



May 14, 2020

To: Transit Committee
From: Darrell E. Johnson, Chief Executive Officer
Subject: June 2020 Bus Service Change

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Darrell Johnson", is written over the "From:" line of the header.

Overview

The June 2020 bus service change consists of adjustments to bus service levels that account for the novel coronavirus pandemic effects. The changes include increases in frequency on higher ridership routes and restoration of service on some routes that were suspended in March 2020. The June service change strikes a balance between anticipated increased customer demand, social distancing, and coach operator availability. The primary strategy is to transition the current service to Saturday service levels.

Recommendation

Receive and file as an information item.

Background

The Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA) implements schedule and route revisions to selected bus routes three times a year, in February, June, and October. The next bus service change is scheduled for implementation on June 14, 2020. OCTA implemented an emergency service change on March 23, 2020, which temporarily reduced service to comply with Governor Newsom's stay-at-home order and help protect the health of OCTA employees while providing a baseline level of service for customers needing to make essential trips. The service change in June will be focused on restoring service based on an anticipated increase in demand, social distancing, and labor availability.

Discussion

After the implementation of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) stay-at-home order, weekday OC Bus ridership dropped significantly. Weekday ridership decreased from approximately 125,000 boardings to the low 30,000s, but has been steadily recovering and is now in the mid-40,000s. On March 23, 2020, OCTA reduced fixed-route bus service by approximately 40 percent by

implementing a Sunday service schedules on all routes, seven days a week. Service on the Metrolink rail-feeder routes continued to operate.

This proactive measure was in response to significantly lower ridership and an effort to help minimize health risks to coach operators and passengers while still providing a critical public service. Moving to Sunday service could be done quickly because existing schedules could be used, and the change could be easily communicated to passengers. As part of this change, service was suspended on ten local/community bus routes, five freeway express routes, as well as Bravo! and Xpress limited-stop routes not operating on Sunday. Staff has continually monitored passenger loads based on ridership data, customer feedback, and coach operator observations. Additional bus trips have been deployed, when possible, on routes where passenger loads have created social distancing issues.

Staff anticipates that demand for OC Bus service will increase between now and mid-June based on the easing of the stay-at-home restrictions. As some businesses reopen, it is anticipated that the public will start using the bus system more often. OCTA will continue to monitor and comply with appropriate state and federal guidance on transit service operation, including that related to social distancing and cleaning best practices. To allow for social distancing, OCTA is currently operating additional buses on certain routes to keep passenger loads low. As such, it is prudent to increase bus service levels during the upcoming June service change to allow for social distancing and accommodate additional customers. OCTA is also mindful of coach operator availability because some employees are not able to return to work.

The primary strategy is to transition the current service to Saturday service levels. This will increase service by 143 daily bus trips over the 1,825 daily bus trips currently being operated. In addition, 141 trips will be strategically added to routes on weekdays where social distancing is a concern, based on current passenger loads. Additional unscheduled trips will be operated, when needed, based on passenger loads to allow for social distancing. Weekday service will also be restored on nine local and community routes that did not have weekend schedules and were therefore suspended in March 2020. Community Route 150 will remain suspended because of the availability of nearby routes. All routes will operate on the weekends based on their normal Saturday or Sunday schedules. There will be no OC Fair Express service this year as the OC Fair has been cancelled.

A summary of the service plan is outlined below. A table describing the details by route is shown in Attachment A. The attachment lists the level of added trips by route and the related revenue hour changes. Also, a map of the route

changes by type is shown in Attachment B. Routes that will continue to have their suspended service are shown in Attachment C.

Service Change Highlights

- Improve weekday service levels on 37 routes by implementing Saturday schedules instead of Sunday schedules, which include increased frequency and/or hours of operation.
- Operate additional weekday bus trips on 15 routes above the Saturday schedule to allow for social distancing.
- Continue to provide regular service on Stationlink rail feeder routes.
- Continue suspension of service on freeway express and limited-stop bus routes which do not operate on weekends.

Overall, the June service change will increase weekday service by 517 daily bus trips and Saturday service by 147 daily trips. Annualized revenue vehicle hours will increase from the 955,641 operated since March to 1,210,312. This is 25 percent below the 1,625,000 annualized revenue vehicle hours operated prior to COVID-19. This amount of service provides for an effective level of bus service that accounts for potential added demand and sufficient capacity to permit social distancing and promote customer confidence. Staff will reassess service levels for the October service change based on customer demand, workforce availability, and social distancing, which may result in route deletions or additions, and adjustments to frequency or span of service.

Communication and engagement will continue to play a key role in building confidence and trust as OCTA delivers critical public transportation services during and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic. To notify customers about the June service change, OCTA is developing information to include the new service and schedules, as well as the safety measures OCTA has implemented such as rear-door boarding and new capacity limits to accommodate social distancing. The information will be distributed two weeks prior to June 14, 2020, through brochures distributed on-board buses and by mail, signage inside and outside the bus, as well as at stops and transit centers. In addition, digital messaging via email, texting, social media, mobile apps, and OCTA's website will be deployed to ensure sufficient level of awareness of the June service change.

Federal Requirements

The changes to bus service for both March and June 2020 are considered temporary services changes, as they are in response to an emergency, and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) has indicated that they are not considered "major service changes", where a Service Equity Analysis and a public participation process would otherwise be required. Staff informed the regional

FTA office about the changes made in March and will also inform the FTA about the June changes.

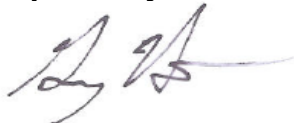
Summary

The June 2020 bus service change increases the weekday frequency to Saturday service levels in anticipation of additional demand as stay-at-home orders are eased. The service levels were developed based on anticipated demand, workforce availability, and social distancing. Notification of the changes to customers will be issued two weeks prior to implementation of the service change.

Attachments

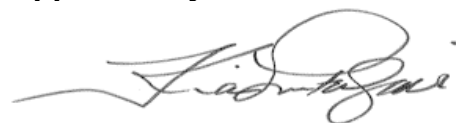
- A. June 2020 Bus Service Change Summary
- B. June 2020 Bus Service Change System Map, Weekday Service Levels
- C. June 2020 Bus Service Change System Map, Suspended Routes

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