

City of Laguna Hills
24035 El Toro Road
Laguna Hills, CA 92653



City of Laguna Woods
24264 El Toro Road
Laguna Woods, CA 92637

City Managers' Offices

September 9, 2024

Darrell Johnson
Chief Executive Officer
Orange County Transportation Authority
550 S. Main Street
Orange, CA 92868

SUBJECT: I-5/El Toro Road Interchange Project

Dear Mr. Johnson,

As the City Managers of two of the three cities located within the I-5/El Toro Road Interchange Project (“Project”) area, we are writing to share our concerns regarding the design alternatives currently under consideration by the Orange County Transportation Authority (“OCTA”) and California Department of Transportation (“Caltrans”). We hope that our feedback will allow OCTA and Caltrans to refocus efforts and avoid further project development and environmental review costs associated with pursuing design alternatives neither city is prepared to support.

It is important to note that we share OCTA’s interest in improving traffic flow and mobility in and around the I-5/El Toro Road interchange. Likewise, we acknowledge that OCTA made a public commitment to improve the I-5/El Toro Road interchange as part of Measure M2 and agree that honoring that commitment is important and necessary. We also note that neither OCTA nor the Measure M2 Ordinance committed to any specific scope of improvements for the I-5/El Toro Road interchange and, accordingly, the design alternatives currently under consideration are not the only design alternatives that can be considered or pursued.

As you are aware, the design alternatives currently under consideration were developed during an Alternatives Assessment Study that OCTA initiated in 2021 in order to – as the Project’s webpage states – take “one more look” at the I-5/El Toro Road interchange, following an inability to reach local consensus on a preferred alternative amongst prior design alternatives. We appreciate OCTA’s ongoing recognition of the importance of identifying a preferred alternative that improves regional circulation while avoiding untenable impacts to local residents and businesses. We know that we also share a commitment to fiscal responsibility, including being prudent stewards of the Measure M2 monies and other public funds entrusted to our agencies. While it is important that something be done at the I-5/El Toro Road interchange, it is important that it be done well.

Unfortunately, having reviewed the Project's Draft Traffic Operations Analysis Report ("TOAR") and having constructively engaged with OCTA/Caltrans staff in both regular Project Development Team meetings and other settings for several years now, we have concluded that Build Alternative AA-1 and Build Alternative AA-5 would fail to produce regional circulation improvements of a magnitude to justify the hundreds of millions of dollars of expenditures and extensive right-of-way acquisition required for construction, or the years of disruptive construction that our residents, businesses, and, more broadly, Measure M2 taxpayers, would be forced to endure. Simply put, we believe pursuing either build alternative would require too much for too little, and that Measure M2 monies would be best spent on other projects.

Our recommendations are as follows:

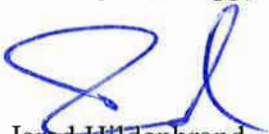
1. Cease project development and environmental review work related to Build Alternative AA-1 and Build Alternative AA-5. We strongly discourage the continued expenditure of public funds and OCTA/Caltrans staff time to advance alternatives that two of the three cities within the Project area are not prepared to support.
2. Continue project development and environmental review work related to the No Build Alternative and Transportation System Management ("TSM") and Transportation Demand Management ("TDM") Alternative. The TSM/TDM Alternative involves efforts to increase the efficiency of existing facilities, including those recently constructed as part of the I-5 South County Improvements Project. We recommend retaining an additional third-party consultant with substantial TSM/TDM experience, acceptable to all three cities within the Project area, to ensure that the TSM/TDM Alternative is as forward looking as possible, reflects the latest in best practices, and leverages the most advanced technology.
3. If the TSM/TMD Alternative is ultimately selected as the preferred alternative, implement its improvements following completion of the I-5 South County Improvements Project.

If you would like to discuss this matter further, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

CITY OF LAGUNA HILLS



Jarad Hildenbrand
City Manager

CITY OF LAGUNA WOODS



Christopher Macon
City Manager

cc: Laguna Hills City Council
Laguna Woods City Council