




***April 26, 2021***

**To:** Members of the Board of Directors   
**From:** Darrell E. Johnson, Chief Executive Officer  
**Subject:** Public Hearing for the Draft June 2021 Bus Service Change

### ***Overview***

Based on Federal Transit Administration Title VI requirements, the draft June 2021 bus service change requires a public hearing. This requirement includes an equity analysis and a public hearing for major bus service changes that are implemented during an emergency and have been in place for 12 months or longer. On February 22, 2021, an outreach program was introduced to gather feedback about the draft June 2021 service change as well as emergency changes to bus service implemented during the coronavirus pandemic. To complete the public participation process, a public hearing date of April 26, 2021 was set.

### ***Recommendation***

Receive and file initial public input on the draft June 2021 bus service change as well as emergency changes to bus service implemented during the coronavirus pandemic.

### ***Background***

The Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA) implements schedule and route revisions to selected OC Bus routes three times a year, in February, June, and October. The next bus service change is scheduled for implementation on June 13, 2021. OCTA implemented an emergency service change on March 23, 2020. This emergency service change reduced service levels to balance a significant reduction in demand for transit because of the federal and state emergency declarations, including the State's stay-at-home order to help reduce the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19) and correlating public health guidance.

Based on these factors, service levels were adjusted to provide a basic level of service for customers needing to make essential trips. Bus service was subsequently increased slightly in June 2020 as demand increased and to help ensure social distancing for passengers and OCTA coach operators. The same service levels were continued with the October 2020 and February 2021 service

changes. The current state of the COVID-19 pandemic continues to have a negative impact on bus ridership. As a result of this, OCTA plans to continue the service level that is currently operating for the draft June 2021 bus service change, along with adjustments to provide span and frequency improvements based on feedback following an extensive public outreach process. Additional bus trips and trippers (unscheduled extra buses on busier routes) will continue to be deployed daily, as needed, based on social distancing requirements.

### ***Discussion***

Proposed service change recommendations for June 2021 were presented to the Board of Directors (Board) on February 22, 2021. For the draft June 2021 bus service change, it is planned to continue to deliver existing service levels, which include enhanced Saturday service levels on weekdays and February 2020 service levels on Saturdays and Sundays. This maintains the same service levels since June 2020, and 1,187,000 annualized revenue vehicle hours.

The June 2021 service hours are approximately 27 percent below the 1,622,000 annualized revenue vehicle hours that were operated in February 2020, prior to the pandemic. This reduction in service hours is primarily attributed to:

- Reduced service frequency on 37 routes
- No changes to service on 13 routes
- Temporary suspension of eight routes

These changes are considered “major service changes” under OCTA policy and require public outreach and a public hearing prior to Board approval. On February 22, 2021, the Board directed staff to implement a public outreach program to solicit feedback. The comprehensive outreach program was designed following Title VI Public Involvement Plan guidelines and was adapted to overcome the challenges of limited physical gatherings due to COVID-19. The main goal was to create awareness and encourage participation with additional focus on hard-to-reach communities through multilingual and multifaceted approaches. The following outreach activities took place:

- Digital communications – Information was placed on the OCTA website in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese with an online questionnaire to gather feedback. The questionnaire was also publicized on OCTA’s blog “On the Move,” and social media channels. Multiple email blasts were sent to 112,000 email addresses from OCTA’s bus customer email list.

- Printed Brochure/Questionnaire – To encourage feedback, 50,000 printed questionnaires in multiple languages were developed and placed on the buses, and mailed to employers, colleges/universities, senior centers, and diverse community groups.
- Telephone Hotlines – Hotlines in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese were established for customers without internet access to ask questions about the service change, register for the community meetings, and respond to the questionnaire.
- Print and Broadcast Advertisements – Advertisements were placed in four newspapers including English, Spanish, and Vietnamese publications, as well as advertisements inside all buses to notify customers and the general public of the proposed service change community meetings and public hearing. Spanish and Vietnamese television and radio were utilized to reach the diverse communities.
- Three Community Meetings – Meetings took place virtually in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese, where participants could connect via dial-in phone, computer, or mobile device. A total of 169 people participated in three community meetings (77 at the meeting held in English, 18 at the meeting held in Spanish, and 74 at the meeting held in Vietnamese).
- Local Jurisdiction Communication – Emails, along with a digital communication tool kit, were sent to public information officers at all cities with service change information for redistribution via cities' communication channels.
- Local Media – A press release was issued to local media notifying the community about the service change and public involvement program.
- Diversity Community Leaders Group Quarterly Meeting – The proposed service changes were discussed, and members were provided with outreach materials to share with their respective networks.

To gather customer input on the draft June 2021 bus service change, online and print questionnaires were developed. Responses to the questionnaire, along with comments received from virtual community meetings, customer relations, and other channels, are being used to inform the draft June 2021 bus service change as well as future service changes, beginning with the October 2021 service change. The goal of the public outreach was to gather feedback on specific areas related to the service change, including:

- Customer experience with OC Bus service during COVID-19, including service changes necessitated by COVID-19 and stay-at-home orders
- Customer satisfaction with current OC Bus service
- Requested changes or enhancements to current OC Bus routes

As of March 31, 2021, more than 2,200 questionnaires and public comments have been received. The table below identifies how comments were received.

Channel	Count
Online/Print Questionnaires	2,086
Virtual Community Meeting Attendees	169
Customer Relations (Calls, Emails, Social Media)	53
Total:	2,262

Key themes from comments received:

#### Response to OC Bus Service During COVID-19

- Overall, 63 percent of responses were positive regarding OC Bus service provided during the COVID-19 pandemic. These comments included:
  - OC Bus helped with essential travel (24 percent)
  - Riders were able to get to where they needed to go (20 percent)
  - Appreciation of COVID-19 safety measures (19 percent)
- A total of 18 percent of responses were negative regarding OC Bus service. These comments included:
  - Customers weren't comfortable riding due to COVID-19 (7 percent)
  - There wasn't enough service where needed (7 percent)
  - Riders weren't able to get to where they needed to go (4 percent)

#### The Majority of Customers are Satisfied with Current OC Bus Routes

- As part of the customer questionnaire, respondents were asked to identify up to three of their most frequently used OC Bus routes and provide a satisfaction rating for each route. Overall, 69 percent of existing route ratings were either satisfied or very satisfied.

The remaining responses were 21 percent neutral and 10 percent either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied.

### Route-Specific Feedback on Current OC Bus Service

While feedback on current OC Bus routes was largely positive (45 percent of responses), improvements requested by passengers included:

- Increase service frequency (14 percent)
  - Routes 25, 30, 35, 29, 71
- Add service span (9 percent)
  - Weekday Mornings: Routes 26, 53, 25, 72, 30, 54, 70
  - Weekday Evenings: Routes 42, 87, 25, 83, 26, 38
  - Weekends: Routes 42, 87, 29, 167, 86
- Restore service/routes suspended due to COVID-19 (3 percent)
  - Routes 560, 57X, 721, 701
- Improve on-time performance (3 percent)
  - Routes 57, 35, 53, 50

In addition, questionnaire respondents indicated their desired future service enhancements along with travel needs. The top four enhancements requested included: increasing service frequency (32 percent), faster travel time (18 percent), fewer needed transfer connections between routes (10 percent), and later service span (10 percent).

All customer comments and requests have been provided to the service planning team to consider for the draft June 2021 bus service change or future service plans.

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**Summary**

A public hearing on the draft June 2021 bus service change is required. Initial public feedback is presented for Board review. Staff will return to the Board with a refined service plan recommendation on May 24, 2021.

**Attachments**

- A. June 2021 Bus Service Change Brochures (English/Spanish)
- B. June 2021 Bus Service Change Brochures (English/Vietnamese)

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