SR-55 ACCESS STUDY INITIAL SCREENING REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The State Route 55 (SR-55) Access Study Initial Screening Report is a cooperative effort among the Cities of Costa Mesa and Newport Beach, the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), and the Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA) to identify potential alternatives to address mobility and congestion issues within the project area of SR-55/Newport Boulevard. The objective of this process is to identify between two and four circulation alternatives that provide improved mobility, reduced congestion, and limited environmental/community impacts within the corridor and around the general region.

The focus of this report is the SR-55/Newport Boulevard corridor between 19th Street and Industrial Way. SR-55 carries more than 100,000 average daily trips (ADT) at 19th Street. SR-55 south of 19th Street and north of 17th Street carries more than 87,000 ADT. South of 17th Street to Pacific Coast Highway, Newport Boulevard carries approximately 55,000 ADT. Analysis of circulation effects (i.e., intersection operations and level of service [LOS]) also extends to a broader study area that includes Victoria Street/22nd Street to the north, Dover Drive to the east, Pacific Coast Highway to the south, and the Santa Ana River to the west.

Traffic forecasting was conducted by OCTA staff within the overall study area and along the corridor using the latest version of the Orange County Traffic Analysis Model (OCTAM).

A Purpose and Need statement was created to provide a comprehensive and specific description of why a project should be pursued and the issues to be addressed in that pursuit. The Purpose and Need for the report is based on initial community input from stakeholders in the Cities of Costa Mesa and Newport Beach (including residents and business owners), additional technical recommendations from the engineering staffs at the City of Costa Mesa, City of Newport Beach, Caltrans, and OCTA, and policy insights from city council members and members of the Orange County Board of Supervisors.

Based on the stated goals and objectives of the Purpose and Need statement and input from stakeholders, evaluation criteria were developed to identify the potential benefits and impacts of alternative strategies for the SR-55 project. The set of generalized goals are as follows:

1. **System Linkage.** The alternative provides a vehicular linkage to the regional and local transportation system.
2. **Capacity and Transportation Demand.** The alternative results in study area and Newport Boulevard-corridor arterial, intersection and freeway operations that meet municipal/agency standards or are no worse than baseline operations.
3. **Legislation/Compatibility with Plans.** The alternative provides a solution that is compatible with the Caltrans State Route Concept Report, County Master Plan of Arterial Highways, and Costa Mesa and Newport Beach General Plans.

4. **Social Demands/Economic Development.** The alternative will not create significant neighborhood and business impacts and will reduce these issues as they currently exist. The alternative will have economic, social and aesthetic benefits to the area.
5. **Modal Interrelationships.** The alternative does not preclude current or planned fixed-route OCTA bus service or future Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) service within the Newport Boulevard corridor.
6. **Project Enhancements/Safety/Roadway Deficiencies.** The alternative meets all applicable Caltrans, County, and municipal design standards to address vehicular and pedestrian safety.
7. **Implementation.** The alternative does not exhibit major impediments to secure necessary agency approvals or funding, or require unanticipated right-of-way (ROW) to implement.

A public outreach program was implemented to share information, increase awareness, and gather input from key stakeholders and local community members. The project team communicated with the public through open houses, workshops, online surveys, direct mailers and e-mail announcements. The public feedback generated from the outreach program was combined with technical analysis to develop the following seven transportation alternatives to address the Purpose and Need of the SR-55 Access Study.

- **Alternative 1 – No Build/Baseline:** Implements the City of Costa Mesa's planned improvements along the Newport Boulevard corridor while maintaining the existing SR-55/Newport Boulevard arterial configuration.
- **Alternative 2 – Current Freeway Plan:** A depressed six-lane freeway section in an easterly alignment per the existing freeway agreement.
- **Alternative 3 – Transportation System Management (TSM):** Includes an additional southbound lane to maintain four northbound and southbound lanes on Newport Boulevard as a conventional highway from 19th Street to 17th Street.
- **Alternative 4 – Improved Conventional Highway (Newport Boulevard Only):** Intended to demonstrate the extent of improvements should a conventional highway solution be pursued.
- **Alternative 5 – Vertical Terminal Enhancement:** Provides an incremental approach of improving the corridor's traffic flow by first addressing the terminals (i.e., 19th Street, 17th Street and Superior Avenue) in order to improve congestion within the corridor.
- **Alternative 6 – Freeway Elevated over Newport Boulevard:** Construction of an overhead viaduct above Newport Boulevard from 19th Street to Industrial Way.
- **Alternative 7 – Cut/Cover Freeway along Newport Boulevard:** Construction of an entirely new structure below Newport Boulevard providing a four-lane controlled access freeway under Newport Boulevard from 19th Street to Industrial Way and an interchange at 19th Street.

Alternative 4 was removed from further consideration as it is simply a demonstration of the conventional capital needs to satisfy future travel demand. The seven alternatives were then subject to further input from the public and were refined accordingly. Each alternative was then screened to rule out those concepts and strategies that would not advance the project Purpose and Need, and to identify those concepts and strategies that achieve the greatest concurrence with the Purpose and Need, and warrant more detailed engineering and environmental analysis.

Based on the full or significant achievement of the evaluation criteria and Purpose and Need, the following alternatives are recommended for further analysis and consideration in subsequent, more detailed studies:

- Alternative 1 – No Build/Baseline Condition
- Alternative 5 – Vertical Terminal Enhancement
- Alternative 7 – Cut/Cover Freeway along Newport Boulevard

These alternatives may be considered as individual improvement projects or in combination with elements of other alternatives to maximize congestion relief while minimizing community intrusion and impacts. The TSM alternative has not been screened out. Instead, it is recommended that the affected agencies consider the strategies and components of the TSM alternative to provide short-range congestion relief.