



**November 12, 2020**

**To:** Transit Committee

**From:** Darrell E. Johnson, Chief Executive Officer

**Subject:** 2020 Coordinated Public Transit – Human Services Transportation Plan for Orange County

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Darrell E. Johnson", is positioned to the right of the "From:" line.

### **Overview**

The Coordinated Public Transit – Human Services Transportation Plan identifies strategies to address unmet transportation needs among seniors, persons with disabilities, and persons of low income. The plan is a requirement to receive certain federal transit funding. The update process has concluded, and Board of Directors' approval is requested to finalize the 2020 plan update.

### **Recommendation**

Direct staff to finalize the 2020 Coordinated Public Transit – Human Services Transportation Plan incorporating feedback provided by the Board of Directors.

### **Background**

The Coordinated Public Transit – Human Services Transportation Plan (Coordinated Plan) brings together human service organizations and public transit providers to identify mobility needs of seniors, persons with disabilities, and persons of low income. Consistent with requirements in Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Section 5310 Program, the Coordinated Plan process helps leverage and extend scarce transportation resources by coordinating different and often “siloed” public transportation and private nonprofit transportation providers. The plan identifies and prioritizes strategies for coordinating transportation services, meeting mobility needs, and addressing barriers to transportation access.

The Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA) Board of Directors (Board) adopted the first Coordinated Plan in 2008. Strategies identified in this plan have been used to award grant funding to Orange County agencies to support transportation programs for target populations. In 2018, OCTA began using the FTA Section 5310 funds for the OC ACCESS Program that provides federally-required “complementary paratransit” service to persons with disabilities who cannot use the fixed-route bus system.

In order to continue providing funding for specialized transportation providers, a locally-funded “Enhanced Mobility for Seniors and Disabled Grant Program” was developed to provide more flexibility for specialized transportation projects. The Coordinated Plan is also used to identify project and program needs prior to developing specific funding guidelines for this grant program. It is important to note that not everything identified in the plan is required to be funded and OCTA grant programs supplement other sources of funds received by the specialized transportation providers. The OCTA Grant Program Guidelines will be brought to the Board for approval prior to release, which is anticipated in early 2021.

### ***Discussion***

OCTA retained consulting services to assist in updating the Coordinated Plan. This process covered the following areas further described below:

- Evaluating target population and demographic changes;
- Conducting public outreach activities to reassess existing transportation services and resources; and
- Developing goals and strategies to address needs.

### **Target Population Demographic Findings**

Between 2012 and 2018, the population over 65 increased by over 33 percent, compared to the 5.4 percent increase in total population. During the same period, people in Orange County that reported having at least one type of disability increased by almost 25 percent. The total number of individuals living in poverty increased by two percent between 2012 and 2018. Overall, increases in the older population, persons with reported disabilities, and the low-income population have increased since 2012, underscoring the need to address these populations as part of the Coordinated Plan. In addition to this demographic data, OCTA coordinated with key stakeholders to gain an understanding of specific provider needs, which are further described below.

### **Transportation Provider and Public Outreach**

Due to coronavirus (COVID-19) social distancing guidelines, face-to-face meetings could not be conducted. OCTA outreach efforts included telephone interviews and videoconference meetings with cities, human service agencies

and organizations, members of target populations, and the OCTA Special Needs Advisory Committee. Surveys of seniors were also undertaken. Common survey results and interviews included the following:

- Lengthy fixed-route bus headways;
- Limited service options in some geographic areas of the County;
- Access to transit stops from social/community service provider locations;
- Difficulty navigating wide and busy streets/lanes near bus lines;
- Limited ability to travel outside the service area to major medical facilities; and
- Lack of service availability for low-income persons under 60 years of age.

Social service agencies were also asked to specify the transportation needs most often communicated to them by their clients. Traveling to both local and regional medical locations was the most reported transportation need, followed by shopping and escorted trips to and through the door. Transportation to or from south Orange County, trips with multiple destinations, and commuting to worksites were also identified needs. Traveling to neighboring counties was the least communicated transportation need.

To further assess the existing needs of target populations, survey respondents were asked an open-ended question to describe the barriers that their clients experience in accessing transportation. The following were the top responses:

- Twenty-four percent of the agency clients indicated having difficulty paying the required fare;
- Twenty-one percent reported long walking distances to the nearest bus stop; and
- Twenty-one percent experienced challenges with low frequency of transit buses.

The following barriers were common among older adults and persons with disabilities:

- Twelve percent had difficulty navigating the transit network;
- Twelve percent had difficulty traveling beyond the public transit service area; and
- Nine percent reported issues with eligibility, completing advanced registration, and scheduling on demand response programs.

For complete results on needs and barriers, please refer to figures four and five in Section IV of the Executive Summary (Attachment A).

**Goals and Strategies**

As a result of the demographic analysis, assessment of transportation services, and public outreach efforts, four draft coordination goals and 16 strategies were identified:

Goal 1 – Restore and enhance the specialized public transportation network to meet the needs of the target populations in a post-COVID-19 environment.

- 1.1 Continue to support the capital costs, operations, and maintenance of OC ACCESS.
- 1.2 Integrate flexible transportation options to meet first/last mile needs.
- 1.3 Provide reliable on-demand transportation services for disabled persons.
- 1.4 Improve safety and access to services for target populations through technology.

Goal 2 – Rebuild specialized services for target populations.

- 2.1 Continue to fund the maintenance and purchase of new vehicles for human service transportation agencies/organizations.
- 2.2 Continue to support transportation services for low-income, transit-dependent populations.
- 2.3 Prioritize services in areas that are underserved or have gaps in service.
- 2.4 Promote coordination between agencies and organizations that provide special needs transportation.

Goal 3 – Leverage transportation information to enhance mobility – measure outcomes.

- 3.1 Continue progress towards the use of technology by target populations to access travel information, schedule rides, and travel training.
- 3.2 Support participation in 211 Community Information Exchange.
- 3.3 Institute measurements to outcomes evaluate.

Goal 4 – Improve and expand external and internal mobility infrastructure.

- 4.1 Identify bus stop and transfer locations needing physical improvements necessary for persons with disabilities to access public transit.
- 4.2 Expand volunteer driver services to existing transportation needs.
- 4.3 Expand non-profit mobility options using retired vehicles.

- 4.4 Explore shared use of grant-funded vehicles by grantees serving compatible needs.
- 4.5 Explore flexible use of grant funding to allow for non-traditional uses and users.

The draft goals and strategies outlined in the 2020 update to the Coordination Plan will facilitate coordination and community partnership among human services transportation providers. Further, it will assist in developing programs to address the unmet needs and gaps in transportation services for seniors, persons with disabilities, and persons of low income. Staff will return to the Board with funding guidelines for the OCTA Enhanced Mobility for Seniors and Disabled Grant Program that will consider the strategies included in the Coordinated Plan.


### ***Summary***

The 2020 Coordinated Public Transit - Human Services Transportation Plan is prepared in accordance with federal guidelines under the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Act. The plan identifies unmet transportation needs for seniors, persons with disabilities, and persons of low income, and offers recommended project strategies. Staff is seeking feedback on the draft goals and strategies prior to finalizing the plan.

### ***Attachment***


- A. Orange County Transportation Authority, Human Services Transportation Coordination Plan, Draft Executive Summary

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