Community Engagement Plan

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1. OVERVIEW

The Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA) is undertaking the Making Better Connections Plan to improve customer experience and grow ridership for OC Bus. Like transit agencies across the country, OCTA's transit service has been subject to historic forces shaping the nation and the world - economic fluctuations, demographic shifts, political uncertainty, the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, labor shortages and workplace transformation. While these changes have impacted bus ridership, OCTA sees this moment as an opportunity.
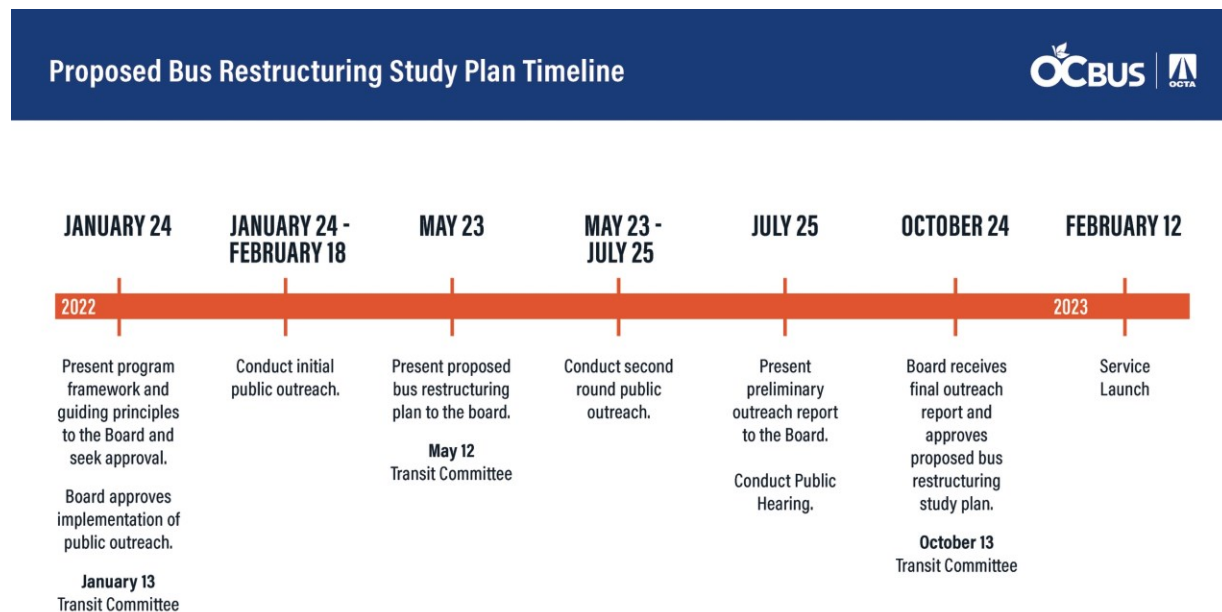
We now have the chance to refine and rebuild transit service in Orange County. The study will examine ways to redesign our bus service to increase focus on the evolving needs of our customers. Upon conclusion, it will provide a suite of transportation options that will reflect how people in Orange County live and work today and in the future.

Bus Restructuring Goals

The goal of the study is to improve customer experience and grow ridership by:
1. Matching the service to markets, such as:
   - Providing high-frequency, fixed-route service in denser areas of the county
   - Investigating whether an alternative service model may provide more cost-effective access to areas that are less dense
2. Preserving and improving core service, such as:
   - Improving bus speeds, reducing transfer time, and improving frequency
   - Focusing service improvements in disadvantaged communities
3. Leveraging innovation and technology to reduce customer wait and travel times

Project Schedule

Proposed Bus Restructuring Study Plan Timeline — OCBUS | OCTA

JANUARY 24	JANUARY 24 - FEBRUARY 18	MAY 23	MAY 23 - JULY 25	JULY 25	OCTOBER 24	FEBRUARY 12
2022						2023
Present program framework and guiding principles to the Board and seek approval. Board approves implementation of public outreach. **January 13** Transit Committee	Conduct initial public outreach.	Present proposed bus restructuring plan to the board. **May 12** Transit Committee	Conduct second round public outreach.	Present preliminary outreach report to the Board. Conduct Public Hearing.	Board receives final outreach report and approves proposed bus restructuring study plan. **October 13** Transit Committee	Service Launch

2. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

At the heart of the Making Better Connections Plan is a fair, equitable and accessible public engagement process. This will give every stakeholder the chance to be heard. OCTA believes this process is crucial for the development of a bus network that truly serves the needs of Orange County. The outreach plan is designed to address as many concerns as possible, while maintaining the project's vision and goals, to create a plan that has broad community support.

The following guiding principles form the foundation of this outreach plan:

Be inclusive. Engage diverse audiences across neighborhoods, geographies, ages, races/ethnicities and experiences. Demonstrate that OCTA values all voices and proactively seeks out those who have been historically underrepresented and underserved.

Communicate clearly and transparently. Make sure as many people as possible know about the project, why it's needed and ways they can provide input. Offer frequent updates and be open about the challenges and tradeoffs inherent in bus restructuring.

Inform and listen. Receiving and listening to input from the community is just as important as informing and educating stakeholders. When community members take time from their busy lives to learn about the project and offer thoughtful feedback, it is incumbent upon OCTA to recognize this effort and clearly show how their contributions will be used in the final plan.

Ensure equity. Equity and fairness are linked to the provision of public transit service. Research shows that most OC bus riders are people of color or lower socioeconomic status who depend on public transportation for the jobs that provide their livelihood. The plan must allow their voices to be heard and take every available opportunity to meaningfully engage them in the process.

Engage people "where they are." Customize engagement to meet the needs of specific populations. Meet people where they are physically and cognitively. This includes conducting engagement activities at flexible times and locations and gathering input in ways that are understandable and accessible to all audiences. At the same time, while COVID-19 remains a threat to public health, OCTA will continue to provide virtual and socially distanced outreach options.

Leverage technology. Digital tools provide an opportunity to tailor communications to specific groups and quantify success. Use technology to broaden outreach while remaining aware of disparities in digital access, literacy and language.

3. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT GOALS

This outreach plan is structured around four goals developed to effectively communicate with those impacted by the study. Each goal complements and supports the others and is designed to ensure reach, equity, and inclusion.

Conduct Community Outreach across Orange County

Objective: Reach as many OCTA stakeholders as possible using mass communication tactics and leveraging technology.

Audience: Anyone of any age in Orange County whose life is affected by the transportation system. This audience includes – but is not limited to – residents, employers, workers and students; elected officials and government agency staff; community organizations and advocates; business groups; schools and institutions; media and influencers; and OCTA employees.

Proactively Engage Current Bus Riders

Objective: Ensure active dialogue with OCTA's most impacted stakeholders – its riders.

Audience: Current riders of OC Bus, OC Flex and OC ACCESS as well as former riders who lapsed during the pandemic.

Seek Feedback from a Cross Section of the Community

Objective: Ensure outreach is inclusive and equitable using data to help determine gaps in engagement and leveraging both technology and community partnerships to guarantee that all voices are being heard.

Audience: Assure that a diverse cross section of communities is included to represent all those who use OCTA's services.

Provide Opportunities for Direct (In-Person or Virtual) Feedback

Objective: Meet people where they are, either physically or in the virtual world, by providing opportunities for community members to interact with project staff, ask questions and make comments in a personalized way.

Audience: All audiences listed above with an emphasis on connecting with individuals at the times and in the places and formats that work with their busy lives and schedules. This includes formal and informal representatives of organizations and communities who are willing to help OCTA inform and engage with their constituents.

4. KEY ENGAGEMENT TACTICS

Tactical Outreach Schedule

The project has been structured with two distinct outreach phases. Phase 1 seeks community input on the existing state of the OC Bus network, and the wants, needs and priorities of current, former and non-riders. The input gathered during Phase 1 will inform OCTA's Making Better Connections Plan. Phase 2 provides an opportunity for the community to see how their feedback was incorporated into the draft plan and to give their input on the plan itself. The

following chart outlines how various outreach tactics will be deployed according to project phase.

Ongoing Outreach: January-July 2022		
• Project Website • Organic Social Media	• Fact Sheets & FAQs • Physical Project Hubs	• Print Info on Buses • Project Hotline

Phase 1: Jan. 24-Feb. 18, 2022	Phase 2: May 23-July 25, 2022

• Digital Surveys
• Paid Social Media
• Press Release
• On the Move blog
• Email Updates
•
• OCTA Advisory Committees
   o Diversity Leaders Committee (1/25/22)
   o Accessible Transit Advisory Committee (1/27/22)
• Virtual Community Meetings
   o 2/1/22 – 6 pm
• Local Jurisdiction Communications
	• Digital Surveys
	• Paid Social Media
	• Press Release
	• On the Move blog
	• Email Updates
	• Brochure with Survey on Buses
	• Print Ads
	• OCTA Advisory Committees
	   o Accessible Transit Advisory Committee Meeting (4/26/2022)
	   o Diversity Leaders Committee Meeting (5/3/2022)
	   o Citizen Advisory Committee Meeting (7/19/2022)
	• Community Meetings
	   o 6/14/22 – 6 pm Laguna Hills Community Center
	   o 6/15/22 – 6 pm Virtual Zoom Meeting
	   o 6/16/22 – 3 pm Santa Ana Senior Center
	• Public Hearing
	• Pop-Ups
	• Bus ride alongs
	• Local Jurisdiction Communications

Description of Engagement Tactics

Ongoing Outreach Tactics
The ongoing engagement tactics below form the backbone of the outreach plan. Throughout the project, these tools will always be "on" and available to the community.

Project Website. The project website will serve as the Making Better Connections online hub and document repository. It will contain detailed project information, schedule and a calendar of opportunities for public input. It will provide direct links to the digital surveys, presentations and story maps. Frequently updated, it will be ADA accessible and available in multiple languages.

Organic Social Media. While OCTA will use both organic and paid social media to engage its stakeholders, organic social media ensures the agency's most dedicated followers have up-to-the-moment project information. It also serves as an important historical record of the outreach process and source of public comment.

Fact Sheets and FAQs. Fact sheets, FAQs and education collateral will be produced in print and digital formats and in a variety of languages, including English, Spanish and Vietnamese. The materials will be available on the project website, at physical project hubs and for distribution on buses, at community meetings and events and to community-based organizations (CBOs). OCTA will also take advantage of its existing relationships with school and college districts to distribute materials to students, faculty, parents and guardians.

Onboard Signage and Printed Materials. Bus riders are the project's most important audience. To reach this audience, OCTA will employ a variety of onboard communications tools, including interior ads, take-ones and articles in the Transit Connection newsletter. Onboard signage and materials can feature QR codes to easily direct bus riders to digital surveys.

Physical Project Hubs. Physical project hubs will be established at key locations throughout Orange County, such as libraries, community centers, senior centers, schools and transit centers. Hubs will be stocked with project information and collateral materials.

Project Hotline. Individuals may call (714) 636-RIDE and receive project information from OCTA's customer service center. They may also fill out project surveys over the phone with the help of a customer service agent.

Phased Outreach Tactics
The tactics below will be scheduled strategically at key project milestones. They will enable OCTA to talk to specific communities and individuals at opportune times using comfortable, convenient and accessible formats.

Local Media. OCTA will partner with local media to inform the public about the project and opportunities for public involvement. Press releases will be issued at key milestones during Phases 1 and 2 of the outreach process. Print ads will publicize the hearing in Phase 2. Key publications include the OC Register, Excelsior, Nguoi Viet Daily News and Viet Bao.

Paid Social Media. Paid social media will allow OCTA to harness the power of digital targeting to direct messages and survey opportunities to audiences based on criteria such as city or zip code of residence, language spoken, age, income and more. OCTA may also use its email databases to create "lookalike" campaigns to target potential riders who share key characteristics of its existing customer base.

Digital Surveys. The outreach process will employ digital surveying tools to gather public input on how people perceive and use the current transit system, changes and improvements they'd like to see, and even trade-offs they are willing to make. Social media, email and app-based messaging campaigns will promote the survey to riders and non-riders during both phases of the project.

Brochure with Paper Survey on Transit Vehicles. During Phase 2, OCTA will create a brochure that includes a paper-based survey for distribution to transit passengers. This brochure will be

available on OC Bus, OC ACCESS and OC Flex vehicles.

Email Updates. Email is a fast and effective way to reach current and recently lapsed OCTA riders. Email updates will be sent at key project milestones to people in OCTA's customer databases for OC Bus, OC ACCESS and OC Flex. Emails will align with project kick-off, survey promotion and community meeting notification periods.

Texting/Messaging via Apps. OCTA riders have readily adopted apps that facilitate transit use. OCTA will take advantage of the messaging capabilities of the Transit App as well as its text and ticketing apps to encourage riders to provide input during the study.

Key Stakeholder Interviews. OCTA will develop a list of key stakeholders, each representing an important project audience. During Phase 1, the project team will conduct interviews with each individual on the list to gather personal feedback and insights into how bus restructuring will impact their constituents and the best ways to connect with their communities.

Community Ambassadors. Community Ambassadors are people who have agreed to represent OCTA in the field. Formally, they are project team members who will staff pop-up events, host project hub office hours and conduct bus ride-alongs. Informally, they are community-based organizations and community partners who agree to share project information, host presentations and gather feedback within their organizations and communities.

Targeted Sessions for Special Audiences. These special presentations to OCTA's key organizational stakeholders serve three purposes. First, they will inform and educate groups and organizations about the project. Next, they will provide an opportunity to capture feedback from group members, who are highly engaged OCTA stakeholders. Finally, group members will be asked to serve as Community Ambassadors by bringing the information they have learned back to their communities and workplaces. Targeted sessions will be offered to the OCTA Diversity Leaders Committee, Citizen Advisory Committee and Accessible Transit Advisory Committee as well as staff and elected officials in local jurisdictions.

Public Meetings, Workshops and Open Houses. At certain project milestones, OCTA will offer virtual and in-person community meetings and a public hearing. The timing, language and format of these meetings will allow people to attend in a way and at a time most comfortable for them. Virtual community meetings with a call-in feature will be held in February and June in English, Spanish and Vietnamese. An in-person open house and public hearing will be scheduled during Phase 2.

Pop-Up Events. Small-scale pop-up events will be held in conjunction with pre-existing community festivals, fairs and other gatherings. They will also take place during designated "office hours" at the physical project hubs. They represent an important way to meet people where they are physically and culturally. Staffed by OCTA team members, including those fluent in languages like Spanish and Vietnamese, pop-up booths provide an informal place for community members to drop by, ask questions and learn more about the project. Pop-up events are planned for Phase 2.

Bus Ride Along. During Phase 1, OCTA staff will perform a bus ride-along and interact with bus riders, encourage them to fill out surveys and answer questions about the project.

5. CONTEXTUAL REFERENCE

OCTA last completed a bus restructuring study in 2012. The "Transit System Study" was the basis for changes to bus service between 2016 and 2018. In general, these changes reallocated service from lower productivity routes and areas to the core service area where these resources could yield additional ridership. As part of this current effort, OCTA is looking to restructure the OC Bus system based on recent changes in demand, travel patterns, and funding.

Existing OCTA Transit Service and Projects

OC Bus

The Orange County fixed-route bus service, known as "OC Bus," has been operating for nearly 50 years. The system now consists of 58 routes providing service to approximately 5,400 bus stops in Orange, Los Angeles, and Riverside counties. Annual ridership was approximately 38 million boardings in the year before the pandemic, which is a 45 percent decrease from the all-time high of 69 million in 2007.

OC Streetcar (Under Construction)

OC Streetcar is the first modern streetcar project to be built in Orange County and will serve the City of Santa Ana's historic and thriving downtown. Expected to begin carrying passengers in 2023, it will operate along a 4.15-mile route that connects the Santa Ana Regional Transportation Center (SARTC) and a new transit hub in the City of Garden Grove.

OC Flex

OC Flex is an on-demand, curb-to-curb microtransit service offered by OCTA in parts of Aliso Viejo, Laguna Niguel and Mission Viejo. Within this zone, unlimited rides are only $4.50 per day, seven days a week as part of a pilot program. This service concept may serve a purpose in the bus restructuring effort as a replacement service or be provided in areas with low transit demand.

COVID-19 Impacts on OC Bus

After the implementation of the Governor's stay-at-home order in March 2020, weekday OC Bus ridership dropped significantly. Weekday ridership decreased from approximately 125,000 boardings to the low 30,000s immediately after the stay-at-home order, but has been steadily recovering and is now in the mid-80,000s. In March 2020, OCTA reduced fixed-route bus service by approximately 40 percent (40%) by implementing Sunday service schedules on all routes, seven days a week. Starting in June 2020, an enhanced Saturday service schedule was implemented on weekdays and a regular schedule on Saturdays and Sundays. This amount of service equates to about 75 percent (75%) of pre-COVID-19 service levels. Since the June 2021 service change, OCTA has been adding service, focusing on improving frequency and service hours of operation on many OC bus routes. In June 2021, approximately 13,000 annual revenue vehicle hours (RVH) were added, 107,000 RVH in August 2021, and about 41,000 RVH in October 2021. An additional 100,000 RVH are planned for February 2022, which will increase bus service levels to 1.45 million annual RVH. This is consistent with the fiscal year (FY) 2021-22 budget and represents a 7.5 percent increase in service over October 2021 levels and about 11 percent below pre-COVID-19 levels.

Key Themes in Previous Outreach Efforts

Across various engagements and from thousands of people who have shared their feedback in recent years, six key themes have emerged. People have already expressed support for the following improvements to transit in Orange County and OCTA will begin this outreach process mindful of what we've heard from our community in the past.

- **Faster and more frequent transit** that is time-competitive with driving, such as rapid bus in the core of the county or express bus serving trips over long distances.
- **Longer hours of operation,** and more frequent service during off-peak periods, including mid-day on weekdays, evenings and weekends.
- **High-capacity or rapid transit modes** (rail or bus rapid transit) serving the busiest corridors.
- **Easier connections** to, from and between transit routes, including improvements to walking and biking access as well as park-n-rides.
- **More seasonal and special event service,** similar to the existing beach community trolleys, OC Fair Express and Angels Express.
- **Real-time information and enhanced amenities** at transit stops and stations to improve the customer experience.