



November 8, 2018

To: Transit Committee
From: Darrell E. Johnson, Chief Executive Officer
Subject: OC Bus 360° Update

Overview

The Orange County Transportation Authority is implementing a comprehensive effort to reconfigure transit services in response to changing market conditions. The goals are to address ridership declines by improving passenger travel times and designing services to retain existing customers and attract new customers. A status report on major OC Bus 360° elements is presented for review.

Recommendation

Receive and file as an information item.

Background

To address declining bus ridership, in 2015, the Board of Directors (Board) endorsed a comprehensive action plan (Plan), known as OC Bus 360°. This effort included a comprehensive review of current and former rider perceptions, a peer review panel that reviewed the Orange County Transportation Authority's (OCTA) performance and plans, new branding and marketing tactics tied to rider needs, upgraded bus routes and services to better match demand and capacity, technology solutions to improve passenger experience, and pricing, as well as other revenue changes to stimulate ridership, and provide new funding.

Extensive work was invested by OCTA divisions to implement the Plan. These efforts included:

- Implementation of new and faster bus routes;
- Redeployment of services in June 2016, October 2016, October 2017, and February 2018, to improve efficiencies and build ridership;
- Competitively-awarded grants to local agencies through Project V for transit services tailored to community needs;

- Implementation of a promotional fare and college pass program;
- Rollout of new technologies, such as mobile ticketing, real-time bus arrival information, and a microtransit service; and
- Extensive marketing, public outreach, and promotional campaigns.

Discussion

Local, Regional, and National Ridership Trends

Nationwide, bus ridership was down 1.45 percent, comparing the second quarter of calendar year 2017 to 2018. Regionally, ridership is down on all large Southern California bus systems and across all light and heavy rail modes. Metrolink commuter rail ridership was up slightly. OCTA ridership decreased by 2.38 percent during the same period, which compares favorably to other major bus agencies in Southern California that saw an average decrease of 3.22 percent.

OC Bus 360° Ridership Changes

Bus routes improved between 2016 and 2018 are showing ridership growth during the second quarter of the 2018 calendar year. Ridership on the improved routes, as a group, has increased by 3.7 percent on weekdays, compared to the previous quarter. Ridership was also slightly higher compared to the same quarter of the previous year. Overall weekday systemwide productivity (boardings per revenue hour) also increased 2.9 percent compared to the previous quarter. Ridership and productivity information will continue to be reported as part of the quarterly Transit Division Performance Measurements Report.

Bravo! Route 529 Implementation

Bravo! Route 529 was included in the 2016 Bus Service Plan contingent on staff securing external funding for the implementation. Staff has subsequently identified state funding for the vehicles and the service, which will be implemented in February 2019. The new limited-stop service will operate on Beach Boulevard from the Fullerton Park-and-Ride to the Goldenwest Transportation Center through the cities of Anaheim, Buena Park, Fullerton, Garden Grove, Huntington Beach, Stanton, and Westminster. The additional buses needed for the service were funded by the state Low Carbon Transit Operations Program (LCTOP). The incremental operating cost for the first two and a half years of operations will also be funded through the LCTOP. The implementation of this service is anticipated to grow ridership by approximately 500,000 annual boardings on the Beach Boulevard corridor.

OC Flex Microtransit Pilot

In October 2017, the Board approved a one-year pilot program to deploy the OC Flex microtransit service in two zones based on the results of planning analysis, market survey, and technology considerations. The service launched on October 15 in the Huntington Beach and Westminster zone and on October 20 in the Aliso Viejo, Laguna Niguel, and Mission Viejo zone. Staff will be returning to the Board to evaluate the pilot program at the six-month and one-year intervals. The six-month evaluation will allow staff to propose changes that may be necessary to improve the service. The one-year evaluation will be used to help determine if one or both pilot zones should continue to operate and potentially expand to additional areas.

Mobile Ticketing

The mobile ticketing program continues to see growth. The app has been downloaded 130,114 times from June 2016 till August 2018. Mobile ticketing now accounts for 8.2 percent of overall fare revenue. This school year, the college pass program has been added to the mobile ticketing app to allow students to seamlessly board the OC Bus using their smartphones.

Project V Services

The Community-Based Transit/Circulator Program (Project V) under Measure M provides funding to jurisdictions seeking to implement local transit services (i.e., community-based circulators, shuttles, bus trolleys, and demand-responsive services). These services complement regional bus and rail service while also meeting local needs in areas not adequately served by regional transit.

A call for projects was issued in early 2018 and six local agencies submitted seven Project V applications. In June, the Board approved funding for five of the projects and directed staff to continue working with the cities of Laguna Niguel and San Clemente on their proposed projects. Some of the newly approved (or expanded routes) were able to initiate services during summer 2018. Staff will provide a Project V ridership update to the Board in January.

College Pass Program and Ongoing Promotions

In September 2017, OCTA launched a three-year Santa Ana College Pilot Pass Program which allows students to ride the OC Bus fare free using their student ID card. The first year was funded with an LCTOP grant and the remaining two years are funded by a semester fee approved by the students. Through the end of the first school year, approximately 6,775 students used the pass, generating over one million boardings. Based on the success of the

program, the Rancho Santiago Community College District worked with OCTA to expand the program to include the 9,000 students at Santiago Canyon College. Students at this college approved a \$5 per semester fee with over 80 percent of the vote. Staff will continue to work with other interested community colleges to expand this successful program.

Ridership Marketing Campaigns

Following the February 2018 service change, where weekend and evening services were improved, a targeted marketing campaign highlighting the improved routes was implemented to increase awareness and usage. Marketing efforts included direct mail, bus advertising, outdoor advertising, targeted digital advertisements, and social media. This nine-week campaign generated strong interest from potential riders and almost 5,300 individuals responded to the campaign's call to action. About 3,200 respondents indicated they had not ridden the bus in the past six months and were given two free trial one-day passes. Based on a follow-up survey of those who tried riding the bus, 86 percent indicated they continued to ride the OC Bus after the free trial. In summer 2018, OCTA launched an online campaign with two videos featuring new service improvements, highlighting the benefits of riding the bus. This eight-week campaign generated 4,700 individuals responding to the campaign's call to action to ride the bus with two free one-day passes. Approximately 70 percent of these indicated they had not ridden the bus in the past six months. Cumulative statistics for all OC Bus 360 ridership marketing campaigns are shown in Attachment A.

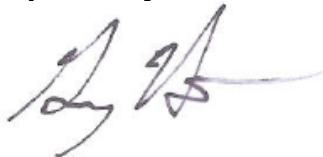
Summary

Elements of the OC Bus 360° Plan are proving successful, and new strategies are being pursued to improve productivity. Recent and upcoming strategies include a new Bravo! route on Beach Boulevard, OC Flex microtransit pilots, expansion of the college pass program, and informing the public about these, and previous, efforts to improve transit service.

Attachments

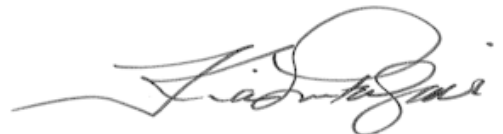
- A. OC Bus 360° Update
- B. National, State, and Regional Transit Operator Ridership Trends

Prepared by:



Gary Hewitt
Section Manager, Transit Planning
(714) 560-5715

Approved by:



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