




MEMORANDUM

March 22, 2019

To: Members of the Board of Directors

From: Darrell E. Johnson, Chief Executive Officer 

Subject: **Follow-up to February 2019 Bus Service Change**

As a follow-up to the memo I sent you on February 25, 2019, I wanted to provide you with an update on the service issues we have been working to resolve since the Bus Service Change that occurred on February 10, 2019. This update also includes information that was reported to the Transit Committee on March 14 by Jennifer Bergener, Orange County Transportation Authority's (OCTA) Chief Operating Officer.

As you already know, we have seen missed trips and lost service increase significantly since the most recent service change. OCTA, our contract fixed-route operator, First Transit, as well as most transit properties across the country, are experiencing severe labor shortages. In Southern California, this has been exacerbated by low unemployment, high cost of housing, and high demand for skilled labor.

First Transit changed the way in which it schedules and deploys its drivers to remedy an existing issue related to meal and rest breaks for operators as part of the February service change. In doing so, there was an increase to the number of operator assignments that needed to be filled. That, coupled with the existing labor shortage, severely impacted First Transit's ability to deliver service. In all, First Transit was short 80 coach operators as compared to OCTA's own shortage of approximately 30 coach operators.

The issue was identified immediately, and First Transit took some steps to mitigate the impacts of the shortage. First Transit began using managers, supervisors, other administrative staff, and also reached out to their union for assistance to cover open assignments. Unfortunately, these measures only provided minimal help.

From February 10 through March 17, 2019, OCTA estimates that First Transit has missed a total of 1,570 trips, which is a loss of 1,833 hours of service. First Transit operates approximately 40 percent of OCTA bus service, and this amounts to about 2.4 percent of the total number of scheduled operating hours.

OCTA staff continues to work closely with First Transit to resolve the issue. All contractual requirements remain in effect, including the assessment of penalties for lost service. First Transit has submitted a formal corrective action plan that includes:

- The use of coach operators from National Tour Company,
- The continued use of administrative and management staff to cover service,
- Using operators from neighboring properties for which First Transit provides service
- Adjusting the assignments associated with the schedule change to reduce the number of drivers needed by up to 25, and
- Implementing a much-needed wage increase to help attract and retain operators; currently the First Transit starting wage for coach operators is approximately \$3 lower per hour than comparable transit jobs in the region.

First Transit has been responsive to the issue at hand and has worked closely with OCTA staff to implement these corrective action plan elements. All of the corrective measures are expected to be in place by March 25. OCTA staff has provided significant support to the First Transit team over the last several weeks, and we feel confident that the measures outlined here are moving us in the right direction.

As I said previously, while this is an explanation of what has happened, there is no excuse for failing to meet the high standards that we set for OCTA bus service; we remain committed to providing the highest quality service possible.

DEJ:heb

c: Executive Staff