

# 2024 OC TRANSIT VISION

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

OCTOBER 2024



 OC Transit Vision



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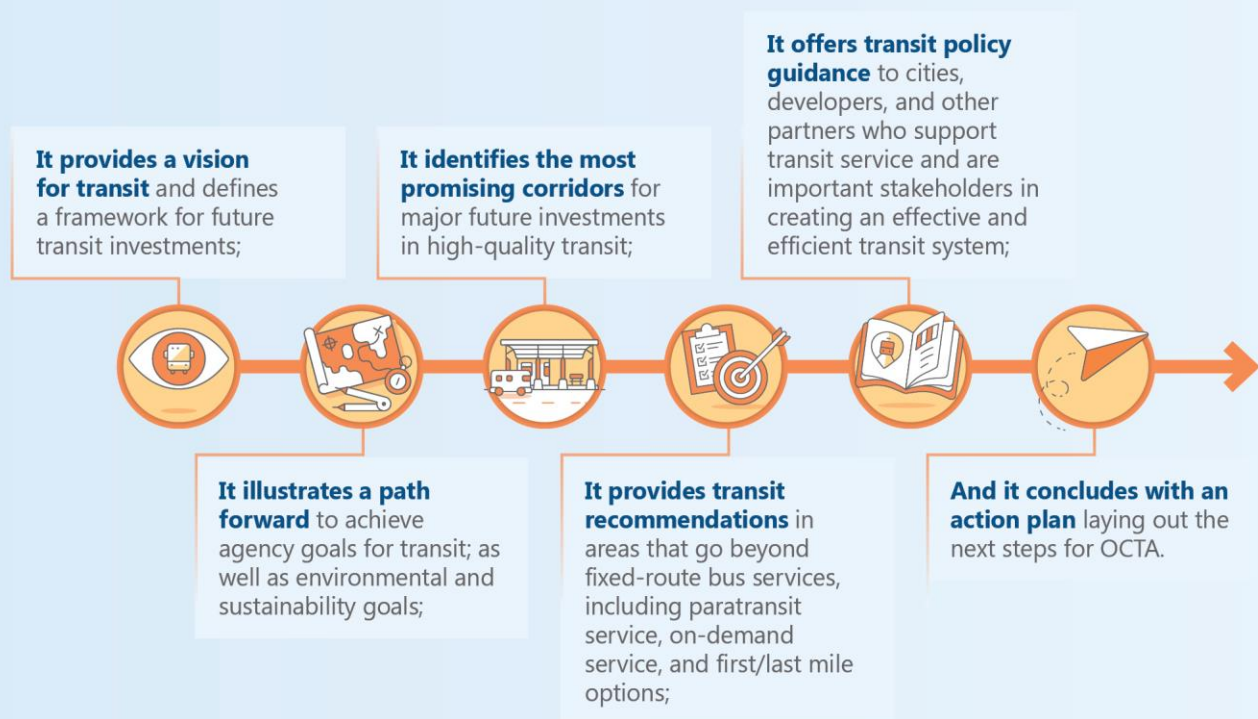
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# WHY AN OC TRANSIT VISION

The OC Transit Vision is a 30-year plan for enhancing and expanding public transit service in Orange County. The Vision identifies near-term, mid-term, and long-term projects and programs that can make transit a more compelling travel option for Orange County residents and visitors.

Why develop a vision for transit in Orange County? Because the county is evolving, and major changes have been taking place in the transportation landscape—with more of them on the horizon. OCTA, in turn, has had to look at the transit services it provides from the ground-up to be relevant for these changing times. Emerging technologies, impacts from the coronavirus pandemic, and policy shifts have all forced transit providers like OCTA to evolve. The OC Transit Vision is an effort by OCTA to be more responsive and proactive in addressing the changing transit market. This is the second OC Transit Vision which builds upon the goals and objectives laid out in the 2018 Plan.

The OC Transit Vision features a number of elements to help improve transit service today and in the coming decades.



## WHAT IS TRANSIT LIKE TODAY?

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OC Bus is OCTA's largest and most visible service, providing 52 routes and serving 30 million passengers annually throughout Orange County (2023). OC Bus also provides service to major events and destinations, as well as vanpools and OC ACCESS service for those with disabilities.

OCTA's OC Bus Rapid comprises of four rapid lines, providing service that is faster and more reliable, convenient, and attractive than local bus service. Stops serve only the busiest locations, such as transfer points and major destinations.

Scheduled to open in 2025, the OC Streetcar will be Orange County's first urban rail line. It will run more than four miles from the Santa Ana Regional Transportation Center to Garden Grove, intersecting with existing OC Bus Rapid routes to form a key transit connection. Orange County is served by both Amtrak Pacific Surfliner and Metrolink regional/commuter rail lines. The Los Angeles – San Diego – San Luis Obispo (LOSSAN) rail corridor is a north-south regional rail spine connecting Orange County to Los Angeles and San Diego. LA Metro operates service connecting to 17 OC Bus routes. Agencies in neighboring counties also provide limited connections to Orange County transit services.

More locally, numerous communities offer a variety of circulators, shuttles, ridershare services, and active transportation options.

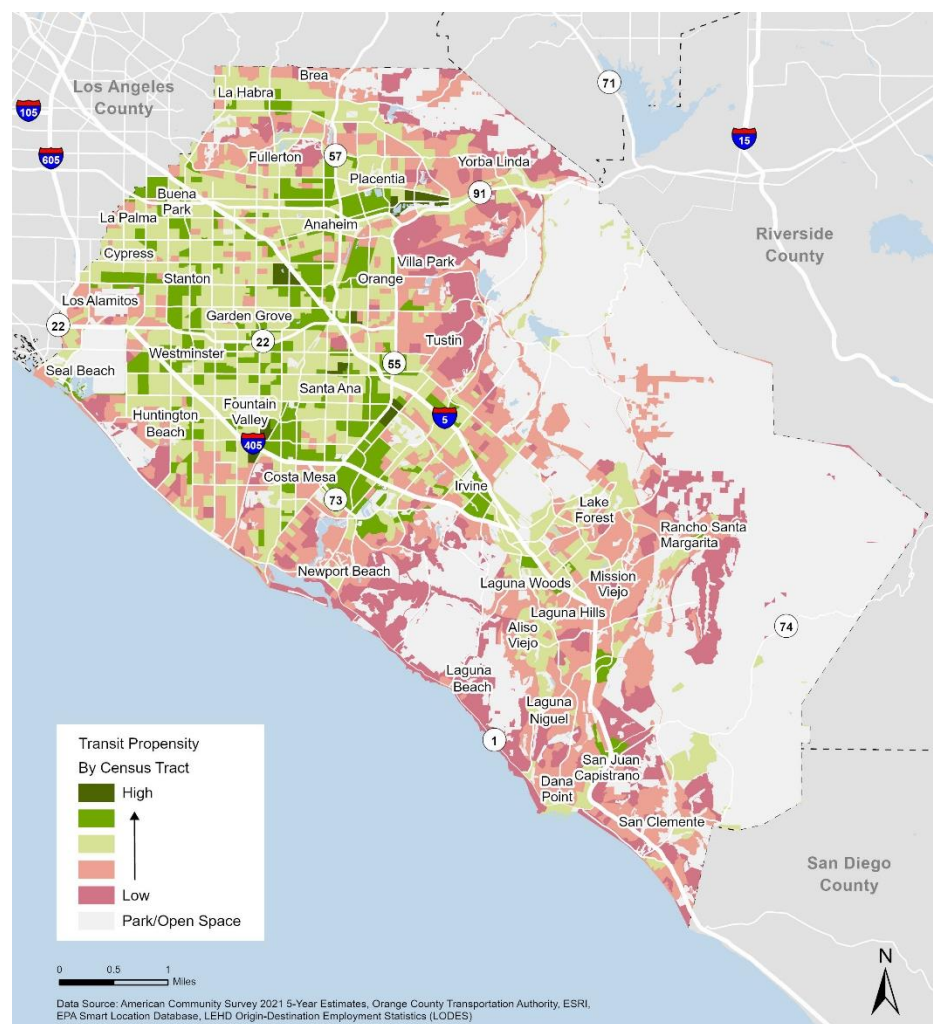


## WHERE ARE INVESTMENTS NEEDED?

The population of Orange County is nearly 3.2 million people, making it the third most populous county in the state. To understand where transit investments are needed both today and in the future, the OC Transit Vision looks at travel patterns and demand for service by considering the following factors: traffic volumes, intersection density, total employment, employment density, low-income households, and per capita income. These factors determine transit propensity, where people are more likely to use transit in Orange County (see Figure 1).

- In Orange County, most areas of high and medium-high transit propensity are located in the urban core of north/central county, most notably in Santa Ana and Anaheim. There are, however, areas of relatively high propensity throughout Irvine and south along the I-5 corridor.
- Lower-income individuals and households—those more likely to rely on transit—are highly concentrated in the urban core of north/central county.
- The Irvine Business Complex boasts the largest concentration of jobs in Orange County. However, it is located in an especially auto-oriented part of the county and does not currently generate significant transit ridership.
- Wealthier, auto-centric communities along the coast, to the east, and in much of south county demonstrate lower levels of transit propensity.

FIGURE 1 TRANSIT PROPENSITY MAP



## How Have We Involved the Community?

### Interactive Surveys

The project team conducted two multilingual interactive surveys, available in multiple languages, to solicit feedback regarding the existing transit system and proposed OC Transit Vision recommendations.

The project team met quarterly with the OCTA Citizens Advisory Committee and participated in two workshops with county elected officials and planning directors.

### Citizens Advisory Committee, Elected Officials, and Planning Directors Meetings

### Public Engagement

The project team implemented a comprehensive outreach plan that included attending 32 community events, hosting multiple stakeholder roundtables and webinars, conducting stakeholder interviews, and making multiple presentations.



## What Is the Community Saying About Transit?

Across these various engagements and from the thousands of people who shared their feedback, a number of priorities emerged. People expressed particular support for the following improvements to transit in Orange County:



**Faster and more frequent transit** that is time competitive with driving, such as rapid transit in the core of the county or express bus serving trips over long distances.



**Longer hours of operation**, and more frequent service during peak and off-peak periods, including early morning, late night, and weekends.



**More service to more areas**, including lower-usage areas.



**More seasonal and special event services**, similar to the existing beach community trolleys, OC Fair Express, and Angels Express.



**More service outside of Orange County**, including more inter-city and regional rail service, express bus routes, and connections with other transit agencies.



**Direct service to key activity and employment centers** that is cost efficient and time competitive with driving.

# TRANSIT VISION RECOMMENDATIONS

Improving transit service and expanding travel options in Orange County requires a multifaceted approach that relies on partnerships with OCTA and the county's jurisdictions. This section outlines a vision and goals for transit in Orange County and offers recommendations for improving transit—both in the higher transit demand areas of north county and in the lower transit demand areas of south county. The analysis to inform these recommendations considered both current and future conditions, recognizing that changes to the transportation network and built environment needed to support transit will evolve as Orange County continues to grow and change.

This section introduces recommendations focused on specific corridors and routes as well as new types of services and programs that can be provided countywide. Collectively these recommendations form a transit vision that will support the next 30 years of growth and development in Orange County.

## What Is Our Vision for Transit?



Provide compelling and competitive transit service that expands transportation choices for current riders, attracts new riders, and equitably supports immediate and long-term mobility in Orange County.

## What Are Our Goals for Transit?



### Enhance

Make it *more desirable* to take transit



### Connect

Connect Orange County's people and places with *effective transit*



### Simplify

Make transit *easier to use* and more convenient



### Collaborate

Make Orange County a *more attractive place* to live, work, and visit by providing transit services that supports community priorities



### Sustain

Create a system that is *resilient* over the long term

The recommendations of the OC Transit Vision acknowledge that different types of services are needed in different parts of the county. Higher capacity, fixed-route transit (like Rapid Bus and Bus Rapid Transit [BRT]) has great potential for success in Orange County's denser, more walkable areas. At the same time, service in the lower density, more suburban areas of the county should focus on key connections to jobs, including local bus routes and on-demand services.

The OC Transit Vision offers something for everyone, whether improvements to existing OC Bus routes, enhancements to OC ACCESS paratransit service, new high-capacity transit corridors, expanded seasonal and special event services, "microtransit" (or on-demand) service, more trips on Metrolink, or future connections to Los Angeles County. The recommendations shown in Figure 2 on page 9 capture the key corridor investments identified through the OC Transit Vision. Additional information about all countywide recommendations can be found in the following sections.

## INVESTMENTS IN TRANSIT OPPORTUNITY CORRIDORS

One of the primary reasons to develop a transit vision for Orange County was to identify Transit Opportunity Corridors (TOC)—high-demand corridors meriting major investment in higher-quality service (see Transit Propensity map on page 3). Major investments along TOCs may include more frequent service, higher-capacity vehicles, roadway improvements such as transit signal priority and dedicated lanes, and other transit enhancements to improve speed and reliability. The following two modes appeared most feasible for Orange County and were evaluated as part of the TOC development process.



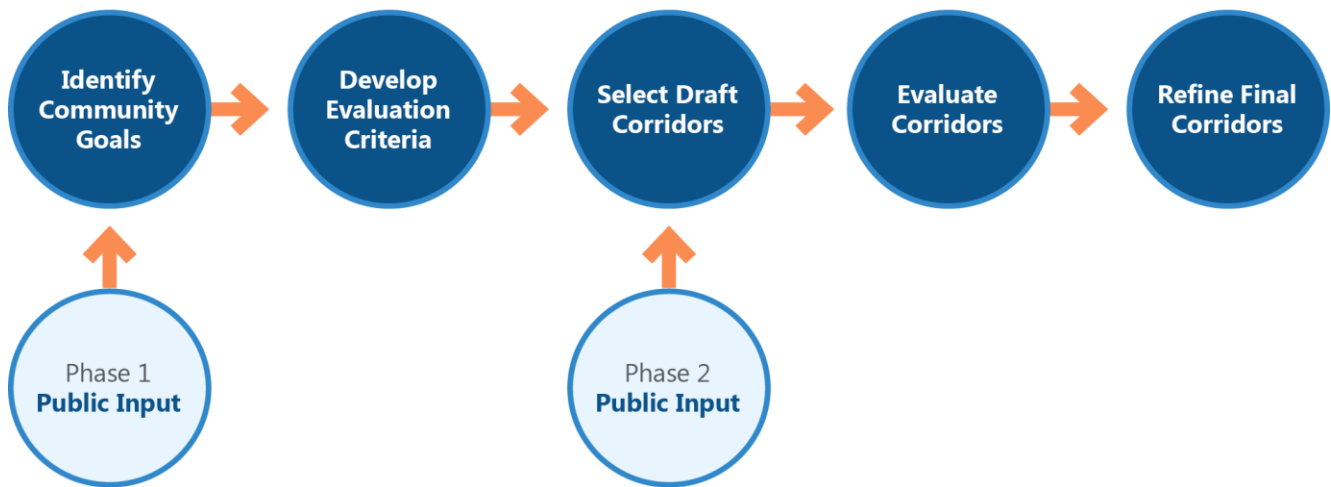
### **Bus Rapid Transit**

*Enhanced bus service that operates on dedicated lanes or with signal priority, offering faster and more frequent service.*



### **Rapid Bus**

*Bus service that is similar to BRT but does not operate in dedicated transit lanes. Targeted measures to improve transit priority may include queue jump lanes and signal priority. OCTA currently operates four rapid routes.*



The Transit Opportunity Corridors were selected based on community input and technical evaluation:

- Initial public input helped to determine shared community goals for transit in Orange County.
- The goals helped to shape the TOC evaluation criteria.
- A second round of public input—including an interactive online survey in which respondents could see corridors and vote for their preferred options—helped to select a prioritized list of TOCs for evaluation.
- The TOC evaluation used criteria based on OC Transit Vision goals and public feedback from the second round of public input to rank the top ten corridors.



## TRANSIT OPPORTUNITY CORRIDORS - NEXT STEPS

- Conduct corridor studies for the Bristol/State College, Harbor, and Beach corridors.
- Identify short-term corridor improvements (2025–2029) to support the OC Streetcar, major destinations, and future events such as the 2028 Olympic and Paralympic Games.
- Implement all ten TOCs through a phased approach over the mid to long term (2030–2040+).

FIGURE 2 TRANSIT OPPORTUNITY CORRIDORS



## COUNTYWIDE TRANSIT STRATEGIES

### Fixed-Route Recommendations

Continue to improve the efficiency and connectivity of the bus network through full implementation of the Making Better Connections (MBC) Plan. Through the MBC Plan, certain routes will experience increased frequencies, extended operational hours, and reduced wait times at transfer locations. A separate OC Bus Comprehensive Operations Analysis should be conducted over the next five years to analyze travel patterns since the pandemic and further optimize service levels. The OC Transit Vision also recommends a study to explore the feasibility of returning express bus service that was discontinued during the pandemic.

Other fixed-route recommendations include the following:

- Identify short-term transit improvement strategies on Harbor Boulevard upon completion of two ongoing Harbor corridor studies.
- Extend OC Bus Rapid Route 553 from the Anaheim Regional Transportation Center (ARTIC) to the Anaheim Resort on Katella Avenue to serve increased demand due to the upcoming OC Vibe project and Anaheim Resort expansion.
- Determine high-growth areas in the county where OC Bus service coverage may expand or where existing route frequencies may increase.
- Implement a new Rider Validation System (RVS) to simplify the fare payment process and introduce a fare capping mechanism to save riders money.
- Accelerate the transition to a 100 percent zero-emission bus fleet by 2040 to fully comply with The State of California’s clean air goals.
- Prepare for OC Streetcar by coordinating bus connections through the Bus-Rail Interface Plan.

## LOSSAN/Metrolink Improvements

The LOSSAN corridor is the existing rail spine for Orange County. A regional rail line, it connects Orange County to downtown Los Angeles. Within Orange County, it runs from Buena Park in the north to San Clemente in the south via major destinations, including downtown Fullerton, Anaheim’s Platinum Triangle, downtown Santa Ana, Irvine, and Laguna Niguel. It is served by multiple operators and several lines, including Amtrak’s Pacific Surfliner from San Luis Obispo to San Diego, as well as the Metrolink Orange County, 91/Perris Valley, and Inland Empire-Orange County lines. Additionally, the Metrolink 91/Perris Valley and Inland Empire-Orange County lines operate on tracks east of LOSSAN, connecting to Riverside County.

OCTA should support improvements to Orange County rail service planned by Metrolink and other partner agencies. Proceed with existing plans to increase the number of rail trips, improve station access, and reduce the number of at-grade crossings.

## OC Vanpool Expansion

OCTA’s OC Vanpool Program offers a subsidized, month-to-month shared commuting option for groups of seven to 15 people traveling to workplaces within Orange County. As demand for vanpool services begins to recover from the coronavirus pandemic, OCTA may incentivize employee vanpools in a number of ways:

- Promote increased financial incentives offered to participants. OCTA recently increased vehicle lease subsidies from \$400 to \$600, as well as an additional \$100 for high-occupancy vanpools and zero-emission vehicles.

- Continue partnership with the California Department of Transportation to expand the high-occupancy vehicle (HOV) lane network on freeways.

## Paratransit Enhancements

OC ACCESS provides nearly one million boardings annually and projected growth in the population of older Americans is expected to boost paratransit demand in the future. Recognizing the growth in paratransit costs, OCTA has begun taking steps to manage demand, including continued support of senior mobility programs, expanding cooperative agreements, and expanding the Same-Day Taxi Program. Going forward, the following additional steps will be implemented over the short term:

- Procurement of a Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) that will retire current legacy products and bring all services available to OC ACCESS eligible riders under one platform while integrating with the existing OC Bus app. The new software will provide flexibility for other service types like Same-Day Taxi and Senior Mobility Programs to easily schedule trips for alternative services. Scheduling and dispatching for paratransit trips will be automated to improve accuracy and continuous optimization.
- Initiation of a Transportation Network Company (TNC) Pilot that will utilize services like Uber and Lyft to provide supplemental services to the Same-Day Taxi Program in an effort to expand access to more paratransit riders.

## Seasonal and Special Event Services

Building on the success of existing services such as the beach community trolleys, the OC Fair Express, and the Angels Express, seek other opportunities to provide part-time service where traffic and parking issues make transit an attractive alternative.

OCTA should explore opportunities to expand its existing seasonal and special event services. It should also pilot new services through Project V (its program of matching grants for local transit services), which may include on-demand “microtransit” in areas of the county where demand for fixed-route service is low. A Measure M2 Project V call for projects in 2031 should focus on additional opportunities for seasonal, on-demand, and special event services that reduce local congestion and expand access.

## First/Last Mile Connections

Every transit trip begins and ends with a connection to an origin or destination. Investments in first/last mile journeys are essential for making transit trips safe, accessible, and convenient for riders.

OCTA should advance recommendations outlined in the Mobility Hub Study to implement a suite of mobility services at major transit centers and destinations throughout the county.

The active transportation network also plays an important role in expanding access to transit. OCTA should continue to coordinate with local jurisdictions to improve connections to bus stops and transit services.



# TRANSIT ACTION PLAN

The OC Transit Vision has been developed over 18 months with significant input from the OCTA Board of Directors, the OCTA Citizens Advisory Committee, elected officials, and municipal staff from Orange County's 34 jurisdictions, and thousands of residents and visitors to Orange County. The plan builds on extensive data analysis and national best practices to explore transit trends and markets and proposes recommendations for improving transit throughout Orange County.

Implementing the recommendations of the OC Transit Vision will require concerted effort and resources from OCTA. While many of the projects identified in this plan will take years to come to fruition, there are steps that OCTA can take immediately to begin moving the vision to reality. This chapter outlines a phasing strategy for implementing the OC Transit Vision.

## HOW DO WE MOVE TO ACTION?

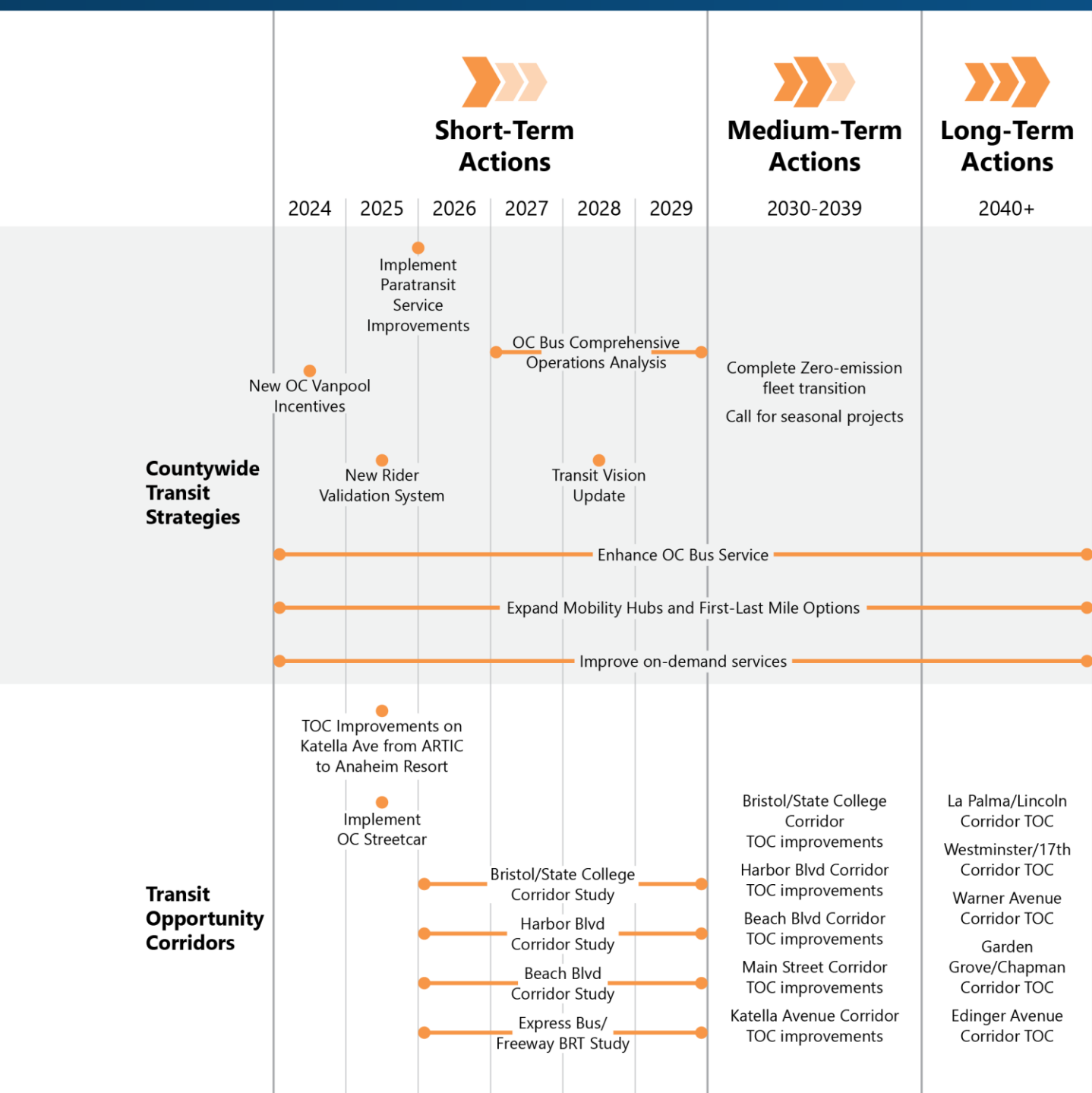
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The projects outlined in the OC Transit Vision are grouped into three timeframes for implementation: short-term (2025–2029), mid-term (2030–2039), and long-term (2040+). This phasing approach recognizes the project development process for major capital investments, such as procuring zero-emission buses and implementing the OC Streetcar, as well as existing and projected OCTA revenues.

The short-term recommendations focus on projects, programs, and additional studies that largely can be undertaken using existing OCTA resources. By improving bus service on existing routes through the MBC Plan, expanding countywide transit services, and advancing studies along high-priority TOCs, OCTA can take immediate steps to make transit more frequent, fast, and reliable for Orange County residents and visitors.

The mid- and long-term recommendations will require additional revenues and depend, in part, on progress made in the next five years.

FIGURE 3 OC TRANSIT VISION PHASING



## WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

The OC Transit Vision builds on the transit service and programs that are working well in Orange County today and sets a vision for “compelling and competitive transit service that expands transportation choices for current riders, attracts new riders and equitably supports immediate and long-term mobility” in the county.

The OC Transit Vision provides a near-, mid-, and long-term roadmap for making transit an increasingly popular choice for travel to, through, and within Orange County. The Vision identifies specific actions and investments that will help OCTA achieve the goals set forth and prioritizes which steps to take immediately.



The Vision is built on 18 months of research, analysis, and conversations with Orange County residents and visitors. The recommendations are data-driven and are targeted to different needs and markets throughout the county. High-capacity transit projects are focused in areas of Orange County with a high propensity for transit use, while on-demand services and integrated mobility hubs with first/last mile connections are recommended for areas where fixed-route transit historically has been less successful. This combination of approaches means that the OC Transit Vision offers something for everyone—and tailors mobility options to match markets and the communities OCTA serves.

Looking to OCTA’s past successes, and to the good work happening in the county and region today, the OC Transit Vision helps Orange County chart a path to becoming a home for transit service that provide mobility for all residents and visitors.

