



December 8, 2022

To: Transit Committee

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "DEJ", with the word "For" written in smaller letters above the signature.

From: Darrell E. Johnson, Chief Executive Officer

Subject: February 2023 Bus Service Change

Overview

The proposed February 2023 bus service change consists of the implementation of the initial phase of the final service plan for the Making Better Connections Study, which was approved by the Board of Directors on October 24, 2022. This service change will restructure some OC Bus services and make minor schedule adjustments to improve service quality and reliability. The upcoming service change will set the stage for future improvements consistent with the Making Better Connections Service Plan.

Recommendation

Receive and file as an information item.

Background

The Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA) generally implements regular schedule and route revisions to selected OC Bus routes three times a year, in February, June, and October. Beginning in 2023, schedule and route adjustments are anticipated to occur four times per year (February, May, August, and November). The proposed bus service changes discussed herein are scheduled for implementation on February 12, 2023.

OCTA completed a comprehensive study (known as the Making Better Connections Study {Study}) that assessed emerging travel trends and the optimal transit network to serve Orange County residents, workers, and visitors. Transit ridership has been declining over the past decade, mirroring regional and national trends due to higher vehicle ownership levels, demographic changes, and other external factors. Within the last two years, changes in ridership levels were primarily influenced by the coronavirus (COVID-19) stay-at-home orders

and dramatic changes in travel patterns. The Study aligns OC Bus service plans with emerging transit demand and travel patterns. Extensive public engagement to inform the development and evaluation of the final recommendations occurred between May and July 2022, culminating in a public hearing at the July 25, 2022, Board of Directors (Board) meeting. The final service plan (Plan) that emerged from the Study was approved by the Board on October 24, 2022. The Plan strives to improve bus service on high ridership routes, reduce the wait time, and simplify route structures. Staff will phase the deployment of Study recommendations over the next 24 months while monitoring bus service utilization rates and considers the availability of personnel to support the service.

Discussion

Since the initial state emergency declaration due to COVID-19 in March 2020, OCTA has made numerous adjustments to bus service. These changes have been implemented strategically to support ridership trends, requests from customers and coach operators, and changes in travel behavior and traffic conditions. OCTA incrementally restored bus service as the impacts of COVID-19 began to subside leading to a rise in economic activity and demand. The restored services; however, followed pre-COVID-19 service patterns. OCTA recognized that bus transit service must be aligned with the emerging travel patterns. The February 2023 bus service change shifts the focus of the improvements towards the Plan, which was approved by the Board in October 2022. In deploying the Plan, OCTA must be sensitive to the level of available coach operator resources as a controlling factor on how much bus service can be added during any service change. A relatively small increase of about 6,500 (.05 percent) annual revenue vehicle hours (RVH) are planned for February 2023.

The added service hours will help optimize the OC Bus system by providing frequency and span improvements, as well as route alignments, to maximize efficiency of the bus system. The proposed changes represent phase 1 of the Study implementation strategy and will set the stage for future phases. Other route changes include modifications to improve service quality and reliability to account for changes in traffic patterns. Staff used customer and coach operator input to develop the list of improvements

The proposed changes permanently discontinue one local bus route and one Stationlink route. Alternative bus routes are available for customers who use these routes. Further, some of the route alignment changes will have an impact on OC ACCESS service coverage. The changes affect an average of 15 daily trips which is considered minor and can be handled by the available same-day taxi. OCTA will communicate with the potentially affected riders in advance and provide the information on alternate transportation solutions. The recommendations are detailed in Attachment A and shown in Attachment B.

The proposed changes will keep bus service levels at 1.44 million annual RVH, but the goal is to work towards the recommendations of the Study and increase bus service to 1.625 million annual RVH. To reach this level of service, about 185,000 annual RVH will be added in phases over a period of 24 months, covering eight service changes or phases. The eight phases are anticipated to be grouped by logical geographic area (i.e., north, central, and south Orange County, etc.). The anticipated planned increases in service hours will be consistent with the availability of labor resources with an eye towards demand for ridership and productivity.

Following the implementation of the service improvements, staff will assess performance based on key variables, such as customer demand, on-time performance, and the latest developments regarding COVID-19. Additional adjustments can be made in future service changes, as necessary.

Title VI and Environmental Justice Analysis

Staff conducted a Title VI and Environmental Justice Analysis of the Making Better Connections Service Plan, per Federal Transit Administration requirements and consistent with OCTA policy. The February 2023 bus service changes were included in that analysis. The analysis accumulated the impacts to minority and low-income communities by comparing the transit service levels before and after the route changes. Based on this analysis, it has been determined that the proposed changes to the bus system, taken in their entirety, would not have a disparate impact on minority persons nor a disproportionate burden on low-income persons.

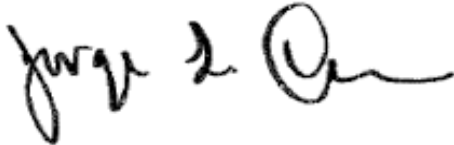
Summary

The proposed February 2023 bus service change will focus on the implementation of the first phase of the Making Better Connections Study and improvements to service quality and reliability. Customers will be notified of the changes three weeks prior to implementation.

Attachments

- A. February 2023 Bus Service Change: Bus Route Recommendations
- B. February 2023 Bus Service Change: Making Better Connections
Phase 1, Routes with Changes

Prepared by:



Jorge Duran
Section Manager III
(714) 560-5765

Approved by:



Kia Mortazavi
Executive Director, Planning
(714) 560-5741