

June 30, 2003

Board of Directors  
Orange County Transportation Authority  
550 S. Main St.  
PO Box 14184  
Orange CA 92863-1584

Dear Board Member,

This letter is a request for the OCTA to consider major alternatives for the PEROW and similar routes to help reduce future congestion and improve Orange County's economic health.

### **Background**

We are all aware of the projections of the deterioration of future traffic conditions, its effect on the citizenry, and reduction in the vitality of our social and economic conditions. We are also aware of the difficulty of finding remedies to meet future transportation demand. OCTA maintains a continuous effort to do future planning such as its recent Fast Forward and Long Range planning projects. Of the difficulties, the acquisition of additional right of way, is probably the most critical. Because of this, we have almost completely given up on developing new highways in the region. OCTA's planning projects have concentrated on relatively minor modifications to existing roads and introducing more transit in the hope that transit will entice significantly more riders.

But supposing there is a source of right of way (ROW) that is easily available and relatively easily developed? If this were the case, it would be imperative that we closely examine its possible uses to make absolutely sure we are using it to its best advantage. If this were the case then such ROW would be a precious commodity, to be carefully utilized. We would want to pay particular attention to making sure we did not squander it as had been done by past poorly thought out planning efforts.

The specific right of way that we are referring to is the no longer used Pacific Electric Right of Way (PEROW) which is now owned by the county. This ROW runs through some of the most densely populated areas in the county. According to OCTA studies there are about 590,000 people living in its corridor. The ROW has been unused for many years, lies on a straight line and is about 100 ft wide. It runs from the center of Santa Ana to the Los Angeles border and beyond, crossing I-605 and connecting to the I-105 and the Green line. Its only drawback is the lack of attractions in its middle section. But that section is where potential users live.

Various uses for this ROW have been identified. At the current time OCTA has been considering this route for an extension to a central light rail line system. Other stated desires for this ROW is for a Regional Maglev system. **But to date there has been no comprehensive alternatives analysis ever conducted for usage of this route.** (The only exception is the consideration of a small portion of the southern end for an arterial to the SA Civic center.) There has been no study to determine that using the PEROW for a rail line is the best public use of this property. Without such a study the OCTA, as part of its search for a new Centerline route, may commit itself irrevocably to a second rate usage without even knowing it. This would be irresponsible of the Authority. Such a study should be conducted immediately.

### **The Proposal**

A comprehensive Best Use Property Utilization study or a more formal Major Investment study should be conducted immediately for the PEROW. The study should

1. Determine what usage would yield the most and best public benefit. The criteria should include both the residence of the corridor and the residence of the region.
2. The alternatives should include as a minimum, Light Rail, Bus Rapid Transit, arterial highway, arterial superhighway, standard freeways and limited access narrow freeway/tollways.
3. Bus Rapid transit should consider both dedicated bus ROW and BRT light with shared auto usage, including in combination with the next item.
4. The arterial super highway goes by many names including viaduct and mini-freeway. It is halfway between an arterial and freeway. It includes outside service lanes and uses overpasses at all intersections for central through lanes. It has the potential of high capacity, fast travel speeds and service for local businesses. A presentation of this concept was made to Dave Elbaum by Dave Mootchnik recently.
5. Limited access narrow freeway/tollways are intended to provide rapid travel over longer distances. They would have egresses are no less than two miles separation.
  - Four (two lanes each way) and five lane options should be considered to minimize need for any additional property. The five lane option includes a central reversing lane.
  - Alternatives should include free access, toll access, and HOT access. Even if tolled, the road should be public funded and the pricing strategies considered to maximize people moved.
  - Shared use of the roadway for autos and express bus should be considered.
6. Consideration should be given to use of the ROW as part of a broader network improvement. The current WOC rail study would be the basis for light rail or BRT usage. Equal evaluation should be given to upgrading the arterial network when considering arterial or freeway/tollway usage. This would include reconsidering the smart street program, which is a halfway improvement and substitute arterial superstreets.
7. Consideration should also be given to both dedicated truckway usage and truck exclusion roads.
8. Potential other rail ROW that is owned or could be purchased should be identified and similar consideration as the above given

We the members of Southern California Commuter Forum urge you to implement the above best use study before committing the PEROW to any specific usage.

Sincerely Yours

Dave Mootchnik for  
Southern California Commuter Forum