



December 9, 2021

To: Transit Committee

From: Darrell E. Johnson, Chief Executive Officer

Subject: February 2022 Bus Service Change

Overview

In an effort to better meet demand for bus service as California and the economy continue to emerge from the coronavirus pandemic, the February 2022 bus service change will provide additional service to improve service quality and reliability. Bus service levels will increase by 83,000 annual revenue vehicle hours to 1.43 million annual revenue vehicle hours, which is within the fiscal year 2021-22 budgeted amount of service. Staff utilized customer comments and route performance statistics to develop the service improvements.

Recommendation

Receive and file as an information item.

Background

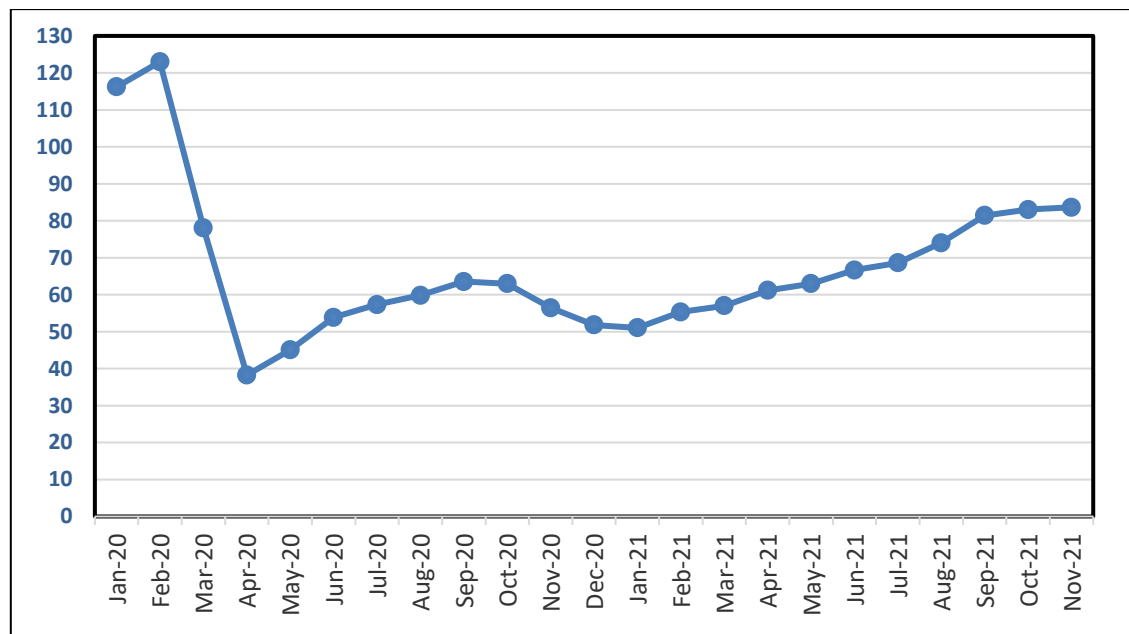
The Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA) implements regular schedule and route revisions to selected OC Bus routes three times a year, in February, June, and October. The next bus service change is scheduled for implementation on February 13, 2022.

OCTA implemented an emergency service change on March 23, 2020. Service levels were reduced to balance a reduction in demand for transit service, resulting from the federal and state emergency declarations, while still providing vital transportation services. This also included California's stay-at-home order to help reduce the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19). OCTA has made numerous adjustments to bus service since the initial state emergency declaration. These changes have been implemented strategically to address changes in demand, customer and coach operator requests, and changes in traffic conditions.

Discussion

As regularly reported to the Board of Directors (Board), the COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant and sustained impact on transit ridership, not only in Orange County but also nationwide. OC Bus ridership decreased from approximately 125,000 average weekday boardings to the low 30,000s in April 2020. Ridership has recently rebounded to about 85,000 average weekday boardings. The chart below shows the average weekday ridership, by week, from mid-February 2020 through the end of October 2021.

Average Weekday Boardings by Month (in Thousands)



On March 23, 2020, in direct response to the dramatic decrease in demand, OCTA reduced fixed-route bus service approximately 40 percent by implementing Sunday service schedules on all routes, seven days a week. Between June 2020 and June 2021, OCTA operated an enhanced Saturday service schedule on weekdays and a regular weekend schedule on Saturdays and Sundays. Since the June 2021 service change, OCTA has been adding service, focusing on improving frequency and service hours of operation on many OC bus routes. In June 2021, approximately 13,000 annual revenue vehicle hours (RVH) were added, 107,000 RVH in August 2021, and about 41,000 RVH in October 2021. An additional 83,000 RVH are planned for February 2022, which will increase bus service levels to 1.43 million annual RVH. This is slightly below with the fiscal year (FY) 2021-22 budget of 1.45 million annual RVH, and represents a 6.1 percent increase in service over October 2021 levels and about 12 percent below pre-COVID-19 levels.

Based on current demand and ridership trends, bus service levels are expected to remain constant at 1.45 million RVH through FY 2022-23. Future service increases will be informed by the Bus Restructuring Study. The study will identify improvements to better serve travel patterns that have been affected by the pandemic, as well as improve service quality and reliability. Recommendations from the study are anticipated to be presented to the Board for consideration in October 2022, and will be implemented starting with the February 2023 service change. Staff will provide the Board with an overview on this study and the public engagement that will be required for a study of this magnitude at the January 2022 Transit Committee and Board meetings.

The proposed February 2022 service change will improve service on 39 of the 52 OCTA bus routes currently operated. The changes were developed to improve service quality and reliability by providing more service during early morning and late evenings, more frequency throughout the day, and additional time to account for increases in traffic. Staff used customer comments along with route performance statistics to develop the list of improvements, which include:

- Improving service frequency on 16 bus routes,
- Expanding hours of operation earlier in the morning and/or later in the evening on nine bus routes,
- Schedule adjustments on 35 bus routes to improve on-time performance,
- Adjusting schedules on one bus route due to changes to Metrolink schedule, and
- Reinstating Bravo! Route 529 service on the Beach Boulevard corridor.

OCTA will continue the suspension of five freeway express bus routes, and the Bus Restructuring Study will make recommendations for future restoration or changes to these routes. The recommendations are detailed in Attachment A and shown in attachments B, C, D, E, F, and G.

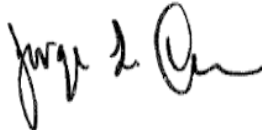
Following the implementation of the service improvements, staff will assess the service based on key variables, such as customer demand, service performance, and the latest developments regarding COVID-19. Additional adjustments could be made in future service changes. The February 2022 service change levels are consistent with the approved OCTA FY 2021-22 Budget.

Summary

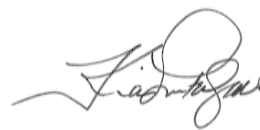
The proposed February 2022 bus service change will increase transit service to improve service quality and reliability. Customer comments and route performance statistics were used to develop the improvements, which include more frequent service, expanded hours of operations, schedule adjustments to improve on-time performance, and other changes. Customers will be notified of the changes three weeks prior to implementation.

Attachments

- A. February 2022 Bus Service Change: Bus Route Recommendations
- B. February 2022 Bus Service Change System Map, Routes with Frequency Improvements
- C. February 2022 Bus Service Change System Map, Routes with Span Improvements
- D. February 2022 Bus Service Change System Map, Routes with Improved On-Time Performance
- E. February 2022 Bus Service Change System Map, Routes Continue Suspended
- F. February 2022 Bus Service Change System Map, Routes to be Reinstated
- G. February 2022 Bus Service Change System Map, Routes with No Changes

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