



**September 8, 2022**

**To:** Transit Committee  
**From:** Darrell E. Johnson, Chief Executive Officer  
**Subject:** October 2022 Bus Service Change

### **Overview**

The proposed October 2022 bus service change includes the implementation of a new limited stop service on Main Street, minor schedule adjustments, and winter seasonal service changes to improve service quality and reliability. The proposed changes do not require an adjustment to the overall level of service hours and set the stage for further improvements as part of the Making Better Connections Program.

### **Recommendation**

Approve the October 2022 bus service change and direct staff to begin implementation.

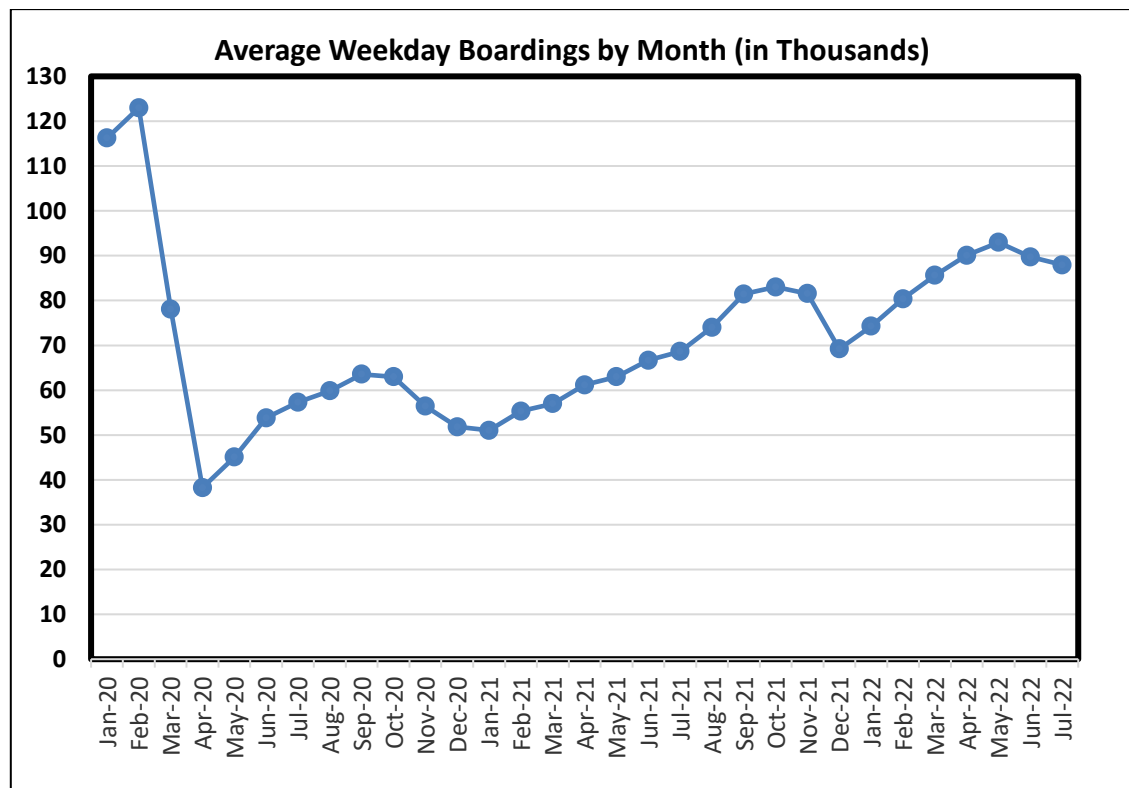
### **Background**

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 can occur four times per year in February, May, August, and November. The proposed bus service changes discussed herein are scheduled for implementation on October 9, 2022.

OCTA implemented an emergency service change in March 2020 when bus service levels were reduced to balance a significant reduction in demand for transit service resulting from the federal and state emergency declarations. Since the initial state emergency declaration, OCTA has made numerous adjustments to bus service. These changes have been implemented strategically to support ridership growth, customer and coach operator requests, and changes in travel behavior and traffic conditions. More recently, a shortage of coach operators, which is being experienced prevalent throughout the industry, is having an impact on how much bus service can be implemented in this bus service change.

### Discussion

As regularly reported to the Board of Directors (Board), the coronavirus (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 steadily been increasing and reached about 93,000 average weekday boardings in the month of May 2022, prior to school recess and the highest since the pandemic began. The chart below shows the average weekday ridership, by month, from mid-February 2020 through the end of July 2022.



After the initial reduction in bus service in March 2020 due to COVID-19, OCTA has been steadily adding bus service in response to demand. This includes focusing on improving service reliability as traffic conditions have evolved and improving frequency and service hours of operation on many OC Bus routes. Due to a shortage of coach operators that continues to affect transit agencies throughout Southern California and nationwide, a relatively small decrease of about 1,800 (.01 percent) annual revenue vehicle hours (RVH) are planned for October 2022. This will keep bus service levels at 1.44 million annual RVH. The approved OCTA Fiscal Year 2022-23 Budget calls for 1.62 million annual RVH.

The proposed October 2022 service change will adjust service on 18 OCTA bus routes currently in operation. The key highlight of the service change is the implementation of new Bravo! Route 553 on Main Street between the cities of Anaheim and Santa Ana, as shown in Attachment A. Bravo! is a type of bus service with limited stops, thereby improving travel time as compared to the existing local bus service on the same corridor. This will be the fourth Bravo! route in operation under this family of services. Other Bravo! routes include Route 529 (Beach Boulevard), Route 543 (Harbor Boulevard), and Route 560 (Westminster Avenue/17th Street). Bravo! Route 553 will be implemented in October 2022 using grant-funded battery-electric buses to support environmental sustainability and furthering OCTA's zero-emission Bus Pilot Program.

OCTA is in the process of receiving ten battery-electric buses (BEB). Five of the ten BEBs will be deployed on Bravo! Route 553. Funding for operating the service will be provided through the state's Low Carbon Transit Operations Program, and the buses were purchased with state Solutions for Congested Corridor Program funds as part of multimodal program to address congestion in this travel corridor. These programs were created to provide operating and capital assistance for transit agencies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and improve mobility, with a priority on serving disadvantaged communities. In addition, the new service will provide congestion relief, particularly during the construction phase of improvements that are underway on State Route 55.

Due to challenges with recruiting new coach operators, the implementation of this new route would require minor reductions in service on the underlying local Route 53, as well as seeking efficiencies where feasible given limitation on coach operator availability. With the implementation of Bravo! Route 553, customers will experience overall improvements (i.e., faster travel time, digital signage at bus stops with schedule information, zero-emission buses, etc.), along the corridor. Other route changes included in the October service change were developed to improve service quality and reliability to account for changes in traffic patterns. Staff used customer and coach operator comments to develop the list of improvements. OCTA will continue the suspension of five freeway express bus routes. The recommendations are detailed in Attachment B and Attachment C.

The next opportunity to modify OC Bus service will be the February 2023 service change where coach operators will be permitted to modify work schedules and swap routes. In addition, future service increases will be informed by the Making Better Connections Study Service Plan, which is anticipated to be presented at October 24, 2022, Board meeting. This study will recommend improvements to better serve travel patterns that have been affected by the pandemic, as well as improve service quality and reliability. Implementation of the final recommendations are anticipated to begin implementation starting in 2023.

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 recommended October 2022 bus service change, per Federal Transit Administration requirements and consistent with OCTA policy. The analysis accumulated 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.

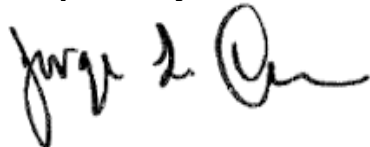
#### **Summary**

The proposed October 2022 bus service change will focus on the implementation of a new Bravo! Route 553 and improvements to service quality and reliability. Customer and coach operator comments, as well as route performance statistics, were used to develop the improvements for this service change. Customers will be notified of the changes three weeks prior to implementation while focusing on the promotion of the new Bravo! Route 553.

#### **Attachments**

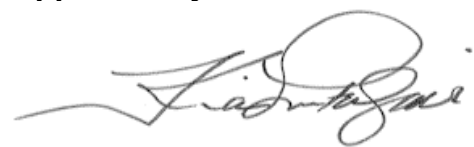
- A. Bravo! Route 553 Main Street Bus
- B. October 2022 Bus Service Change: Bus Route Recommendations
- C. October 2022 Bus Service Change System Map, Routes with Changes

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