



**November 14, 2024**

**To:** Transit Committee

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

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Darrell E. Johnson", is written over the printed name. To the right of the signature, the word "For" is written in blue ink.

**Subject:** Draft Orange County Human Services Transportation Coordinated Plan

### **Overview**

The Human Services Transportation Coordinated Plan identifies strategies to address unmet needs and enhance mobility for seniors, individuals with disabilities, and low-income residents in Orange County. This plan is a prerequisite for securing Federal Transit Administration Section 5310 Program funding. Staff has updated the Human Services Transportation Coordinated Plan, and Board of Directors' approval is requested to finalize the draft plan.

### **Recommendation**

Direct staff to finalize the Draft Human Services Transportation Coordinated Plan.

### **Background**

The Human Services Transportation Coordinated Plan (Plan) consolidates efforts between public transit and private or nonprofit human service organizations to address the transportation needs of individuals with disabilities, older adults, and people with low incomes. Consistent with requirements in the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Section 5310 Program, the Plan process helps leverage and extend scarce transportation resources between public transportation and private or nonprofit transportation providers. The Plan identifies and prioritizes strategies for coordinating transportation services, meeting mobility needs, and addressing barriers to transportation access. The Plan provides guidance for the allocation and distribution of funds throughout Orange County. The Plan is also used to identify project and program needs prior to developing specific funding guidelines.

The Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA) Board of Directors (Board) adopted the first Plan in 2008 and it is updated every four years to be consistent with Federal requirements. 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 to support OC ACCESS, a federally required complementary paratransit service to persons with disabilities who cannot use the fixed-route bus system.

In addition to OC Bus and OC ACCESS, OCTA also provides supplemental same-day taxi service for individuals who qualify for OC ACCESS and funding for specialized services, such as the Senior Mobility Program and the Senior Non-Emergency Transportation Program, which are designed to enhance transportation alternatives for seniors. There are a number of human services transportation (HST) providers that provide these services and are the focus of the Plan.

The Plan is structured around four essential elements:

1. An assessment of existing services, detailing current transportation providers across public, private, and nonprofit sectors.
2. An evaluation of transportation needs specific to seniors and individuals with disabilities.
3. Strategies and projects aimed at addressing the gaps between current services and identified needs, alongside opportunities to enhance service efficiency.
4. Prioritization of strategies and projects based on available resources, timing, and feasibility.

To receive funding, projects must be consistent with the Plan or address a need or strategy outlined in the Plan. It is important to note that not everything identified in the Plan is required to be funded and/or implemented. Agencies may experience resource constraints that also influence their ability to provide services.

### ***Discussion***

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

- Evaluating demographic shifts among target populations
- Conducting robust community outreach to reassess transportation needs and resources
- Developing forward-looking goals and strategies to address identified transportation gaps

### Existing Community Conditions and Travel Patterns

Among the nearly 3.2 million residents in Orange County, over 900,000 (29 percent) are either in poverty, have a disability, are over age 65, are a veteran, or are some combination of these. Over 23,000 of these individuals are in poverty and have a disability, and another 15,041 individuals are in poverty, have a disability, and are over 65 years old. These trends underscore the value of specialized transportation services. Understanding the overlapping factors that individuals face can help OCTA and partner organizations tailor services and outreach accordingly. While veterans and individuals with low income are not a focus population under the FTA Section 5310, they are commonly included in coordinated plans since many HST providers serve these groups as part of their customer base. Veterans and individuals with low income are considered in conjunction with other key characteristics, such as being seniors or individuals with disabilities, ensuring the focus remains on populations facing transportation challenges.

An analysis conducted on OC ACCESS trips from October 2023 identified the most frequent travel links as being mainly concentrated in densely populated or retail areas. These areas of the County include several major adult day care centers. The data indicates that the top travel connections involve key locations such as medical and adult day care facilities, shopping centers, and senior living facilities, highlighting the critical need for efficient transit options to and from these destinations.

### Key Findings

- The top OC ACCESS trip links show a high concentration of trips related to medical and adult day care facilities, as well as social service offices, indicating a strong demand for connecting services.
- The analysis identifies the distribution of trip destinations across the County, revealing patterns which inform future service planning.
- The top origin-destination pairs underscore the importance of targeted service enhancements in high-traffic areas to meet the specific needs of target users.

### Transportation Provider and Community Engagement Activities

This update to the Plan involved comprehensive engagement with key stakeholder groups, including community members, transportation and human services providers, OCTA's Accessible Transit Advisory Committee (ATAC), and OCTA's internal project development team.

OCTA conducted a detailed survey targeting all 5,049 active OC ACCESS riders. The survey was available both online and through a postage-paid mailer, which garnered 2,391 responses. The survey provided critical insights into travel patterns, unmet needs, and community recommendations for improving transportation services. A virtual community meeting held on March 20, 2024, further engaged participants, offering a platform for additional feedback and interactive discussion.

Engagement with service providers was facilitated through an online agency survey, which collected over 500 responses, and with ATAC, who played a crucial role providing ongoing feedback. These responses helped identify service offerings, client demographics, and notable gaps in transportation services. Following on the agency surveys, the project team conducted interviews with five key human services transportation service providers. Questions were tailored to each agency's survey responses and community role. These discussions provided in-depth insights into the specific challenges and opportunities faced by each entity. In addition, a virtual meeting was held on February 21, 2024. The meeting included an overview of the Plan and the planning process, including high-level information about transportation providers and population characteristics. OCTA also held virtual open office hours on February 28 and 29, 2024, for agencies to discuss the Plan, the process, their projects, and answer any questions they might have regarding the survey.

The insights from community and agency interactions were critical in updating the Plan, helping identify key service gaps and informing strategic development.

### Goals and Strategies

As a result of the outreach and engagement analysis, assessment of transportation services, and public outreach efforts, five goals and strategies were developed to address identified needs. These are recommended strategies that OCTA and human service transportation providers should consider based on their effectiveness and feasibility of implementation. Details for each goal and strategy can be found in the Executive Summary (Attachment A).

- **Goal 1 – Sustain existing services.**  
Need: Support funding, staffing and ability to maintain and enhance the capability of service providers to meet demand in an effective and sustainable way.
  
- **Goal 2 – Enhance existing service coverage and operating hours.**  
Need: Existing services have limited operating hours, and geographic coverage, in part due to low demand for fixed-route service in low density areas.

- Goal 3 – Improve rider-facing information and communication.  
Need: Not all riders are able to access important transportation information, including information about the status of their trip.
  
- Goal 4 – Improve service quality and rider experience.  
Need: Some riders, especially those with disabilities and/or who have limited English proficiency, express concerns with safety and comfort while waiting, and customer service challenges.
  
- Goal 5 – Increase Number of Service Options.  
Need: Gaps in existing services limit the ability of seniors, people with disabilities, and people with low incomes to fully meet their travel needs.

***Summary***

The Draft Human Services Transportation Coordinated Plan outlines a comprehensive approach to addressing the transportation needs of Orange County's most vulnerable populations. It reflects a commitment to improving mobility through enhanced coordination, targeted resource allocation, and innovative service delivery strategies. The recommended strategies for human service transportation providers will be assessed considering resource and financial constraints for service enhancements.

***Attachment***

- A. Draft Human Services Transportation Coordinated Plan Executive Summary

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