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Six O.C. cities get 1

Ideas for pedestrian tunnel, shut

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An underground pedestrian crossing in Orange, hotel shuttles in Anaheim and a trolley in San Clemente are among project ideas approved for study by Orange County's largest transportation agency.

The \$300,000 allocated Monday for those three projects is part of a \$3.4-million package the Orange County Transportation Authority has made available for studies in each of the county's 34 cities to promote rail transit. Funding of the projects will be addressed later.

The agency previously approved a \$450-million upgrade of Metrolink service in Orange County, adding enough trains to run every 30 minutes, from 5 a.m. to midnight by 2009.

The city studies will help expand the reach of Metrolink by making it easier for commuters to access a nearby station via public transportation, said Ted Nguyen, an OCTA spokesman.

Monday's action affects Orange, Anaheim, Laguna Beach, San Clemente, Aliso Viejo and Villa Park, which were among the first to apply for OCTA funding.

Anaheim, which is planning to build one of the largest transit centers in Southern California, has provided an additional \$300,000 to study shuttle routes connecting the city's resort and hotel areas to the bus-rail center, said Curt Pringle, Anaheim mayor and an OCTA director.

"We're looking at everything, all the way up to a monorail connector," Pringle said.

Anaheim's new transit center will include a 20,000-square-foot Metrolink station, 1,000 parking spaces, a pedestrian underpass and pedestrian plaza. The second phase will add 2,000 parking spaces, a high-speed rail station and a pedestrian bridge linking the station to the Honda Center, formerly known as the Arrowhead Pond of Anaheim.

In Orange, the city has plans to improve its Metrolink station, including lengthening the platform to accommodate longer trains that now block vehicle traffic on Chapman Avenue. In addition, an underground pedestrian crossing is being considered, said Orange Councilwoman

Carolyn Cavecche, who is an OCTA director.

"It's a safety issue," Cavecche said. "Metrolink doesn't like riders crossing railroad tracks, which they do now, so we're going underground."

Orange is joining Anaheim and Villa Park to study the best way to funnel commuters to nearby Metrolink stations.

Meanwhile, San Clemente will look at adding a trolley to the city's public transit system that connects the downtown area and beaches to the North Beach Metrolink station, said Laurie Ferguson, an assistant to the city manager.

The city has plans for a small hotel, restaurants and commercial shops around the station area, "so the trolley fits right in," Ferguson said.

During the summer, hundreds of rail passengers step off Amtrak and Metrolink trains at the city pier each weekend, inundating local shops.

"A trolley will give Metrolink riders a chance to explore the city's main business section," Ferguson said, adding that one of the trolley's proposed routes is to Calafia Beach.

"This will be a trolley with rubber tires; no tracks," she said. "We're excited about it."

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