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Panel outlines 5-year transportation projects

OCTA officials approve a draft of a plan that outlines projects under renewed Measure M.

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THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER

ORANGE –

Transportation officials approved Tuesday a draft plan that outlines projects for the next five years under the renewed Measure M, a half-cent sales tax.

Orange County Transportation Authority board members said the agency needs to begin work on freeway, transit and local street-improvement projects, which could total \$1.6 billion by 2012.

"We need to be full speed ahead as quickly as possible," board member Curt Pringle said.

Some of the projects that could be kick-started between 2007 and 2012 include: adding lanes on the 91 between the 5 and 57 freeways, and between the 55 to the Riverside County border; adding lanes on the 405 between the 605 and 55; a new northbound lane on the 57 between Orangewood Avenue and Lambert Road.

The plan also includes improvements at rail crossings and local streets; creating quiet zones where railroads go through neighborhoods; and better synchronizing signals. The board is expected to discuss a finalized plan in August.

The current measure, approved in 1990, will expire in 2011. The renewed Measure M – dubbed, "M2" – was approved in November 2006 and will last until 2041.

"We should be responsive to what voters are anticipating," Pringle said, adding that local freeways and roads are in a "state of emergency" and should be improved swiftly.

Board members also approved a \$485,000 report to outline the next steps for the Anaheim Regional Transportation Intermodal Center, or ARTIC. It would be a full-scale transit hub with a variety of transportation modes, including Metrolink and Amtrak.

Art Leahy, OCTA's chief executive, said the center would be comparable to downtown San Diego's Santa Fe Depot.

Orange County's version could also be a pit stop for a potential high-speed train service. Jeanne Spinner LaMar, OCTA's manager of local initiatives, said the viability of building the center does not hinge on plans to build a statewide high-speed rail program.

Next steps under Measure M

- Complete conceptual engineering for all freeway projects in the plan.
- Start construction on five freeway projects on the 91, 57 and 5, totaling \$445 million.
- Award up to \$165 million to cities and the county for signal-synchronization and road upgrades.
- Increased Metrolink service within the county; improve railroad-crossing safety; and create quiet zones surrounding rail lines.

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