

Meeting of April 27, 2020

Board Receives COVID-19 Update

The Orange County Transportation Authority's Board of Directors received an update on how the agency is responding to the coronavirus pandemic.

OCTA has continued to make operational changes to the OC Bus system to encourage proper social distancing and has implemented updated Federal Transit Administration guidelines for coach operators, including limiting the number of riders on board buses. OCTA also continues to operate its regular OC Bus routes on Sunday service levels, is boarding passengers through the rear bus doors and continues enhanced nightly bus cleaning.

OCTA is also closely monitoring the financial implications of the pandemic, providing input to state and federal officials as stimulus packages are rolled out at the federal level, and being considered at the state level. Development and refinement of OCTA's 2020-21 budget also continues, reflecting updated revenue and expense assumptions.

Efforts continue to expedite construction on several of OCTA's major projects during this time because of low traffic volumes freeways and streets.

On the I-405 Improvement Project, it is estimated that daytime and extended nighttime lane closures will provide more than 4,800 additional work hours between mid-March and mid-May. On the OC Streetcar, crews have been installing storm drains and water lines throughout Downtown Santa Ana while many of the businesses are closed and traffic is extremely light. And on the Laguna Niguel to San Juan Capistrano Passing Siding Project, major work at a private rail crossing near a church was able to be completed with extended weekend closures because of on-site services not being held.

OCTA to Add Plug-in Electric Buses to Fleet

The OCTA board approved a request for quotes to purchase 10 plug-in battery electric buses, another important step toward zero-emission transportation technology for a balanced and sustainable future.

The pilot program for the 10 plug-in battery electric 40-foot buses comes in the wake of OCTA's debut earlier this year of 10 new hydrogen fuel-cell electric buses. Those hydrogen buses, which also create zero emissions, began operating in January, when OCTA unveiled the nation's largest hydrogen fueling station at its Santa Ana base.

Testing both hydrogen fuel cell and plug-in battery electric buses will allow OCTA to collect valuable data on how the buses perform on Orange County streets and to determine which technology – or the best mix of technologies – to pursue moving forward.

OCTA operates more than 500 buses in the regular OC Bus system across Orange County. For now, most of those buses run on clean-burning compressed natural gas. But OCTA is working toward a goal of producing zero emissions while operating its buses.

The effort aligns with California's Innovative Clean Transit Rule, a first-of-its kind regulation in the U.S. that sets a goal for public transit agencies to gradually transition to 100 percent zero-emission bus fleets by 2040. The Clean Transit Rule is part of the state's comprehensive program helping to achieve California's air quality and climate goals.

Requests for quotes are due this summer. The plug-in battery electric buses are expected to begin operation in Orange County in late 2021.

Solutions Developed to Improve Beach Boulevard Travel

The OCTA board received the final report of the Beach Boulevard Corridor Study, which looked at ways to improve travel along Beach Boulevard between La Habra and Huntington Beach.

The study focused on addressing existing and anticipated future travel demand along the 21-mile stretch of Beach Boulevard. Based on the findings, and through an extensive public outreach effort, a series of recommendations to all modes of travel was developed.

The recommendations, which include improvements to transit service, sidewalks, crosswalks and traffic signals, will be provided to the cities along Beach Boulevard to help guide their local planning initiatives. OCTA will continue to work with the cities and agencies along the corridor to assist with any project development needs.