



*July 8, 2021*

**To:** Transit Committee  
**From:** Darrell E. Johnson, Chief Executive Officer  
**Subject:** August 2021 Bus Service Change

### **Overview**

California is emerging from the coronavirus pandemic and the stay-at-home orders that were put in place to protect public health are being phased out. The return of economic activity is expected to increase demand for bus transit service. In response, the Orange County Transportation Authority is implementing a mid-summer service change. The proposed August 2021 bus service change represents the largest increase in service since the start of the pandemic. The additional service is intended to address expected ridership increases related to the return of in-person instruction for schools, colleges, and universities, and the resurgence of hospitality industry activities.

### **Recommendation**

Receive and file as an information item.

### **Background**

The Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA) implements regular schedule and route revisions to selected OC Bus routes three times a year, in February, June, and October.

OCTA implemented an emergency service change on March 23, 2020, which reduced service levels to balance a reduction in demand for transit service resulting from the federal and state emergency declarations including California's stay-at-home order to help reduce the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19) while still providing vital transportation services. Based on these factors, service levels were adjusted to provide a baseline level of service for customers needing to make essential trips. Bus service was subsequently adjusted as demand increased and to help ensure social distancing for passengers and OCTA coach operators.

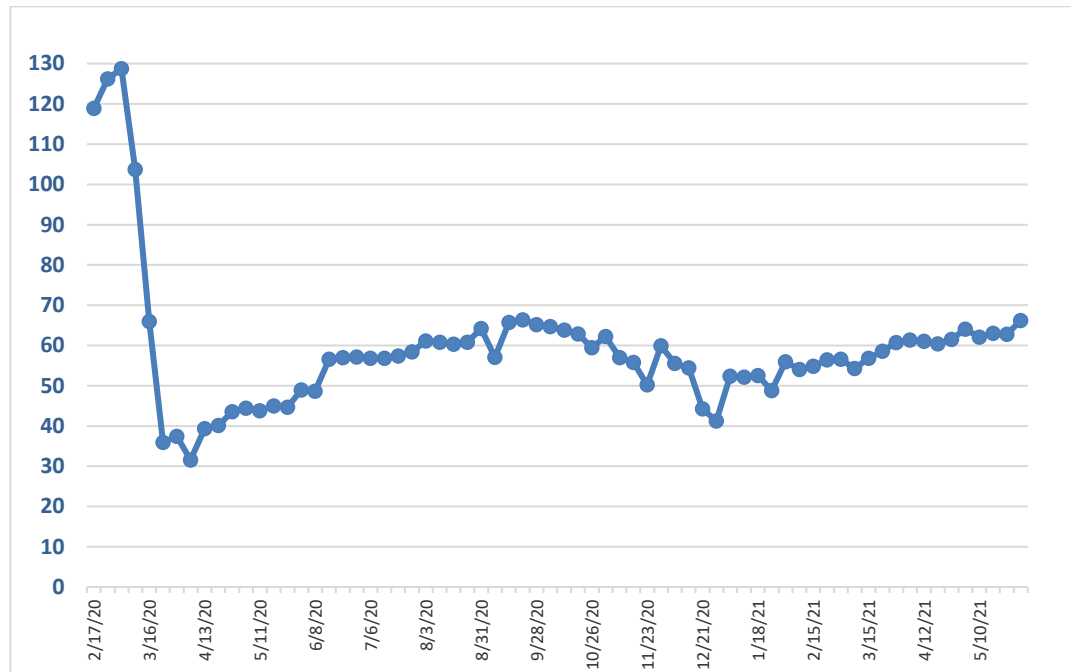
OC Bus routes have been operating under a public health emergency since the initial service changes went into effect in March 2020. The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) requires that, pursuant to Title VI, any major service change that lasts longer than 12 months include a service equity analysis to determine if there are disparate impacts on minority and/or low-income populations who rely on bus service. As a result, OCTA was required to perform a service equity analysis, conduct public outreach, and hold a public hearing. On February 22, 2021, the Board of Directors (Board) directed staff to implement a Public Outreach Program to comply with the FTA requirement and to solicit feedback for the planned restoration of bus service. Per OCTA's policy, a Public Outreach Program was conducted and concluded with a public hearing at the April 26, 2021 Board meeting. This effort resulted in the receipt of 2,262 questionnaires and comments. Staff began incorporating public input in the recently implemented June 2021 bus service change and will continue to incorporate this feedback in upcoming service changes.

The State's plan to reopen businesses to full capacity and the return of in-person instruction for Kindergarten through 12 schools, colleges, and universities is expected to result in increased demand for transit service. Further, the anticipated rebound in the hospitality sector will likely contribute to demand for public transit. In response, a mid-summer service change is proposed to increase service frequency and service span and reinstate some suspended routes. Staff recommends implementing this service change on August 15, 2021. The proposed August service change does not alter plans for the regularly scheduled October 2021 service change, which could include additional bus service changes based on ridership trends through the summer period and seasonal adjustments.

***Discussion***

After the implementation of California's stay-at-home order in March 2020, weekday OC Bus ridership dropped significantly, from approximately 125,000 average weekday boardings to the low 30,000s in April 2020. Ridership rebounded to over 60,000 average weekday boardings in fall 2020 and spring 2021. The chart below shows the average weekday ridership from mid-February 2020 through early June 2021.

Average Weekday Boardings by Week (in Thousands)



OCTA will continue the suspension of six bus routes. The recommendations are detailed in Attachment A and shown in attachments B, C, D, E, F, and G.

Staff anticipates that ridership demand for OC Bus service will remain steady during the summer and increased ridership resulting from schools re-opening will be accommodated with the changes proposed for August. After implementation, staff will assess the service change based on key variables, such as customer demand and workforce availability. Contingent on increasing demand, the October 2021 service change will build on the proposed August 2021 service change based on these variables in addition to public input received. Preliminary plans for October 2021 could increase service by approximately 40,000 annual RVH to a total of 1,350,000 annual RVH or about 17 percent below pre-COVID-19 service levels, consistent with the proposed OCTA Fiscal Year (FY) 2021-22 Budget. Staff will inform the Board prior to implementation.

***Summary***

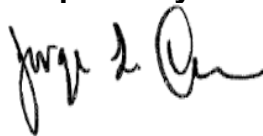
Staff recommends the Board approve the proposed August 2021 bus service change and continue to use the public feedback received to develop the FY 2021-22 Bus Service Plan. With Board approval, staff will begin implementing the recommendations for the August 2021 bus service change. Customers will be notified of the changes three weeks prior to implementation.

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***Attachments***

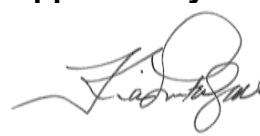
- A. August 2021 Bus Service Change
- B. August 2021 Bus Service Change System Map, Routes with Frequency Improvements
- C. August 2021 Bus Service Change System Map, Routes with Frequency Reductions
- D. August 2021 Bus Service Change System Map, Routes with Span Improvements
- E. August 2021 Bus Service Change System Map, Routes to be Reinstated
- F. August 2021 Bus Service Change System Map, Routes Continue Suspended
- G. August 2021 Bus Service Change System Map, Routes with No Changes

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