

Meeting of Aug. 10, 2020

OCTA Board Commends Essential Workers, Pilots Distribution of Free Face Coverings

The Orange County Transportation Authority's board of directors approved a resolution reinforcing the agency's ongoing commitment and efforts to help slow the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19).

The resolution applauds the efforts of OCTA employees and essential workers throughout the county and re-emphasizes the board's support for all necessary precautionary measures to help fight COVID-19.

Among those measures is OCTA's efforts to distribute free face coverings to OC Bus passengers. More than 11,000 face coverings have been distributed on select OC Bus routes in the first two weeks of a pilot program aimed at further protecting passengers' health.

The buses equipped with onboard dispensers operate on Route 43 and Bravo! Route 543 that run along Harbor Boulevard between Fullerton and Costa Mesa, and Route 66, which runs along McFadden Avenue between Huntington Beach and Irvine. As the system is refined, free face coverings will be made available on additional routes.

OCTA also is coordinating with community partners and local social-service agencies that work with vulnerable populations to make free, reusable face coverings available, helping get them to some passengers who may be most in need.

To date, 24 agencies have agreed to distribute the cloth face coverings and more than 7,100 are being sent to agencies such as Meals on Wheels of Orange County, Abrazar, The Salvation Army and the Assistance League of Orange County.

The reusable cloth face coverings, also available for free to passengers at the OCTA Store, have been made available through the Federal Transit Administration, which supplied OCTA with 60,000 for distribution.

OCTA Adds All-Electric Support Vehicles to Fleet

The OCTA board approved the purchase of up to 55 battery-electric vehicles that will support bus operations in the field – another important step in OCTA's ongoing effort to convert its fleet to producing zero emissions.

The all-electric, zero-emission vehicles will replace up to 55 existing light-duty vehicles, which run on compressed natural gas and are at the end of their scheduled lifespan.

The contract with Winner Chevrolet, a qualified state-approved contractor, is for up to \$1.78 million and will provide for the purchase of the 2020 Chevy Bolts.

The vehicles will primarily be used to relieve coach operators on duty in the field. Although a bus driver may work a shift of eight to 10 hours, the bus may remain in service up to 22 hours a day, requiring a new driver to meet the bus in route.

The board's action to expedite the purchase of the vehicles helps take advantage of factory incentives that are expiring later this month, helping save up to \$55,000 overall.

OCTA has taken several important steps this year to convert to zero-emission technology for a balanced and sustainable transportation future.

In January, OCTA debuted 10 new hydrogen fuel-cell electric buses, along with the nation's largest hydrogen fueling station. In April, the OCTA board approved a request for quotes to purchase 10 plug-in battery-electric buses. And in June, the board approved a draft plan outlining how the agency will convert the OC Bus fleet to 100 percent zero-emission technology over the next 20 years.

Board Receives Updates on South County Improvements

The OCTA board received an update on current and future projects to help improve mobility in south Orange County.

The I-5 South County Improvements Project, currently under construction, is widening 6.5 miles of the freeway between SR-73 and El Toro Road.

The \$565 million project will add one regular lane in both directions between Avery and Alicia parkways and extend the carpool lane in both directions between Alicia Parkway and El Toro Road. The project is scheduled for completion in early 2025.

In addition, three projects that are focused on meeting travel demand in south Orange County over the next decade are moving forward. Those projects are:

- A non-tolled extension of Los Patrones Parkway from Cow Camp Road to Avenida La Pata
- The widening of Ortega Highway between Calle Entradero and Reata Road
- The extension of the I-5 carpool lane from Avenida Pico to the San Diego County line.

The board also received an update on the South Orange County Multimodal Transportation Study, which aims to address the long-term transportation needs of the area.

In the coming months, OCTA will seek input from the public, elected officials and other stakeholders that will help guide a set of multimodal transportation investments for potential implementation over time. That initial set of alternative strategies is expected to be brought back to the OCTA board later this year.

Once approved, the recommended improvements will be considered for inclusion in the Long-Range Transportation Plan, which OCTA uses as input for the Regional Transportation Plan developed by the Southern California Association of Governments.