



April 11, 2019

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, fare adjustments, 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 Measure M 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 1.62 percent, comparing the third quarter of the calendar year 2018 to 2017. Regionally, ridership was down for most transit operators across modes. OCTA ridership decreased by 1.09 percent, which still compares favorably to other major bus agencies in Southern California, which saw an average decrease of 3.47 percent. Anaheim Resort Transit, Riverside Transit, and Metrolink saw ridership increases during this period.

OC Bus 360° Ridership Changes

Weekday ridership on routes improved in 2016, and 2018 saw a 0.3 percent decrease during the 2018 calendar fourth quarter compared to the previous year. This compares favorably to the systemwide ridership decrease. Ridership on routes where weekend service was improved in 2018 are showing an initial increase of 2.7 percent. More detailed ridership and productivity information is reported to the Board in the quarterly Transit Division Performance Measurements Report.

OC Bus Marketing

In November 2018, OCTA launched the OC Bus Holiday Campaign to enhance public perception and encourage trial usage. Marketing efforts included targeted digital advertisements, social media, and print advertisements in three languages. During this seven-week campaign, new riders were encouraged to take trial rides using two free passes, and current riders had the opportunity to enter to win a 30-day pass. Participants were encouraged to learn to ride and explore when they responded on the campaign webpage. More than 5,000 people responded, and 4,000 said 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.

Bravo! Route 529 Launch

The Bravo! Route 529 service started on February 11, 2019. This service operates Monday through Friday from 6:00 AM to 6:00 PM, making stops at 13 locations, instead of the typical 34 stops on the regular fixed-route service (Route 29) on Beach Boulevard. Compared to Route 29, the Bravo! route gives commuters an average travel-time savings of up to ten minutes. The launch

included an extensive marketing campaign to introduce the service to existing customers and attract new riders. During the first month of service, the new service had 23,077 boardings. Staff will monitor feedback on the new Bravo! route and Route 29 to see if any modifications are needed during upcoming service changes.

Prior to the debut of Bravo! 529, a targeted marketing campaign highlighting the benefits of the new route was implemented to increase awareness and usage. Marketing efforts included direct mail, bus advertising, outdoor advertising, targeted digital advertisements, social media, and print advertisements in three languages. This campaign generated strong interest from potential riders with more than 2,000 people responding to the campaign's call to action for free trial passes for new riders and a chance to win a 30-day pass for current riders. Nearly 1,000 respondents indicated they had not ridden the bus in the past six months. Outreach is ongoing to communities and commuters to introduce this new service and attract ridership.

OC Flex Microtransit Pilot Update

In October 2018, OC Flex microtransit began service in two zones covering parts of the cities of Aliso Viejo, Huntington Beach, Laguna Niguel, Mission Viejo, and Westminster. During the first five months, 11,307 rides were provided on the service. Staff will return to the Transit Committee and Board in May with an evaluation after the first six months of service. Proposed changes may also be recommended at that time to improve the service based on operating experience. A second evaluation after one year will help to determine if one or both pilot zones should continue to operate and if the service model should be considered for additional areas.

Prior to the launch of OC Flex, the Marketing Department conducted extensive campaigns to promote ridership in both service zones. Marketing efforts included direct mail, pop-up booths at events, vehicle advertising, outdoor advertising, targeted digital advertisements, and social media.

In December 2018, OCTA focused its OC Flex marketing efforts on students. OCTA partnered with the Capistrano Unified School District to send an email to all district students. In addition, a campaign targeting students through digital advertisements and social media was launched in both OC Flex zones.

In February 2019, a group ride fare promotion was implemented to increase weekend ridership. This campaign offers discounts for groups of two, three, or four riders who book rides using the OC Flex Mobile App. Direct mail postcards were sent to a total of 43,130 households in both OC Flex zones, and targeted digital advertisements were posted. The promotion will continue until April 28, 2019.

OC Bus Mobile App 2.0

Staff worked with our vendor to update the OC Bus mobile ticketing app to add additional functionality and improve the user experience. The changes included:

- Redesigned interface and larger buttons,
- Purchase using Google Pay or Apple Pay,
- Easy repeat purchases and split payments,
- Simplified multi-rider tickets,
- Touch ID or Face ID security,
- Easy ticket transfer when upgrading phones,
- New full-screen ticket and larger quick response code, and
- Online portal to purchase and manage tickets.

The updated app was released in March 2019, and the new features will be promoted to increase mobile ticketing adoption.

College Pass Program Update

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. In fall 2018, the program was expanded to include Santiago Canyon College. Ridership at Santa Ana College grew 12.6 percent between the fall 2017 and 2018 semesters. Between the two colleges, 622,111 boardings were taken during the fall 2018 semester. Staff continues to work with other interested community colleges to expand this successful program.

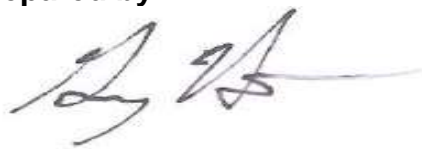
Summary

Staff continues the OC Bus 360° effort to grow ridership and improve the productivity of the bus service. This report outlines several initiatives during the previous six months, including an updated mobile ticketing app and new service on Beach Boulevard. Staff continues to market the bus service with an emphasis on these improvements. Upcoming OC Bus 360° efforts will include additional changes to bus service, an evaluation of OC Flex, and expansion of the college pass program.

Attachments

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

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