

BRIEFING PAPER

Smart Mobility Study – The Refined Arterial Improvement Plan Alternative

Background

We have reviewed “An Alternative to the Proposed Foothill South Toll Road”, a report prepared by Smart Mobility, Inc. (SMI) of Norwich, Vermont in the context of the Final Environmental Impact Report/South Orange County Transportation Infrastructure Improvements Plan (FEIR/SOCTIIP) approved by the Foothill/Eastern Transportation Corridor Agency (TCA). The SMI report contends that a series of arterial and I-5 improvements (AIP stands for arterial improvements plus widening of I-5) called the Refined AIP (AIP-R) meets the future traffic demands in South County and is a better alternative to the extension of the Foothill Transportation Corridor-South (FTC-S) due to its minimal impact to the environment, homes and businesses.

Specific Issues:

The widening of I-5 and arterials proposed in the AIP-R, are proposed/assumed to be generally within the existing road right-of-way. This feasibility of this proposal is not supported by any technical engineering or survey analysis. The proposal does not seem to be practical without significant impacts to adjacent properties or reducing MPAH (Master Plan of Arterial Highways) Standards. Reduction of arterials below these standards can have adverse impacts to fire and emergency response times in communities served by the County.

The study states that proposed AIP-R improvements would maintain the “(SOCTIIP) AIP Traffic Performance...of equivalent traffic relief” This conclusion is only a qualitative judgment and not supported by any traffic analysis.

The report also concludes that ‘even minor refinements to the design of the (SOCTIIP) AIP can greatly reduce or even eliminate displacement, such as ...context-sensitive interchange design’. A Context Sensitive Design, alternative (Design minimizing impacts to existing uses/environment) was evaluated in the approved FEIR/SOCTIIP. However this alternative was considered and rejected by the TCA Board as not meeting the project goals and objectives. The following Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) statement summarizes the TCA Board deliberation as follows: “for each potential project, designers are faced with the task of balancing the need for the highway improvement with the need to safely integrate the design into the surrounding natural and human environments.”

Impacts to Orange County Unincorporated areas.

The AIP & AIP-R reports assume expansion of Antonio Parkway/Avenida La Pata to an eight lane Smart Street facility from Oso Parkway to San Juan Creek Road and to a six-lane Smart Street from San Juan Creek Road to Avenida Pico. In addition, Smart Street technologies would also be included on Ortega Highway between Antonio Parkway/Avenida La Pata and I-5, Camino La Ramblas between Avenida La Pata and I-5 and Avenida Pico between Avenida La Pata and I-5. Smart Street technologies include a combination of advanced traffic management strategies such as traffic signal

coordination, real time monitoring and surveillance, and traveler information, as well as modest physical improvements such as additional turn lanes at intersections. The study does not provide any quantification of the traffic/LOS benefits of the application of this technology to these facilities.

Antonio Parkway is designated on the Master Plan of Arterial Highway (MPAH) as a Major Arterial Highway (six lanes) and La Pata Avenue as a Primary (four lanes). The AIP proposed changes will require amendments to the MPAH to upgrade these facilities- a proposal that is not likely to be supported by any adjacent jurisdictions. In addition significant new development is approved and constructed along Antonio Parkway since the SOCTIIP AIP was developed in 2001. Widening of Antonio Parkway to an eight lane roadway is inconsistent with the goals and objectives of the approved environmental documents for these communities. La Pata Avenue is designated as a Primary Arterial Highway and currently it is the only access to the Prima Deshecha landfill facility and to the adjacent San Juan High School and other adjacent development. A six lane facility through the landfill is inconsistent with the approved Prima Deshecha General Development Plan and with the approved development along La Pata Avenue. The AIR-R also relies on an extension of La Pata Avenue as a six lane facility (unbuilt segment). This proposal is inconsistent with the MPAH and the Circulation Plan of the City of San Clemente. In addition improvements, beyond the MPAH, to both Antonio Parkway and La Pata Avenue are inconsistent with the environmental document of the recently approved Ranch Planned Community.

In addition the feasibility and effectiveness of providing grade separation at the intersections of Antonio Parkway/Oso Parkway, Antonio Parkway/Crown Valley Parkway, Antonio Parkway-La Pata Avenue/Ortega Highway, and Avenida La Pata/Avenida Pico as proposed in the AIP-R are also unknown and not addresses in the AIP-R report.

Conclusion

Our review of this report does not support the study's conclusion because the AIP-R does not use the same lane configurations as the FEIR/SOCTIIP AIP Alternative and is not substantiated by any technical engineering or traffic analysis. In addition some of the arterial improvement assumptions will have detrimental impacts on approved development in South County in general and specifically on the communities of Las Flores, Ladera, Rancho Mission Viejo/Ranch Plan and the Prima Deshecha Landfill operations.