



**March 24, 2025**

**To:** Members of the Board of Directors  
**From:** Darrell E. Johnson, Chief Executive Officer  
**Subject:** Public Hearing for the Proposed New Fare Media

### **Overview**

The Orange County Transportation Authority is proposing new fare media as part of the Rider Validation System scheduled to be implemented in late summer 2025. In January, staff initiated a Public Involvement Plan, following Federal Transit Administration Title VI guidelines requiring agencies to conduct outreach prior to implementing new fare media. To complete the public participation process, a date of March 24, 2025, was set for a public hearing. Based on public input collected and feedback received during the public hearing, staff will return to the Board of Directors on May 27, 2025, to seek approval for implementing the proposed fare media.

### **Recommendation**

Receive and file initial public input on the proposed new fare media.

### **Background**

The Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA) has been actively working to modernize its fare collection methods. In 2018, OCTA took a major step by installing mobile ticketing validators across its fixed-route fleet, enabling mobile ticket validation and laying the groundwork for further advancements. This initial investment set the stage for the development of the Rider Validation System (RVS), which aims to significantly improve the fare payment experience, enhance rider validation, and offer greater flexibility in fare policy.

To achieve these objectives, the OCTA Board of Directors (Board) approved a contract with INIT Innovations in Transportation, Inc. (INIT) on October 23, 2023, to allow implementation of the RVS. Implementation of the RVS will modernize the existing fare collection methods with a more equitable and adaptable system that includes features like fare capping, mobile payment options, and open payments with plans to implement it by late summer 2025. In addition, on

November 25, 2024, the Board approved amendments to the Fare Policy including implementation of fare capping and a free two-hour transfer period.

***Discussion***

Federal Transit Administration Title VI (Title VI) guidelines require OCTA to evaluate the implementation of any new fare media for potential rider impacts. On January 13, 2025, the Board directed staff to implement a Public Involvement Plan (PIP) consistent with the Board-approved “strategies and methods for promoting public involvement” that includes specific strategies with targeted outreach to fulfill Title VI requirements.

To achieve this, OCTA staff has developed a PIP for achieving Title VI compliance that emphasizes reaching underserved populations through community engagement. Unless otherwise noted, all communications materials were offered in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese language.

Outreach tactics and activities to date have included:

- Bus Advertisements and Collateral – 50,000 multilingual booklets with mail-back surveys were distributed on buses and at events. Additionally, 1,650 interior bus advertisements (550 per language) were installed fleetwide.
- Bus Ride-Alongs – Multilingual ambassadors shared information and conducted surveys on the 11 busiest routes in core service areas.
- Transportation Center Pop-Up Events – Five locations with bilingual staff (English and Spanish).
- Print Advertisements – Six print advertisements, one in each: OC Register, La Opinión, El Clasificado, Người Việt, Việt Báo, and Viet Dong.
- Digital Information – A multilingual website with 46,456 visits from 27,797 users. Additionally, 12 email blasts reached 85,336 people, social media posts engaged 11,218 people, and digital advertisements reached over one million people. These tactics encouraged participation in the online survey.
- Community Meetings – Seven in-person and virtual sessions with 92 total attendees.

- Community and Cultural Events – Participated in 18 events engaging 13,768 people, with additional communications to ethnic chambers of commerce, business organizations, schools, and community organizations.

The outreach program collected public and customer feedback through online and print surveys. As of February 21, 2025, a total of 6,125 responses have been received.

Preliminary results from the PIP survey indicate a high degree of interest in OCTA providing new fare options, with 83 percent of respondents indicating that they were interested or very interested in new fare options. In contrast, only four percent of respondents reported being not very interested or not at all interested in new fare options.

This high level of interest held true across different fare media usage. Among mobile app users, 90 percent expressed interest or strong interest, the highest of any group. Even among those using cash for single trips or passes from other agencies, interest remained high at 87 percent for both.

Interest in new fare options varied slightly by survey language. Among English-language surveys, 80 percent of respondents reported being interested or very interested in new fare options. Spanish-language surveys showed the highest level of interest at 97 percent, while Vietnamese-language surveys also reported a notably high interest at 91 percent.

When asked about specific proposed fare options, survey respondents expressed the most interest in using the Wave card (smart card) at 30 percent of responses, closely followed by the Wave Mobile App (the new mobile app) at 28 percent of responses. The remaining options had similar percentages of responses: cash for single trips (15 percent), contactless payments (14 percent), and tap-to-pay credit or debit cards (13 percent). Survey respondents were able to select multiple prospective future fare media.

Respondents were also given the option to provide open-ended feedback through the survey. These responses, along with comments from social media, were organized into common themes, summarized below. Similar themes were noted during virtual and community meetings.

- Positive responses to the new fare media noted familiarity and/or experiences with similar systems from other agencies highlighted how the Wave card added flexibility to the fare system as a new fare option, and an environmental benefit.

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- There was minimal negative feedback; however, some riders requested the continued availability of cash payments, onboard day passes, and discounted fares for seniors, disabled individuals, youth, and college riders. It should be noted that cash will still be an option after the Wave card is introduced, both for reloading the card and for one-way fare payments. Likewise, all existing discounted fare options will remain available.
  - Frequently asked questions from the feedback included Wave card interoperability with other transit agencies and further clarification on fare capping and the two-hour transfer period.

The preliminary results of the PIP are based on data collected as of February 21, 2025, with feedback still being accepted through the public hearing on March 24, 2025. All feedback will be incorporated into the proposed new fare media plan, which will be presented to the Board on May 27, 2025. Additionally, all public feedback will help shape the upcoming Awareness and Education Campaign, which will launch after the Board approves the new fare media.

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**Summary**

OCTA is proposing new fare media as part of the RVS scheduled to launch in late summer 2025. Through a comprehensive PIP, OCTA has gathered community feedback that shows strong interest in these new payment options, as well as limited concerns and questions. This input will help shape both the final proposal and the upcoming Awareness and Education Campaign. Following the public hearing and after reviewing all collected feedback, staff will return to the Board on May 27, 2025, to request approval of the Title VI analysis to implement the proposed fare media.

**Attachment**

- A. Proposed New Fare Media Public Involvement Plan, Preliminary Outreach Report

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