is even larger and will widen the 405 freeway between the 605 and 73 freeways with additional lanes.

With any project of this magnitude OCTA will produce an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) that seeks to mitigate environmental impacts of the project. The EIR is scheduled to be released by OCTA on May 18, 2012. After release of the EIR, the public has 45 days to comment on the document. That comment period ends on Monday, July 2, 2012. The EIR can be reviewed on Caltrans' website at [www.dot.ca.gov/dist12/405/index.htm](http://www.dot.ca.gov/dist12/405/index.htm). Copies will also be available for review at the City Clerk's office in City Hall and at the Mary Wilson Library. After addressing comments, OCTA will then finalize the document.

Within the EIR, OCTA is looking at three alternatives to widen the freeway. The alternatives are as follows:

- **Alternative 1:** Add One General-Purpose (GP) Lane in Each Direction. This alternative adds a single GP lane in each direction from Euclid Street to the I-605 interchange,

including interchange improvements, and widens the existing high-occupancy vehicle (HOV) lane in each direction

- **Alternative 2:** Add Two GP Lanes in Each Direction. This alternative adds two GP lanes (increasing the GP-lane count from four to six) in each direction from Euclid Street to the I-605 interchange, including interchange improvements, and widens the existing HOV lane in each direction.
- **Alternative 3:** Express Lane Alternative. This alternative adds both one toll lane to a widened carpool lane and a single GP lane (increasing the GP-lane count from four to five) in each direction from Euclid Street to the I-605 interchange, including interchange improvements, eliminates the existing single HOV lane, and creates two high-occupancy toll (HOT) lanes in each direction. HOT lanes permit single-occupant vehicles to utilize the HOV lanes with the payment of a toll.

The EIR seeks to mitigate impacts to air quality, noise, traffic, etc. Seal Beach has contracted with an environmental consultant who will assist City staff in drafting a formal response to the EIR. There is one dramatic impact however that will lessen the quality of life for those residents within the College Park East neighborhood. The southern edge of College Park East currently is bordered with an arterial street (Almond Avenue) and a sound wall. All three alternatives include relocating the sound wall northward into Almond Avenue. Legally OCTA can do this given that the property line is 10 feet behind the wall.

Moving the freeway northward into Almond will bring all of the smog, noise, etc. closer to homes and residents. It will remove parking spaces from the neighborhood and a landscape buffer that borders the wall. That landscape buffer has overhead electrical lines that provide power, cable, and telephone services to the neighborhood. Those lines will have to be relocated and moved closer to homes.

During the 45 day review process, OCTA will be hosting public meetings. These meetings are designed to present the project and receive input from the community. A schedule of the meetings is as follows:

- **Monday, June 4 ---- 6:00 – 8:00 PM ----** Orange Coast College Student Center, 2701 Fairview Road in Costa Mesa
- **Wednesday, June 6 ---- 6:00 – 8:00 PM ----** Westminster Community Services Facility, 8200 Westminster Avenue in Westminster
- **Thursday, June 7 ---- 6:00 – 8:00 PM ----** Rush Park Auditorium, 3021 Blume Drive in Rossmoor
- **Thursday, June 14 ---- 6:00 – 8:00 PM ----** Fountain Valley Senior Center, 17967 Bushard Street in Fountain Valley

The June 7<sup>th</sup> meeting to be held at the Rush Auditorium in Rossmoor will target residents from the Seal Beach/Rossmoor/Los Alamitos areas.

How can a project be delivered that accomplishes all of OCTA's goals and keeps the freeway behind the existing wall? One of the other tasks of the City's consultant team is to come up with an alternative design that answers this question. An alternative design is expected to be completed within the next few weeks. Our staff will be presenting this design to OCTA around the time that the EIR is released for review. Caltrans has strict guidelines for the design of their

freeways. The alternate design may require the new freeway to vary from some of these guidelines. Caltrans calls those variations "Design Exceptions". The most common design exception will be narrowing of the shoulder from the standard of ten (10) feet. The next step will be pursuing approval of these design exceptions in Sacramento for this project. Seal Beach city staff and City Council Members have also begun meeting with elected officials in Sacramento to solicit support in the City's efforts with respect to this project.

If the goal is to keep the sound wall where it is, there are two ways the public can help to make this happen. First is to participate in the environmental process. That means attend the public meeting and submit written comments to OCTA regarding the EIR. Second, make sure that the elected officials at Caltrans and OCTA are aware of how important this issue is to you as a resident.

As the review period approaches, a public meeting will be hosted at the Seal Beach Tennis Center to discuss the project and how to comment to the EIR. Seal Beach city staff, Council representatives, and our consultant team will be present to answer questions. Please contact Sean Crumby, Assistant City Manager/Director of Public Works at (562) 431-2527 ext. 1318 or via email at [scrumby@sealbeachca.gov](mailto:scrumby@sealbeachca.gov) if you have ideas on how to protect Almond Avenue and College Park East.