



September 9, 2021

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

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

Overview

In anticipation of increased demand due to the return of in-person learning for most schools, colleges, and universities, the Orange County Transportation Authority implemented a special service change on August 15, 2021. The proposed October 2021 bus service change will provide additional service to further address anticipated ridership increases related to the return of in-person learning and work trips for most sectors of the economy, including 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. The next bus service change is scheduled for implementation on October 10, 2021.

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.

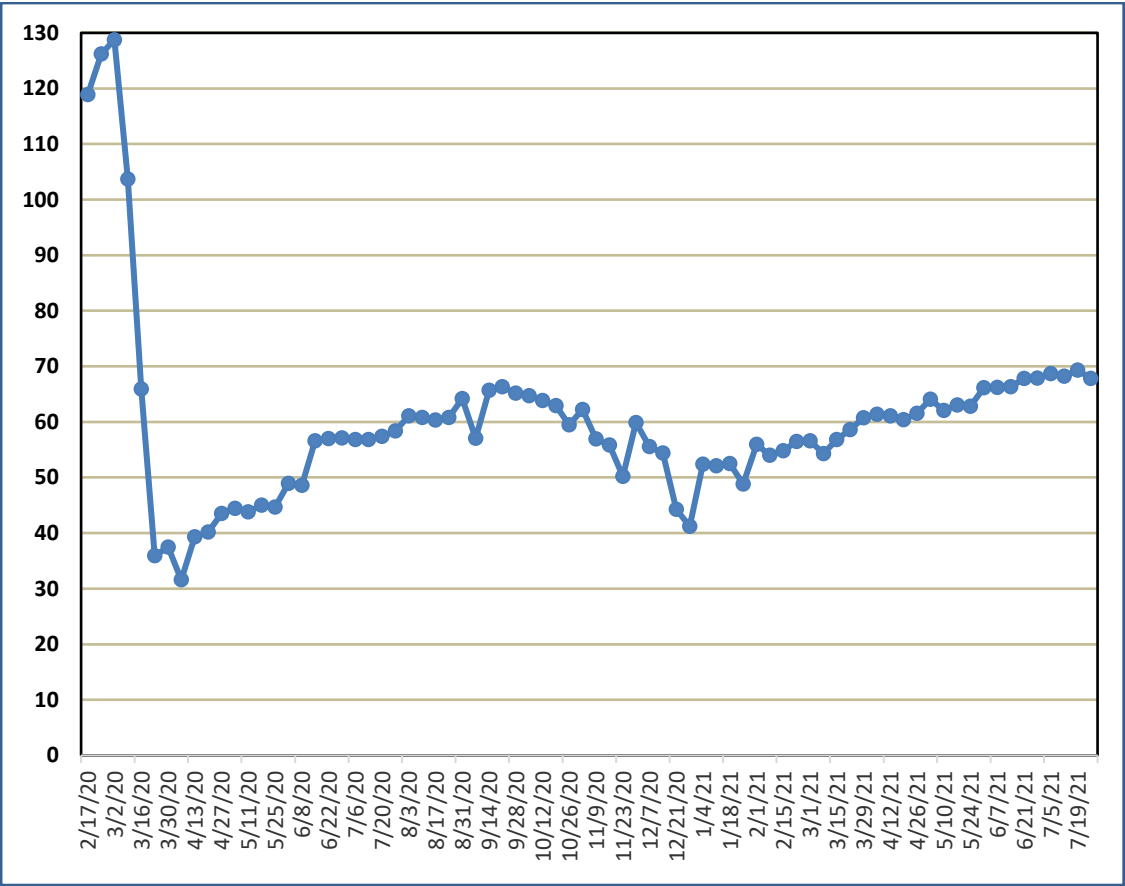
OC Bus routes have been operating under a public health emergency since the initial service changes went into effect in March 2020. The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) requires that, pursuant to Title VI, any major service change that lasts longer than 12 months include a service equity analysis 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. Staff began incorporating public input in the recently implemented June and August 2021 bus service changes to improve bus service and will continue to consider this feedback in upcoming service changes.

Discussion

COVID-19 has had a significant impact on transit ridership nationwide. OC Bus ridership decreased from approximately 125,000 average weekday boardings to the low 30,000s in April 2020. Ridership has recently rebounded to about 70,000 average weekday boardings. The chart below shows the average weekday ridership, by week, from mid-February 2020 through the end of July 2021.

Average Weekday Boardings by Week (in Thousands)



On March 23, 2020, in direct response to the dramatic decrease in demand, OCTA reduced fixed-route bus service approximately 40 percent by implementing Sunday service schedules on all routes, seven days a week. Between the June 2020 and June 2021, OCTA operated an enhanced Saturday service schedule on weekdays and a regular schedule on Saturdays and Sundays. In June 2021, OCTA began adding service, focusing on improving frequency and service hours of operation on many OC bus routes. An additional 103,000 annual revenue vehicle hours (RVH) were added in August 2021, and a 40,700 RVH increase is planned for October 2021, which will increase service to 1.35 million annual RVH. This is a three percent increase in service over August 2021 levels and about 17 percent below pre-COVID-19 levels.

The proposed October 2021 service change will improve service on 23 of the 52 OCTA bus routes currently operated. The changes were developed to accommodate the anticipated increase in demand as the economy continues to reopen and schools and universities return to in-person instruction and also considered public input. These changes include:

- Improving service frequency on five bus routes,
- Expanding hours of operation earlier in the morning and/or later in the evening on 13 bus route,
- Schedule adjustments on ten bus routes to improve on-time performance;
- Adjusting schedules on five bus routes due to changes to Metrolink schedule, and,
- Reinstating Route 59 service to the University of California, Irvine.

OCTA will continue the suspension of six bus routes until the demand for service rebounds. The recommendations are detailed in Attachment A and shown in attachments B, C, D, and E.

Following the implementation of the service improvements, staff will assess the service based on key variables, such as customer demand, service performance, and the latest developments regarding COVID-19. Preliminary plans for February or June 2022 could increase service by approximately 100,000 annual RVH to a total of 1,450,000 annual RVH or about 11 percent below pre-COVID-19 service levels, consistent with the approved OCTA Fiscal Year 2021-22 Budget. Staff will present the February 2022 changes to the Board in November 2021.

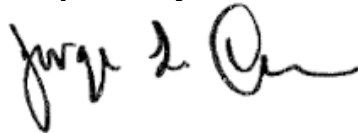
Summary

The proposed October 2021 bus service change will increase transit service in response to customer requests and anticipated ridership increases. Route improvements include more frequent service, expanded hours of operations, schedule adjustments, and other changes. Customers will be notified of the changes three weeks prior to implementation.

Attachments

- A. October 2021 Bus Service Change: Bus Route Recommendations
- B. October 2021 Bus Service Change System Map, Routes with Frequency Improvements
- C. October 2021 Bus Service Change System Map, Routes with Span Improvements
- D. October 2021 Bus Service Change System Map, Routes with Improved On-Time Performance
- E. October 2021 Bus Service Change System Map, Routes Continue Suspended
- F. October 2021 Bus Service Change System Map, Routes with No Changes

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