

OCTC Obligations Reporting

The Orange County Transportation Council (OCTC), as the designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for Orange County, New York is required by Federal law to report how federal money was committed to federally-aided projects each year. These commitments are called “obligations”. Obligations are different than amounts which are “programmed” for projects. Each of these terms, among many others, have specific meanings in the context of Federal aid programs. The tables posted on this web page show advanced construction funding amounts in addition to federal obligation amounts because for practical purposes both represent federal funds that have been set aside for projects that cannot be spent elsewhere.

OCTC is required to produce a Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) which is a multi-modal capital program that “programs” federal funds to highway, bridge, bikeway, pedestrian, transit, and demand management projects that will be undertaken over the next three to five years. Individual project listings in the TIP identify the proposed schedule, scope, costs, and federal, state and local fund source assignment. Only projects which have been placed on the TIP and then incorporated within the State TIP, can be progressed if they are funded in whole or in part with federal funds. In order to begin work on any phase of a transportation project involving Federal funds, the funds must be obligated. Once money has been obligated for a specific phase of a project the money is essentially set aside so it can only be used for that specific phase, it does not necessarily mean that work has begun on that phase. It is at these decision points within the process at which commitments through contracts are being made which require that an accounting step be taken to ensure that funds will be in place to make good on those commitments. The conclusion of the decision-making process at these points (if approved) is an “obligation” of funds. This information is what is required to be reported and is, from one perspective, a measure of how much of what is programmed to happen is actually happening.

PROJECT PHASES

The phases associated with the Obligations Report are listed below. Highway projects generally follow the phases in order, from ‘Scoping’ to ‘Construction Inspection’, with the exception that not all projects necessitate additional right-of-way in which case the associated right-of-way phases would be skipped. Transit projects that don’t require actual building are listed under the ‘Other’ phase for the purpose of the obligation report.

The following is a list of project phases:

Scoping: Meetings are held with project developers and designers, local government representatives, and other involved parties. Decisions are made about the specific elements that will be included in the project, and the range of design alternatives that will be investigated.

Preliminary Design: This phase includes basic engineering work on each alternative, traffic studies, environmental analyses, and other work specific to the project. Public outreach is used to gain community input into project design. This phase ends with the selection and approval of a project alternative.

Final Design: In this phase, the actual plans and specifications that the construction contractor will work from are created.

Right of Way Incidentals: Preparation work done prior to the acquisition of the right-of-way.

Right of Way Acquisition: In this phase, right-of-way necessary for the completion of a project is acquired either through purchase or easements.

Construction: This encompasses all of the work to build the project, whether it is done by a contractor or an agency's own staff.

Construction Inspection: In order to make sure that the work is being done properly and conforms to specifications, there is ongoing inspection. Sometimes this work is done by NYSDOT or the Orange County Department of Public Works, but it is often contracted out.

Other: This phase is usually associated with public transit projects and may involve the purchase and acquisition of rolling stock and associated equipment; in some cases, it covers the construction of fixed or permanent facilities such as a station, parking, and maintenance/storage facilities.