



October 15, 2020

To: Legislative and Communications Committee 
From: Darrell E. Johnson, Chief Executive Officer
Subject: Update on Diversity Outreach and Inclusion Efforts

Overview

The Orange County Transportation Authority is continuing its effort to conduct comprehensive and meaningful outreach to Orange County’s growing diverse communities. This report provides an update on the progress of the diversity and inclusion efforts as well as plans to meet the future needs of community members who are increasingly diverse.

Recommendations

Receive and file as an information item.

Background

The Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA) is continuing its effort to conduct comprehensive and meaningful outreach to Orange County’s growing diverse communities. More than a decade ago, OCTA’s diversity efforts primarily centered on working closely with ethnic business groups to conduct procurement outreach at business expos, conferences, and other events. OCTA has leveraged those strong relationships with diverse business organizations over the past few years by engaging with the business community on OCTA’s other transportation programs, projects, and plans. OCTA’s diversity outreach and inclusion efforts have now expanded significantly to provide public involvement opportunities with Orange County’s other diverse stakeholders. These include communities of color that now make up 57 percent of Orange County’s population. These demographics, combined with the fact that nearly half of Orange County’s residents do not speak English at home, highlight the importance of effectively engaging with diverse audiences to effectively deliver on OCTA’s mission.

Discussion

The OCTA Diversity Outreach and Business Opportunities team's work to plan, execute, and evaluate diversity outreach has relied primarily on building relationships of trust with community, business, faith, social, and other organizations' leaders and members that represent Orange County's diverse communities. The communications and engagement foundation of the program has relied on personally connecting with these constituents – who are often hard to reach. Staff has made tangible progress with outreach to diverse audiences through in-person networking, information sharing, soliciting feedback, and other engagement activities. These outreach activities have relied on participating at community and business events as well as being on-site with large numbers of diverse audiences. During the past several months, OCTA's Diversity Outreach program has significantly shifted to adjust to the dramatic changes as a result of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

Proactive Outreach to Orange County's Ethnic Communities and Other Diverse Audiences

For the past decade, OCTA has had a strong presence with Orange County's numerous chambers of commerce and business organizations that represent Orange County's diverse communities. OCTA's Diversity Outreach and Business Opportunities staff is integrated into many ethnic business organizations as steering committee members, board members or executive advisory members. This includes working closely with prominent business groups such as the Orange County Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, the Black Chamber of Commerce of Orange County, the Filipino American Chamber of Commerce of Orange County, the Korean American Chamber of Commerce of Orange County, and the Vietnamese American Chamber of Commerce of Orange County. Staff also works across OCTA divisions and departments to facilitate procurement opportunities with small minority- and women-owned businesses as well as to provide information about employment opportunities at OCTA and other public agency partners. Staff members participate in expos, conferences, and other business events attracting tens of thousands of participants each year and often coordinate keynote speeches, serve on panels, or play other prominent roles.

The team also staffs booths at events to share information and answers questions about OCTA's services, projects, programs, and plans. Staff has been involved with these business events and other smaller business engagement activities – totaling more than 80 opportunities – in the past fiscal year, with approximately 25 of these events conducted virtually since March 2020.

Engagement Activities for Transportation

Staff is integrated into OCTA's largest capital projects: The Interstate 405 (I-405) Improvement Project and the OC Streetcar Project. Communications and outreach plans for both projects contain communications strategies that include Spanish and Vietnamese at a minimum with other non-English languages when necessary. Both projects' public information campaigns also include bilingual English/Spanish and bilingual English/Vietnamese information along with team members who are bilingual or trilingual to help community members, business owners, and commuters in the language they are most comfortable. Staff also provides in-language messaging that resonates with the common background, shared values, and cultural nuances of Orange County's Latinx, Vietnamese American community, and other audiences. Staff also provides assistance with Orange County's Spanish and Vietnamese news media, with placement of news stories on television, radio, and print publications for these construction projects.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, OCTA conducted public outreach for transportation studies onboard specific routes to connect with OC Bus riders who may be unable to provide feedback at a formal open house. This effort has helped reach difficult-to-reach audiences by providing transit users with proposed updates to OC Bus or other transit-related changes and by obtaining their valuable opinions and suggestions. By pairing bilingual staff targeting Orange County's top two non-English speaking communities of Spanish and Vietnamese, OCTA is cost-effectively reaching constituents who otherwise may not have had that opportunity with traditional communications methods.

By riding bus routes and visiting key stops in fall 2019 and winter 2020, staff contributed to the Beach Boulevard Transportation Study and the Bristol Street Corridor Study with more than 220 OC Bus riders' comments and suggestions in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese. The majority of the survey respondents were from communities of color – Latinx, Asian Americans, and other groups.

Another example of direct community outreach is OCTA's highly visible role in celebrating cultural holidays and participating in commemorations. OCTA staff participated in Hispanic Heritage Month in September 2019, with a social media campaign and on panel discussions regarding contributions of the Latinx community in Orange County. The Latinx community (also known as Latinos or Hispanics) is the largest ethnic group, making up 34 percent of the County's population while the fastest-growing group is the Asian American community that encompasses 21 percent of the population.

OCTA also actively engaged with thousands of participants at two Tét festivals celebrating the Vietnamese Tét lunar new year over the same three-day

weekend in January 2020 at events in the cities of Costa Mesa and Fountain Valley. OCTA's booth at both locations were designed to attract attention with culturally striking graphics. An OC Streetcar video in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese played to passers-by while staff distributed packets of bilingual transportation information to thousands of participants. Also, nearly 800 community members from both Têt event locations completed transportation surveys and signed up to receive future transportation updates.

In early February 2020, OCTA participated in Black History Month and the Cultural Faire in the City of Anaheim. The booth was culturally and historically appropriate with strong visuals to attract visitors. Similar information packets highlighting transportation offerings were distributed to thousands of people during the one-day event that featured OCTA's diverse employees. More than 130 community members filled out transportation surveys during this event.

Multilingual COVID-19 Pandemic Response

Like other organizations, OCTA's high-touch, person-to-person contact with diverse audiences dramatically changed with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. In early March 2020, the team transitioned to filling an important role with the OCTA crisis communications team and quickly executed virtual outreach and communications. All communications pieces were in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese – from the website, emails, and social media to bus signs and voice messages on buses. The team provided, and continues to provide, updates and information alerts in different languages to bus riders, the 91 Express Lanes customers, and capital project stakeholders.

During the early stage of the COVID-19 pandemic, staff partnered with California State University, Fullerton's Latino Communications Institute and Northgate Markets for a Spanish-language question-and-answer session via Facebook Live. The virtual session helped answer questions from the public and transit riders about COVID-19 and mitigations to help stop its spread. Staff also participated in numerous virtual workshops and social media discussions in Spanish and Vietnamese to communicate important health and safety messages on COVID-19 to vulnerable community members and to highlight OCTA's response to help safely transport essential workers.

OCTA's Diverse Community Leaders group also continues to play an important role, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. The group of community, business, faith, and social leaders representing diverse communities meets quarterly to learn about OCTA's transportation updates and plans. The group of influential diversity leaders then shares the updates with their respective constituents or members while also providing valuable feedback to help OCTA

enhance transportation plans and programs. The group has also been instrumental in helping OCTA distribute COVID-19 information and other transportation information. The group had a virtual meeting in July 2020, and the next virtual meeting is scheduled for October 29, 2020.

Qualitative Survey of Hard-to-Reach Diverse Audience

A comprehensive study targeting hard-to-reach diverse audiences, called the Transportation Needs Assessment, was halted in March due to COVID-19. In an effort to gain valuable feedback from diverse communities, staff created an informal qualitative online survey in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese to safely gauge feedback from underserved community members. Staff launched this survey to help bridge the absence of physically connecting with community members with a cost-effective way to virtually solicit feedback. From July 9 to August 31, 2020, 326 community members completed the nonscientific, brief online survey. Highlights of the online survey results include:

ASKED ABOUT PRIORITIZING ISSUES TO CONSIDER WHEN PLANNING FOR TRANSPORTATION BY SELECTING TWO CHOICES	NUMBER OF RESPONSES
REDUCING CONGESTION	153
ENHANCING SAFETY	122
IMPROVING AIR QUALITY	110
PROVIDING MORE TRAVEL OPTIONS	110
ENSURES SUSTAINABILITY	72
ASKED TO SELECT UP TO THREE REASONS FOR NOT RIDING OC BUS	NUMBER OF RESPONSES
SAFETY / COVID-19	173
PREFER TO DRIVE	120
SERVICE NOT FREQUENT ENOUGH / DOESN'T RUN EARLY OR LATE ENOUGH	112
NO STOPS NEAR DESTINATION	83
SAFETY CONCERNS	67

ASKED ABOUT IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE 52 RESPONDENTS WHO INDICATED THEY PRIMARILY RODE OC BUS	PERCENT OF RESPONDENTS
RIDING LESS THAN BEFORE COVID-19	60%
RIDING ABOUT THE SAME AS BEFORE COVID-19	31%
STOPPED RIDING SINCE COVID-19	5%

More than 50 percent of the survey respondents were Latinx, and 17 percent were Asian Americans. Although not a representative sample, this online survey – with more than one-third of respondents completing the survey in Spanish and Vietnamese – is one further step toward providing a greater voice for Orange County’s increasingly diverse community members.

Future Work with Communities of Color and Other Diverse Stakeholders

OCTA’s community-based approach to diversity outreach and inclusion is a solid foundation that will help enable staff to cultivate new relations with other groups and organizations in Orange County and Southern California. Although the COVID-19 pandemic altered the timeline for a more robust in-person engagement effort with communities of faith, especially for the I-405 Improvement Project, plans are in place to begin that effort in alternative ways. Staff is forging partnerships with other groups that represent the Latinx community, the Vietnamese American community, Korean American community, and other ethnic communities. Staff is also moving forward with outreach plans to organizations that represent the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer community, faith organizations, and other community organizations.

Through this work, OCTA is well-positioned to enhance its communications with diverse communities and to ensure effective two-way communications on transportation projects, programs, and services. The team is part of two internal OCTA working groups, focusing on planning and projects and the OCTA workforce, that will help develop OCTA’s ongoing work for diversity and inclusion and identify tangible ways to continually live up to OCTA’s mission and values in serving the diverse travel needs of Orange County’s dynamic demographics.

Summary

OCTA's diversity outreach and inclusion efforts will continue to forge new partnerships. The work will not only include business groups that represent diversity but also provide a stronger role for collaboration with diverse community members, ensuring more opportunities for enhanced engagement with OCTA's projects, programs, and plans. OCTA's Diversity Outreach team will continue to remain flexible to address the evolving environment and work to strengthen public participation opportunities to help meet the needs of Orange County's communities of color and other diverse groups.

Attachment

None.

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