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## **DERAIL CENTERLINE**

OCTA's Light Rail advocacy ignores factual findings of their own studies.

Jack Mallinckrodt  
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The other day, OCTA (Orange County Transportation Authority) held a meeting with elected city officials to discuss how to get the stalled Centerline light rail program back on track. Fullerton Mayor Richard Jones struck what seemed to be the keynote for many of the participants when he said, "We've studied this thing to death. It's time to move dirt instead of wind"

Indeed, we have studied light rail to — what should have been its — death. But have the proponents ever read beyond the OCTA editorializing executive summaries of those reports? I think not. Maybe it's time for a quick review of the factual findings of those studies.

In 1991 OCTA contracted a \$700,000 "Countywide Rail Study". Considering a range of rail alternatives, it recommended a 25-mile light-rail system from Fullerton to Irvine. Total Present Value (TPV) cost would be \$2.6 Billion and the 20-year future ridership projection 406,000 person-miles per day. In perspective, always conspicuously missing from the OCTA reports, that's less than 0.34% of our total county traffic, at a cost per passenger-mile ( per ps-mi) 38 times that of freeways.

Dissatisfied with that finding, OCTA undertook a two year "Peer Review" which basically confirmed those results.

About this time, the rules of qualification for Federal aid changed, requiring a comprehensive study of all alternatives, called a Major Investment Study. The

final results of this \$3.1 Million MIS study released in June 1997 recommended the same route, at a total present value cost of \$1.8 Billion and 20-year performance projection of 218,000 ps-mi/day. In perspective that's 0.18% of county traffic at a cost per ps-mi, 102 times that of freeways. As compared to unrestricted roads and bus expansion, the light rail alternative shared with HOV lane additions, the dubious distinction of least benefit per dollar, in terms of every quantified measure including reduction of total travel time delay, freeway traffic congestion, arterial traffic congestion, fuel consumption and CO emissions.

Finally, in September 1999 OCTA released the result of a \$7 Million Preliminary Planning and Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) of the now renamed Centerline project. For the elevated alternative, the total present value cost was \$2.76 Billion and the 20-year projected ridership 259,000 ps-mi/day. However, the same study also provided data showing that a major portion of that ridership was simply diverted from bus mode. Only that portion of the ridership diverted from automobile mode has any beneficial effect on congestion or environment and that beneficial ridership was found to be 169,000 ps-mi/day. In perspective that's 0.14% of total county traffic at a cost per passenger-mile, 205 times that of freeways.

The basic message of all these studies has been consistent: miniscule, imperceptible congestion and environmental benefit, at a cost per unit benefit, 30 to 200 times that of roads for the same benefit. Needless to say, this essential perspective, even though a trivial extension of other results obtained, was never explained in the editorializing executive summaries of any of the OCTA studies.

Why is this particular perspective important? These cost and capacity results are at the heart of our transportation problem. Texas Transportation Institute studies show that congestion and all its adverse consequences is proportional to the (regional volume)/ (regional capacity) ratio, both measured in person-miles per day. Orange County is already suffering from a near worst-in-nation

transportation capacity shortfall, with traffic volume 36% over capacity and correspondingly near worst regional congestion. Of all of the ill effects of congestion, the single most costly is travel-time delay, currently estimated at more than \$4 Billion per year for the county. In the next 20 years, if nothing further is done beyond current firm plans, county system overload is projected to grow to 72%, far beyond any experience nationally today, and with a congested time delay cost of some \$7.9 Billion (1999 dollars). The miniscule effect of the proposed Centerline rail additions would be to reduce that overload imperceptibly from 71.9% to 71.7%, reducing the \$4 Billion annual cost of congestion by less than \$6 Million per year — a benefit only 1/50 th of the annualized system cost. By contrast, a comparable investment in roads and freeways would yield a benefit of 3.65 times system cost.

In short, the most significant cost of the proposed light rail system is not just its adverse neighborhood impacts and enormous capital and operation cost, but the lost opportunity cost of the wasted funding resources that otherwise could be used to significantly reduce our looming catastrophic congestion, along with its adverse consequences including: lost travel-time, pollution, fuel consumption, accidents, and stress.

Indeed the issue has been studied to death. Now, LET'S JUST DO IT. Do what the factual findings of these studies all have demanded when read with any understanding. STOP this obscene waste on light rail once and for all.

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[800 words]