

OCTA APPROVAL OF CENTERLINE

A short introductory background. In September 1999 OCTA published the first complete system description and environmental documentation of the Centerline light rail system. Over the next two months, strong dissent was received from the cities of Anaheim, Orange, and Santa Ana though which it would run.

In response, the plan was revised in minor detail and revised description and environmental documentation issued in December 2000. Again there was significant opposition. In March 2001, the newly arrived CEO called a halt to the overt promotion of it.

In September 2001, the Mayors of Irvine, Costa Mesa, and Santa Ana unveiled a revised and shortened plan which would go only from Santa Ana to Irvine, about 17 miles, and in a blitzkrieg attack pushed it through all three city councils with essentially no analysis nor organized citizen opposition.

On the basis of this "mandate", on October 22, 2001, the Board of Directors of the Orange County Transportation Authority unanimously approved proceeding to the 40 million dollar preliminary engineering study of the Centerline light rail system.

The following is the verbatim tape transcript of those proceedings. The almost complete lack of understanding of the fundamental issues of effectiveness and cost, is shocking. It was all about "we've got to do something, affording a choice, vision, and excitement". Only Supervisor Spitzer even purported to provide any objective rationale whatsoever, and that effort was flawed by glaringly wrong or misunderstood data.

Meeting of the Board of Directors of OCTA
October 22, 2001
Revised Centerline Approval

VERBATIM TRANSCRIPT

Chairman **Mike Ward**: That's the last request for public comment. Board comments? Vice chairman Spitzer:

Director **Todd Spitzer**: I'll try to be quick because I know the Directors want to talk. First of all I want to thank the speakers on both sides for coming. The decision today is whether to proceed with preliminary engineering. It's a very important first step.

Let's be clear about a few things. Orange County today and in the future is not the Orange County of yesteryear. If you look at housing development and infill projects and redevelopment projects, what is happening in the city of Brea, where I lived for ten years and represented on the Board of Supervisors and still do, the downtown cottage street Ashley project. That's where people want to live and work in the same place. The Ameridge project, which I think was highlighted

in the LA Times this weekend in Fullerton, is another similar project where you are going to see people living and working and recreating closer to home.

Let's talk about equity. Talk about Federal dollars. Transit receives \$6.3 billion, highways \$31.4 billion and airlines \$12 billion dollars, so to say that light rail, which should not compete as a transit project competitively as against every other ??? is not fair. In terms of costs per mile, it actually costs us 55 cents per mile to operate buses and light rail, on the average, will be 45 cents, so it's actually cheaper than to operate buses. Let's talk about major city impacts in terms of light rail. Growth of transit in Dallas with light rail construction increased 14¹/₂%, St. Louis 30.7%, Portland 40.6%, San Diego 49%, Sacramento 76%.

Let's talk about capacity. You build six lanes of freeway, you can handle 15 (sic) cars per hour, per lane, and that's 300 feet of right-of-way. Look around this County. I mean, the debate we're having about the 22 and I think one of the speakers talked about the incredible amount of dollars. Talk about the intrusions to businesses and people, when you start cutting into their backyards and taking their home and condemning, that's intrusion. So for 300 feet of right-of-way, for 100 feet of right-of-way, which is what light rail takes, you carry the same capacity .. and you move a lot of people much more efficiently.

In terms of infill and commercial, why do people make investment decisions in terms of investing their community either in residential or commercial or infill projects? They do that because of the certainty of transportation routes. So the argument is, well, buses are flexible, they're more responsive to demand. Actually, the opposite is true if you're trying to create that relationship between development and transportation. People are not going to make those kinds of heavy duty capital expenditures until they know that there's a fixed route and they can count on its permanency. It's the transportation routes that would drive the kind of great projects that we're starting to see in this County and primarily (?) north Orange County.

And lastly, the Journal of American Planning has documented in its Rail Transit and Joint Development Study, that office rents and near stations rise as a result of the rail. On average of \$3 per square foot increases and that there's lower vacancy rates. Why? Because of the traffic. And the foot traffic and the amount of the people. And also, in the Bart system, homeowners are willing to pay \$16 on average per home comps for every foot they are closer to a light rail system and they will pay \$8 higher for every foot they are **away** from a freeway. So people want to pay to live closer to a light rail and they want to pay a premium to get **away** from freeways.

We're the fourth densest county in the nation. People that...It's not intuitive when you look around but it is documented in, a.. it's documented we're the fourth densest county in the nation. We're the second densest county in the State of California just behind San Francisco. And so we're going from 2.7 to 3.3 million people in the next decade. This is a (sea ?) change of opportunity and we need to seize it. And it's about planning today. It's about what Mayor Agran said about doing the facts (?) for tomorrow. But it is a planning process where we're

actually being responsive and proactive to the demand and what we want to see this County be today and in the future. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman: Thank you. Director Katz

Director **Sarah Katz:** Thank you. Two things. Before I say my comments. I would love the CEO to address Assemblyman Maddox's comments because obviously we aren't doing enough to educate our Legislative representatives if those comments were made.

CEO **Leahy:** The comment was made that we are perhaps not invested enough in the 22. We have in fact just begun in the last ten days moving forward on a project using State monies, specifically earmarked for HOVs in both directions the entire length of that freeway. In addition to that there will be rebuilt on and off ramps, there will be auxiliary lanes where the freeway is congested today. In addition to that, an improved connection between the southbound 5 to the westbound 22. So we think that there will be major improvements to that freeway. I would also note that, for the benefit of the audience here that, with the full cooperation of Caltrans, we'll be using a design build approach to advance this project three or four years faster than had been the initial schedule. So it's an exciting project that's going to improve State Route 22.)

Back to Katz: And, we're talking different pots of money and the funds for the 22 are already there, correct?

Leahy: A little over half are State money. We have a request before the Citizen's Oversight Committee to use measure M freeway monies for the full funding of that project. Those are the measure M monies which are specifically earmarked for freeways and thus that's the intent.

Director **Katz:** I'd really like to recommend Staff that we go out and meet with all our Legislative Representatives so that we don't hear comments like that and that they feel educated and informed about what we're doing. Additionally, I just wanted to thank you for what we've heard, from the three cities leaders saying things. I also want to say that it's so refreshing to see vision in our local elected officials. And that's a sad statement that as an Orange Countian I have to say that and I applaud Irvine, Santa Ana and Costa Mesa for the vision they showed and the spine that it took to vote on a controversial project. I really want to applaud you for that. After Irvine's vote, I decided to move to Irvine. I want to live in a city that has light rail. I purchased a car last November 30th and I have over 30,000 miles on it and I go to this courthouse at least twice a week and what a thrill it will be for me to get on a light rail system and not have to take my car. I take Metrolink. I take Amtrack to be able to go to the Santa Ana Transportation Center. Not have to worry about my car if I have to leave it over night. It's just wonderful. And no I'm not maybe the average Orange Countian but there are many Orange Countians just like me, and I'm thrilled about it. And I'm leaving the Board in January and I pledge to the Board and to the Staff that I will do everything in my power to help you with this project. I'm hoping to live in Oak

Creek which is one of the communities that is concerned about this project. I will work with my neighbors and I'm with you and Congratulations.

Director **Miguel Pulido**: Did you know she's moving in after your vote, Mike? (lots of laughter and comments.) What I'd like to do Mr. Chairman is offer a motion for approval on the items before us and if there's a second, (Katz and others: second) I'd like to make some comments. First of all, I think we need to ask ourselves a lot of questions, questions like, what's the farebox return of a street or a freeway. You know, we're always, I think, in certain ways having double standards when we look at light rail and the tremendous opportunity, I think, it would offer our cities and our County. I think if you look at the amount of land that we've yielded to transportation and particularly the car, you know, take whatever number you want \$7 a square foot, \$10 a square foot, multiply it out, it's a tremendous subsidy that we give, you know, private transportation in the form of cars and I think we need to start bringing in alternatives and looking at things that work, and I'm excited about this alternative. I've met with people, ah, staff, city council members, community leaders. I think this alignment has tremendous potential. As we look long term into the future, I believe we're going to have green energy. I know people say, gee, it doesn't really do anything about pollution because you're just offsetting it with a plant somewhere else. You know there's isn't going to be more and more green energy, what I mean by that, are windmills or renewable energy sources. We won't be able to use any of that energy in the County if we don't, -- in transportation, if we don't have something like a light rail. I don't see any change coming quickly enough for that to have an impact. I know, as we look at Santa Ana in particular for a moment, we're the densest city in southern California, and for a lot of people, I think, that fact is missed. You can look at cities throughout the entire region and it's a huge region in terms of people per square mile -- there are more folks here than anywhere else in southern California -- and I think this offers another mechanism -- a good mechanism -- of moving back and forth. I'm very pleased and I certainly don't consider our Executive Director the Pied Piper from Minneapolis for or bringing in crabgrass. I think, you know, what he's bringing in is credibility, his vision, his experience, it's the ability to see different things in the future. And, personally, for me his leadership has meant a lot. As we've looked at different alternatives and this is a study, this is a study. It's a study to answer all the questions that are going to come out of the meetings and everything that takes place but it's a study that, I think, has to take place in order for all of us to decide whether we can proceed or not.

I also want to thank, in particular, the mayors from Costa Mesa and Irvine, but Larry, for his initial insistence, I mean, part of the reason, you know, much of this happened with Art and the whole Board and the continued desire to make our County a better place to be but it was also, you know, just Larry Agran calling and wanting to meet and I give him a lot of credit for his leadership and vision and effort for us to go forward. Finally, I would just like to say that I know there's also other monies like the STIP money that's in a place here but I think we shouldn't just focus on, you know, on the specifics at this point. I think we should focus on where do we want to go as a society and what's going to work well and

fifty, a hundred, years from now, how do we leave a better place for those that will follow. And I think that this study today is a potential answer in a positive direction to that effect. When you look at this rendering that was put together and they have the old County courthouse there in the background. You know, that was an asset that was built over a hundred years ago and it served a function, and helped us get a lot of things going in the County. I think this light rail, in the future is going to be seen the same way. And, therefore, I think today's vote is a very important vote and I hope it's unanimous. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Director **Jim Silva**: Thank you, Mr. Chairman..I think I've probably been as concerned about taxpayer dollars as anybody on this Board. I know, even on the Board of Supervisors, I've been chastised for perhaps being a little bit too concerned about spending taxpayer dollars. I do feel that light rail would be a solution to part of the problem. It wouldn't be a solution to all of our transportation problem just like the freeways are not a solution to transportation but take those freeways away from Orange County, you'd see some major problems. The 22 freeway, as was mentioned, I think, will require more work in addition to what is already planned. But that will be in the future. What we have to deal with is what are our problems right now and how can we deal with them today. And I think that the cities of Huntington Beach, Seal Beach, Los Alamitos and Cypress have all favored the light rail and we realize in that part of the County, that in order to have light rail service our citizens, we're going to have to get the program started and, I think, the program that will be voted on today is the right direction. It was in 1998, I believe, I was with Mr. Hodge back in Washington, D.C., and I testified before a House appropriations committee on funding for the light rail. And right before I spoke, the Committee took a recess so I was with several Congressmen that were about to speak. So we had a chance to visit about our programs and our projects and everyone that was speaking had a light rail project somewhere. There was a Congresswoman from, Miami, Florida, a Conservative Republican and she said we need the light rail because we want to keep people employed and I think we're looking at exactly the same thing here in Orange County. We want to make sure that we can keep our citizens employed. Orange County has the lowest unemployment rate in the State, probably second or third in the Nation and as long as we can get people to work, we should keep them employed. And for that reason, I will be supporting this.

Director **Laurann Cook**: This has been a long time coming to this Board and I think that what is nicest is that it originated from the cities and that's where a project of this magnitude should come. It's because we do represent the citizens of (Fountain Val – oops) Orange County and to have the cities come on board, it's very important.

I think we did the right thing several months ago. We took a step back and we reevaluated the project, did that outreach to the cities and now we are in a better position for taking that step back. I would like to reiterate something that Director Katz said and that I would certainly like Mr. Leahy to have another meeting with Assembly member Maddox to make sure that his information is

accurate, so there is no confusion about what we're doing. You know, because if misinformation is out there to our State Legislators then I'm also concerned about what is related to the citizens of Orange County. So before any other misinterpretation or misinformation is assumed, I would like Mr. Maddox to have meeting with us on that regard.

One of the things that is important that we talk about today is that this is just the beginning of many multiple outreach opportunities that this organization of cities will be doing with its residents. We've not made that commitment, unfortunately Director Katz and I won't be on the Board to help make that commitment in two years down the road. But I have confidence that this Board will look to the future and have the vision necessary to make Orange County continue to be the outstanding place to live that it is. I think what today is, it's allowing us to provide information and the forums will allow us to enhance that information which will evaluate and address the issues at hand. We're not making that decision but preliminary engineering and the recommendations today allow us to do that. Saying, Cities, what are your concerns? How can we better make it a better project for you? And so I want everyone here who is not happy with the recommendation report to know that you still will have ample opportunity to show us what your concerns are and to allow us to address them.

Alternate Director **Shirley McCracken**: I didn't expect to be sitting here. I'm an alternate at large and I sit for any city representative who's not here. With great concern, and I have met with OCTA staff and with our own city staff over past few years, my concern has always been the technology because just some of the concerns I've heard about the environment, about the energy, about the type of technology, having read the report, I hope some of these will be the answers we get.

In the last month I have been at several meetings of work groups in Orange County that are looking at rail projects. And to say that the community out there is not looking at rail, does not want rail when measure M, one of the elements in it, and I did read it, asked for high tech rail. So when it passed, that was the element that was different from the previous times. So, you know, you're having kind of mixed response as someone who came to this County over thirty years ago and didn't have a driver's license, because I came from communities that had public transportation. So half of my life was spent on public transportation and found that, when my mother came to retire and live with us, she only stayed 18 months because she went back to the east where she could, because she was legally blind, so she could travel. Because she was totally isolated in Orange County. And that is a frightening experience and I think may happen to me somewhere down the line if I don't have any opportunities to have public transportation that can take me to the venues that I need to go to as a senior citizen. And looking at my own city and finding that the population is aging every single day. (interrupted by aging remarks, ha, ha.) So we heard about our young people and we have this, you know, kind of dichotomy with all these young people and we have a huge number under 18 and under 16, who don't drive and then we have this huge number of seniors who shouldn't be driving (Ha, Ha.)

.So I do think we need somehow, someway to move forward and we can argue this, you know, for another two or four years and somewhere along the line we're going to have to stop and study and look at what the issues are and I'm going to be here at least for another year and I'm going to keep asking hard questions because I think it's vitally important that we look at a balance that has to happen and if we don't do that we are no longer suburbia.

You know, thirty years ago,. I drove five miles through, dairy farms to go from my apartment to teach school. You can't find five miles of dairy farms anywhere in this County. (muffled comments from Board) It just doesn't exist anymore. It isn't the same county that it was thirty years ago and if we don't take that reality and move forward with the reality, our children and grandchildren are going to say, what happened? You know, here you have a County which has an economy unlike any other county in the country and they could not have the vision to plan for the future, and I think this is the first step. I think there are a lot of hard questions that have to be asked along the way and I think we have to continue to do that. And I think all of these other rail projects that we are hearing about probably are going to part of a whole network of transportation projects. They're going to make Orange County a viable county to live in the next thirty years.

Director **Art Brown**: There's always been talk of light rail in this county since the early 1990s with the old fixed guideway JPA and this centerline follows basically what the JPA setup, is what they wanted for light rail in the County, from Fullerton to Irvine.

We had comments today about "We need more public outreach". Last year we had 23 presentations to the public, 40 one-on-one presentations, and this year we've had 24 public presentations and 31 one-on-ones. Those one-on-ones consist of groups of from 1 to 10 people. That doesn't count the city council presentations and our own citizen advisory committee presentations.

I hear the question about hi-tech rail. Well today's light rail isn't the light rail of yesterday. The only thing that's the same is the overhead wires. When you talk about hi-tech, the only thing that I've seen hi-tech that's come out recently is Mag Lev which will get its first revenue service in China next year. I don't know what,...I think right now we're almost tech....ah, technology neutral on what type of light rail we're going to have. We could end up with the low (?) speed like Mag Lev (like distributed down in China (?)) We don't know what we're going to get yet. That will be determined in the future. But I look forward to this passing today. I'm also a member of the West Orange County Citizens Association. We're looking at light rail in western Orange County. This will be the starter unit that will prove it in Orange County that light rail is viable and is what this county is going to need to have transportation in the future. Thank you.

Chairman **Mike Ward** : We have a motion and a second before the Board. I would just like to venture a prediction that if this passes, the headlines in one of the newspapers tomorrow, will be , OCTA Approves Centerline, not preliminary engineering, not even to go out..., all we're asking for is to go out with an RFP for

preliminary engineering. But the headline will say that, OCTA Approves Centerline. Because.—(man: “quote unquote the chairman”) Yeah, quote unquote the chairman. (laughter)

Yeah, the editorial’s already said that we’re voting to approve it today. Now I’ve got a motion before the Board and a second. Any further discussion? (Woman: just for the reporters in the audience, I understand you have nothing to do with the headlines.) Yeah, (Laughter) believe me I know that. (laughter and garbled words). Is there any objection to the motion? We will show that to be unanimous.

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