

COASTAL COMMISSION STAFF QUESTION: WERE TRANSIT OPPORTUNITIES CONSIDERED?

Reply:

1.0 OVERVIEW

The mass transit Alternative that was considered by The Collaborative, but not carried forward to evaluation in the Draft EIS/SEIR, is addressed in Sections 4.1.5.6 and 5.7.7 of the Project Alternatives Technical Report, and Section 2.5.5 in the Draft EIS/SEIR. Section 4.1.5.6 describes the existing public transit services in the SOCTIIP study area, including public bus, paratransit, commuter rail and intercity rail services. Plans for future rail transit in southern Orange County are also described.

The OCTAM 3.1 traffic model, which is the basis for the traffic forecasting for the SOCTIIP, assumes the OCTA's transit services were in place in September 2000 for the base-year conditions. The 2025 transit conditions in the OCTAM 3.1 model used in SOCTIIP assume that there will be improvements to select route headways, no new local routes and an approximate 50 percent increase in local bus service. Since there are no plans or findings committed to implementing a light rail transit system in southern Orange County at this time, none are assumed in the OCTAM 3.1 model. The Collaborative considered existing planning for transit improvements by the OCTA, the nature of the existing traffic system in Orange County and OCTA's analysis of future traffic patterns and travel mode choices by Orange County drivers.

Based on these considerations and the inability of a transit-only Alternative to meet future demand as articulated in the Statement of Purpose and Need for SOCTIIP, The Collaborative chose not to evaluate a mass transit Alternative in the Draft EIS/SEIR.

2.0 SEIR EXCERPTS

2.6.5.1 Description and Environmental Considerations Associated with an All-Transit Alternative

An all-transit alternative for the FTC-S assumes a light rail transit (LRT) system in lieu of general purpose and HOV travel lanes. This alternative could potentially provide distinct environmental advantages because an LRT system is assumed to require substantially less right-of-way than a corridor, freeway improvements or arterial improvements.

2.6.5.2 Density Requirements for LRT

The two most critical issues confronting fixed LRT feasibility in south Orange County, and in much of Orange County, are the lack of a central business district (CBD) and low population densities.

Orange County currently has a number of moderately dense business activity centers such as central Santa Ana, the Anaheim commercial/recreation area, Irvine Business Complex, Irvine Spectrum and the South Coast Plaza area. Surrounding these activity nodes are a variety of residential densities, including urban, suburban and rural uses, with support commercial and business uses. This type of land use development pattern results in a series of interconnected, relatively self-contained nodes of activity. Unlike urban areas organized in a concentric pattern, Orange County's multi-nucleated development does not currently provide the residential and employment densities and spatial structure in south Orange County to support a public transportation system based on a backbone LRT system. Based on recent land use projects approved and proposed in south Orange County, these developments are suburban and would not provide densities to support LRT.

The role of land use patterns in determining the type of transportation used is critical (Pushkarev and Zupan 1977). Specifically, the location and density of residential uses in relation to large CBDs are common criteria for evaluating the feasibility of LRT. According to Cervero (1984), LRT development requires an average residential density of nine du/ac in a transit corridor of approximately 65 to 260 square km (25 to 100 square mi), based on a CBD (destination) of approximately 4.6 million square m (50 million square ft) of development. This residential density is necessary because of the need to locate large numbers of dwelling units in proximity to LRT stations.

Existing development patterns in the SOCTIIP area do not meet these general criteria for LRT feasibility. The largest single areas of employment and commercial uses in the SOCTIIP area are, from south to north, downtown San Clemente, Rancho Santa Margarita Business Park in Rancho Santa Margarita and the Irvine Spectrum at the intersection of I-5 and Interstate 405 (I-405). The former Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) El Toro site, north of I-5 and I-405, is currently being planned for civilian reuse by both Orange County and the El Toro Reuse Planning Authority. Based on the passage of Measure W in the March 2002 election, potential future uses on the El Toro site are anticipated to include institutional, cultural, recreation, residential and open space uses. Downtown San Clemente and the Rancho Santa Margarita Business Park do not include sufficient business/commercial space to meet the minimum requirement of 4.6 million square m (50 million square ft) to support LRT. At build out, the Spectrum may meet this minimum requirement. In summary, there is no single major concentrated node of business and commercial uses south of the I-50/I-405 interchange that meets the minimum standard for supporting LRT in south Orange County.

The approximately 259 square km (100 square mi) area surrounding the proposed SOCTIIP corridor alternatives in south Orange County is largely developed in low to moderate density suburban residential uses with the RMV site the largest undeveloped parcel in the area. The Cities of Irvine, Laguna Hills, Laguna Niguel, Aliso Viejo, Mission Viejo, Rancho Santa Margarita, San Juan Capistrano and San Clemente and the communities of Coto de Caza and Las Flores are largely built out. The Talega and Ladera PCs are currently under construction with build out expected by 2010. It is anticipated that the remaining undeveloped areas in the SOCTIIP study area will remain as open space or will be developed with low and medium density residential uses similar to the existing residential developments throughout this part of south Orange County. A substantial part of the remaining undeveloped land is permanently committed to open space uses. In addition, there are few areas in south Orange County where higher density uses could occur and, based on General Plans and existing and approved development, substantially higher densities in undeveloped areas in south Orange County are not likely. Therefore, based on past development patterns, it is unlikely that the

average residential densities in south Orange County at build out will approach or exceed the desired density of nine dwelling units per acre for LRT feasibility.

2.6.5.3 LRT Planning in Orange County

The determination that LRT is not feasible or planned for the SOCTIIP area is consistent with several OCTA studies described below, which do not call for fixed rail transit in this part of Orange County or along either this segment of I-5 or the southern segment of the FTC.

OCTA Regional Rail Evaluation

In November 1990, Orange County voters approved Measure M, a half-cent local sales tax increase to fund transportation improvements. The improvements in the Measure M program are the rebuilding of the County's freeway system; development of a system of high speed arterials; improvements to the local street system; implementation of TSM and transportation demand management (TDM) measures to more efficiently use existing transportation resources; and development of a high capacity urban rail system in Orange County.

Since the passage of Measure M, the OCTA has conducted extensive studies to evaluate various LRT options for Orange County and to assess the environmental impacts associated with LRT. The OCTA completed the location system planning process as documented in the Countywide Rail Study Final Report: Long Range Transit System Plan – Development Strategy (OCTA, October 1991), which resulted in the development of a 47-mile “Initial Urban Rail Network” and the selection of a priority corridor for more detailed study. No LRT corridors were identified in south Orange County in this study, based on overall densities and the lack of concentrated, high density commercial/industrial centers.

OCTA Centerline Project

In December 2000, the OCTA issued a Supplemental Draft EIS/EIR for the proposed CenterLine LRT project. Alternatives considered in that Draft EIS/EIR included a variety of LRT alignments in central and northern Orange County. The southernmost extension of the LRT alternatives was to the Irvine Transportation Center, southeast of the El Toro site and north of the Irvine Spectrum. No LRT alignments were considered in south Orange County, based on overall densities and the lack of concentrated, high density commercial/industrial centers. In spring 2001, based on substantial controversy in many of the cities along the proposed LRT alignments, the OCTA temporarily terminated planning and the environmental process for the CenterLine. In early 2002, the OCTA re-initiated study for the CenterLine project in the future, focusing on building consensus for a starter or initial phase project in cities in the central and northern parts of the County. There is no indication from the OCTA that LRT would be considered in the SOCTIIP area in south Orange County in the foreseeable future because LRT would not be cost effective and existing and planned land uses are not supportive of LRT.

OCTA Fast Forward a Long-Range Transportation Plan

The “Fast Forward Plan” (OCTA, July 27, 1998) provides a strategy for managing future transportation needs in Orange County and specifically identifies a program to:

- Increase commuter rail services and station locations. No new stations are proposed in the SOCTIIP area although increased service is anticipated to be provided on the existing commuter rail line which extends across the SOCTIIP area in south Orange County, from the City of San Clemente to the City of Irvine.
- Implement a 28-mile urban rail system in central Orange County. The southern most station on this system would be in the vicinity of the I-5/I-405 interchange. This program component is expected to be refined to focus on a starter or initial phase CenterLine project in the north and central parts of Orange County as described earlier. There are still serious doubts about the feasibility of such a system and, at this time, there are no guarantees that such as system will be built.
- Increase bus service countywide.

Other Rail Transit

In addition to the LRT studies described above, Amtrak, Caltrans and the California High Speed Rail Authority (CHSRA) are evaluating possible commuter or heavy rail improvements in south Orange County. These potential improvements include increased levels of commuter service on the existing Metrolink alignment in the Los Angeles to San Diego (LOSSAN) corridor; possible double tracking of the existing rail alignment in the southern Orange County part of the LOSSAN corridor; and high speed rail (HSR) from San Diego to San Francisco, with possible alignments along the coast or inland in south Orange County. However, all these services would be limited stop commuter/intercity services and would not effectively serve the same type of market as an LRT system.

2.6.5.4 Summary of the Feasibility of LRT in the SOCTIIP Area

In summary, based on the existing and anticipated employment and residential densities in south Orange County, the existing and anticipated development patterns in study area, the need to serve travel demand which would not be met by LRT, and past and anticipated future LRT planning, LRT is not a feasible transportation system option in south Orange County. Therefore, an all-transit alternative assuming implementation of an LRT system in south Orange County is not evaluated in this EIS/SEIR.