

1 THE OC TRANSIT VISION

THE OC TRANSIT VISION is a 20-year plan for enhancing and expanding public transit service in Orange County. While OCTA has previously developed long-range plans for transit as part of its regularly updated Long-Range Transportation Plan, this is a transit-specific, long-term plan.

Why develop a vision for transit in Orange County? Because transit plays an essential role in the transportation system. A growing metropolitan area like Orange County needs a frequent and reliable transit network to provide additional mobility options to the most congested parts of the county, to provide access to jobs, schools and healthcare for non-driving populations, and to ensure efficient use of the overall transportation network, leading to more efficient land use development decisions.

Moreover, major changes have been taking place in the transportation landscape—and more are on the horizon. OCTA, in turn, has had to look at the transit services it provides from the ground up to be relevant for these changing times. Emerging technologies, cultural changes and policy shifts have all forced transit providers like OCTA to evolve. This OC Transit Vision is an effort by OCTA to be both more responsive and proactive in addressing the changing transit market.

The Transit Vision features a number of elements to help improve transit service today and in the coming decades:

- It establishes a vision, establishes goals, and defines a framework for future transit investments;
- It identifies the most promising corridors for major future investments in high-quality transit;
- It issues transit-related recommendations in areas ranging from existing fixed-route bus services to paratransit service and new types of service, such as on-demand “microtransit” service;
- It offers transit policy guidance to cities, developers, and other partners who support transit service and are important stakeholders in creating an effective and efficient transit system;
- And it concludes with an action plan laying out the next steps for OCTA.

OC TRANSIT VISION STATEMENT, GOALS, AND OBJECTIVES

The OC Transit Vision was built on a foundation of goals and objectives, which in turn were based on a vision statement (Figure 1-1). These were developed collaboratively by staff from a broad cross-section of OCTA departments and were later reviewed by the OCTA Board of Directors. The vision statement, goals, and objectives also take into account early results of public engagement described in Chapter 3, as well as the findings from the State of OC Transit Report described in Chapter 2. The full text of the vision, goals, and objectives is available in Appendix A.

Figure 1-1 Vision and Goals



SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The OC Transit Vision offers recommendations for improving transit throughout Orange County, both in the higher transit demand areas of North/Central County and in lower transit demand areas. The analysis to inform these recommendations considered both current and future conditions, recognizing that changes to the transportation network and built environment needed to support transit will evolve as Orange County continues to grow and change.

The recommendations also acknowledge that different types of services are needed in different parts of the county. Higher capacity, fixed-route transit (like rapid streetcar and bus rapid transit [BRT]) has great potential for success in Orange County's denser, more walkable areas. At the same time, service in the lower density, more suburban areas of the county should focus on key connections to jobs, including OC Flex service connected to Metrolink stations and Freeway BRT to move people along the county's growing high occupancy vehicle network.

The OC Transit Vision offers something for everyone, whether improvements to existing OC Bus routes, enhancements to accessible transit service, new high-capacity transit corridors, expanded seasonal and special event services, pilot "microtransit" (or on-demand) service, more trips on Metrolink, or future connections to Los Angeles County. The recommendations shown in Figure 1-2 and described below capture the key investments identified through the OC Transit Vision. Additional information about each of these can be found in the following chapters.

Figure 1-2 OC Transit Vision Recommendations



Increase fixed-route bus service levels based on OCTA’s Service Allocation Guidelines.

As part of the OC Transit Vision, the OCTA Board of Directors was presented a Transit Investment Framework, which included new Service Allocation Guidelines and Capital Investment Guidelines. The service guidelines define categories of service based on corridor characteristics, and establish minimum service frequencies (headways) and service hours (span of service) for each category. OCTA has already begun increasing service on some routes to meet the new standards, and additional routes should be upgraded as the OC Transit Vision is implemented. More information on the Transit Investment Framework can be found in Chapters 4 and 6 of this report.

Proceed with study of rapid transit projects in the North Harbor/Santa Ana and Bristol corridors.

One of the primary reasons to develop a transit vision for Orange County was to identify Transit Opportunity Corridors (TOCs)—high-demand corridors meriting major investment in higher-quality service such as rapid streetcar or bus rapid transit (BRT). Ten such corridors were identified, and two of these were found to be prime candidates for near- to medium-term investment. Studies are already underway in the Harbor corridor and should begin on Bristol in the next five years. More information on TOCs can be found in Chapter 5.

Upgrade existing and new Bravo! routes.

To extend higher-quality transit to each of the 10 TOCs, OCTA should develop a strategy for upgrading existing and planned Bravo! “rapid bus” routes (including service to be implemented on Beach Boulevard in the near term). OCTA could implement such upgrades incrementally based on a phased expansion strategy. In the near term, the agency can work with the cities in each corridor to implement improvements on a pilot basis, and use Measure M Project W funding, where eligible, to support other improvements. More information on this recommendation can be found in Chapter 6.

Expand seasonal and special event services.

Seasonal and event-based transit services—routes that only operate during the summer or for special events—have proven popular in Orange County. OCTA already operates or funds many such services through partnerships, and will work with cities to support additional opportunities under the Measure M Project V program. More information on this recommendation can be found in Chapter 6.

Proceed with planned improvements to Metrolink and Amtrak rail lines.

A number of agencies with a stake in Orange County’s existing railroads have developed plans to greatly improve service—including both faster and more frequent service—in the existing Amtrak and Metrolink rights-of-way. OCTA also has existing plans to improve station access and to reduce at-grade street crossings. In addition to advancing its own plans, OCTA can work with partner agencies to provide support for their planned improvements. More information on this recommendation can be found in Chapter 6.

Consider expanding OC Flex on-demand service, pending a successful pilot.

OCTA will soon pilot microtransit service, available to and from any point within specific service zones in Huntington Beach and Laguna Niguel/Aliso Viejo. If the year-long pilot proves successful, such service could be expanded to additional locations throughout the county, including areas in Anaheim Canyon, Yorba Linda, Brea, Placentia, North Irvine, Ladera Ranch, Las Flores, and Mission Viejo. More information on this recommendation can be found in Chapter 7.

Seek opportunities to expand the OC Vanpool program.

OCTA’s program of subsidies and technical assistance for employee vanpools is popular, with more than 500 existing vanpools. With additional resources, the program could grow in concert with expansion of the county’s network of managed high-occupancy vehicle freeway lanes. More information on this recommendation can be found in Chapter 7.

Continue efforts to manage paratransit demand.

Due to rapid growth in costs for paratransit service, OCTA is taking steps to manage demand including continued support of senior mobility programs, expanding cooperative agreements, expanding the same-day taxi program, and multiple fare increases. Moving forward, OCTA could explore using OC Flex service to provide paratransit service in areas of the county with low transit demand. More information on this recommendation can be found in Chapter 7.

Expand regional coordination, particularly with Los Angeles County Metro.

OCTA recognizes that successful transit service is about connecting people to destinations, and those destinations are often outside of Orange County. Additionally, new housing in Los Angeles County will need to be connected to the growing job market in Orange County. To support its own service improvements, OCTA will increase its engagement across county lines, especially in Los Angeles County, where planned Metro Rail expansions could connect to OCTA services. As part of this effort, OCTA will also coordinate with officials in Los Angeles County on transportation plans for the 2028 Summer Olympics. More information on this recommendation can be found in Chapter 7.

Conduct a study of freeway-based BRT corridors.

Two of the TOCs are Interstate 5 and State Route 55. BRT could serve these corridors, but it would look and function differently than BRT running on city streets. OCTA should conduct a study to determine routing and to decide how freeway-based BRT should function (for example, whether to serve existing park-and-rides or to build new stations in freeway medians). More information on this recommendation can be found in Chapter 7.

Continue engagement with OC jurisdictions.

As the transportation provider for a county of 34 cities, OCTA relies on cooperation. The OC Transit Vision includes a *Transit-Supportive Design & Policy Handbook* to provide guidance for those OCTA partners with a role in improving access to transit and making the county's land uses more transit-friendly. A summary of the handbook can be found in Chapter 8, and the complete handbook is included with this report as Appendix E.

GUIDE TO THIS REPORT

The contents of the OC Transit Vision, which help to further explain these recommendations and focus on moving OCTA from planning to implementation, include the following:

- **Chapter 2, Context for the Transit Vision.** The OC Transit Vision is closely linked to current efforts to update OCTA's Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP), which will ultimately house many of the OC Transit Vision recommendations. This chapter briefly introduces the LRTP process but focuses on a summary of the key findings from *The State of OC Transit*, a report prepared early in the OC Transit Vision process to understand the landscape of transit in the county today and shape the direction of analysis and recommendations.
- **Chapter 3, Public Engagement Summary.** This chapter begins with a review of the various public outreach efforts that informed the OC Transit Vision. These included outreach to a range of individual and institutional stakeholders representing diverse interests within the community; four digital surveys that collected thousands of responses; and a series of meetings with the OCTA Citizens Advisory Committee, elected officials, and planning directors representing all areas of the county.

- **Chapter 4, Transit Investment Framework.** The Transit Investment Framework was reviewed by the OCTA Board of Directors in April 2017 and serves as a guide for future capital and service investments. It helps to shape the recommendations presented in Chapters 5 and 6 of the OC Transit Vision.
- **Chapter 5, Transit Opportunity Corridors.** Analysis conducted for the OC Transit Vision identified 10 TOCs where future investments in rapid transit might be most beneficial. This chapter summarizes the analysis and makes recommendations on how to proceed with additional planning and design for these corridors.
- **Chapter 6, Fixed-Route Recommendations.** In addition to the TOCs, the OC Transit Vision includes recommendations for a range of existing and planned fixed-route services, including upgrades to existing services to meet Transit Investment Framework standards; a strategy for upgrading Bravo! service to BRT; new and expanded seasonal and special event services; and upgrades to Metrolink and Amtrak Pacific Surfliner rail services in Orange County.
- **Chapter 7, Recommendations for Other Services and Additional Studies.** The OC Transit Vision also includes recommendations for other types of transit service, including OC Flex on-demand service, expansion of the OC Vanpool program, and enhancements to paratransit service. A number of future studies are also recommended.
- **Chapter 8, Transit-Supportive Design and Policies.** This chapter summarizes guidance from the *Transit-Supportive Design & Policies Handbook*. The handbook is intended to assist cities, developers, and other potential OCTA partners as they implement land use changes, access improvements, and other programs and policies that support effective transit service.
- **Chapter 9, Action Plan.** Finally, the OC Transit Vision concludes with a strategy for implementing its recommendations, identifying a phasing plan that OCTA and its partners can follow to fully realize the potential of the vision and begin moving from planning to action. The recommendations are organized into near-, mid-, and long-term phases to align with expected OCTA funding levels, projected costs, and potential funding sources are described.