2 CONTEXT FOR THE TRANSIT VISION

Transit planning in Orange County does not happen in a vacuum. The OC Transit Vision informs—and is informed by—many other efforts, including the current update to OCTA's Long-Range Transportation Plan. Additionally, the analysis and recommendations described in the OC Transit Vision build on work completed in the early stages of this planning process, specifically the *State of OC Transit* report. The following sections introduce the background and planning context for the OC Transit Vision.

OCTA'S LONG-RANGE TRANSPORTATION PLAN

At the time of publication of the OC Transit Vision, OCTA was in the process of updating its Long-Range Transportation Plan (LRTP). OCTA updates its LRTP every four years; the current update is scheduled for completion in late 2018. The OC Transit Vision is an input into the 2018 LRTP, identifying the transit projects to be included in the constrained fiscal scenario.

As its name indicates, the LRTP is a long-range plan to 2040, covering 25 years. The 2018 LRTP will assess Orange County's transportation needs over that time, forecast its financial ability to meet those needs, and prioritize the multimodal projects and programs that would be most effective in meeting them. In addition to its "constrained" plan, the LRTP will also include an "unconstrained" plan identifying additional projects that could be implemented with added funding.

For a variety of reasons, including limited space for freeway and arterial widening, transit is becoming an increasingly important part of the multimodal transportation system in Orange County—making completion of this OC Transit Vision an important step toward an updated LRTP. The recommendations found here will be reflected in the transit sections of the 2018 LRTP.

THE STATE OF OC TRANSIT

The first step in developing a transit vision was to conduct in-depth analysis of the current state of transit in Orange County. Complete analysis can be found in the State of OC Transit, published in January 2017. This section briefly reviews that report's key findings.

**The majority of existing OC Bus ridership is concentrated in a few key corridors.**

- OCTA operates 65 OC Bus routes, but just 19 of them carry 75 percent of riders. This single fact explains much of the rationale for the Transit Vision—transit improvements in a handful of corridors would improve service for the vast majority of riders. This concentration of ridership also led to the development of the OC Bus 360° route reconfiguration that sought to improve ridership and cost-effectiveness by shifting resources from lower-demand to higher-demand corridors.

- Figure 2-1 shows average number of weekday boardings by OCTA bus stop in March 2016.

Figure 2-1   Weekday Bus Boardings
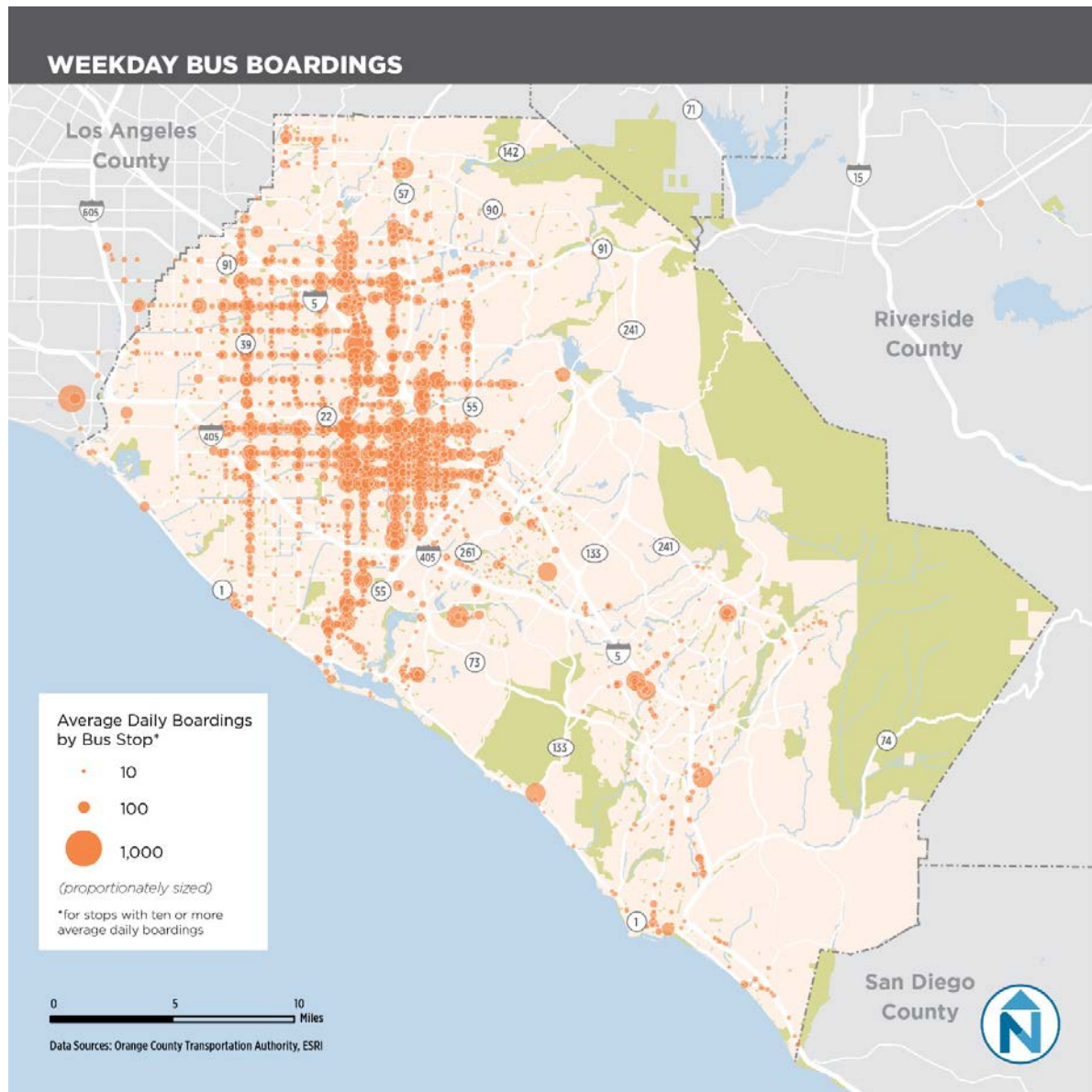
- Most OC Bus service is in the northern part of the county, primarily north of the 55 Freeway, where many of the county's lower-income residents live. Major job centers in South County are predominately auto-oriented and have lower transit usage than employment centers in north and central Orange County. Figure 2-2 shows an analysis of transit propensity in Orange County (based on the methodology described in the State of OC Transit) overlaid with afternoon rush hour frequencies on OC Bus routes.

Figure 2-2   Transit Propensity
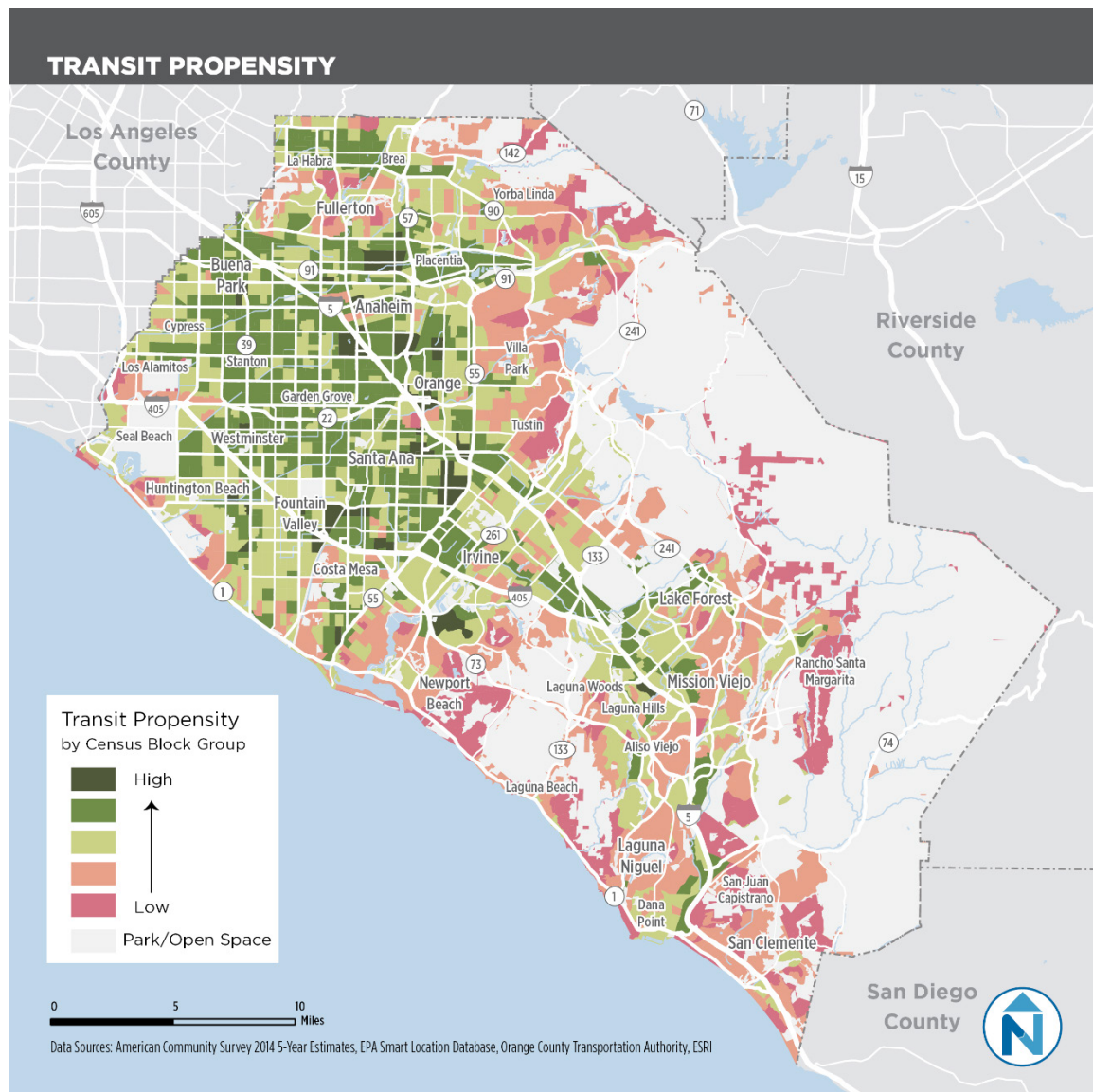
OC Bus service is focused on the weekday commuter market.

- The periods of highest demand in virtually any transit system are weekday peak commute periods, or rush hours, followed by late mornings and early afternoons on weekdays. Orange County is uncommon, however, as destinations such as beaches and theme parks generate high weekend demand. Many employees also work weekends (as well as early and late on weekdays). OCTA currently provides greatly reduced service on weekends.

- OCTA also provides greatly reduced evening service, with deep service reductions immediately following the evening peak period. This limits travel options for evening workers, as well as for those who may wish to live a car-free lifestyle.

- OCTA provides limited special event and holiday service. These services are typically used by people who don't regularly ride transit and—if provided effectively—can serve as a gateway to more regular transit use.

OC Bus service focuses on a select number of hubs.

- OCTA, Caltrans and Orange County cities operate more than 30 intermodal transfer facilities, ranging from Metrolink stations to park-and-rides. While these facilities serve as transfer points between multiple transportation modes (such as bus-to-train, car-to-bus, and bus-to-bus), riders also arrive on foot and bike, making multimodal access to these facilities an area for attention. Figure 2-3 shows the locations of Orange County's transit nodes.

Figure 2-3   Orange County Transit Nodes
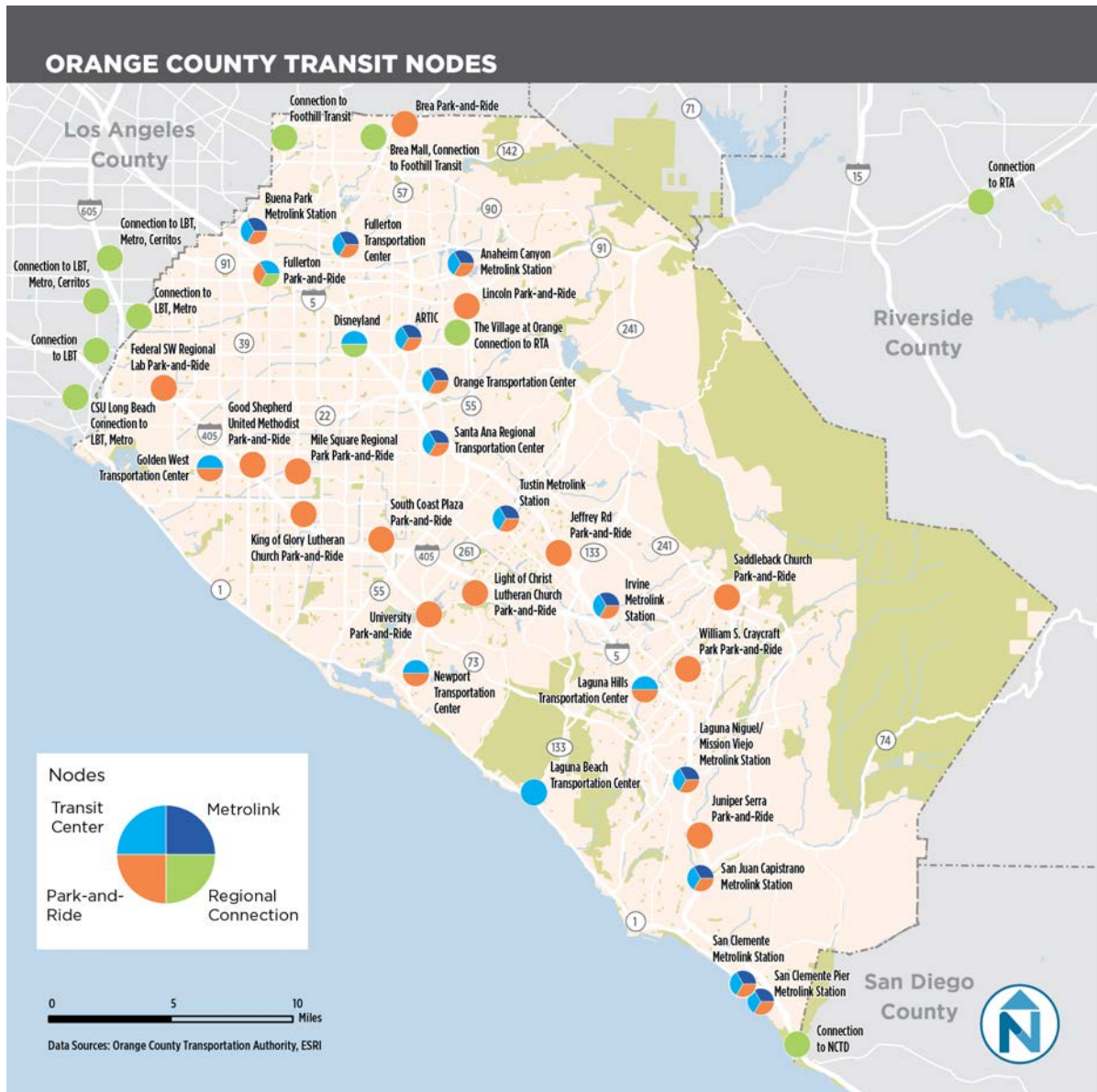
OCTA has begun taking steps to address recent ridership declines, and the future OC Streetcar and Bravo! lines provide a template for ridership growth.

- The agency is tailoring service to context, focusing on fixed-route bus and rail service in its most productive and cost-effective corridors and exploring creative mobility solutions in other areas. The OC Transit Vision considers a range of modes for other priority corridors, including rapid streetcar (similar to the western segment of the OC Streetcar), bus rapid transit, and rapid bus.

- OCTA has also emphasized connectivity, including connectivity between the bus system and the LOSSAN rail spine.

Limited funding has constrained OCTA's ability to boost ridership.

- OCTA and other agencies have gone to great lengths to understand and respond to the external factors—such as lower gas prices—driving ridership declines. However, ridership largely results from the quality and level of service offered, and funding constraints have kept OCTA from offering more and better service. Figure 2-4 illustrates OCTA's revenue sources in 2016. Fares account for only a small portion of OCTA funding, and the agency relies heavily on sales taxes and other external funding sources, which have been volatile recently.

Figure 2-4   OCTA Bus and Paratransit Revenues (2016)
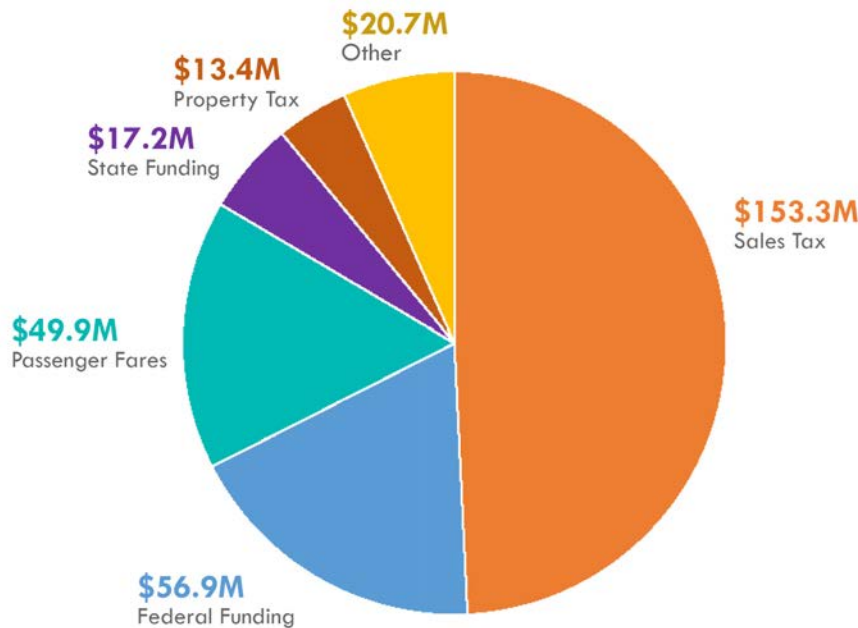
Land uses and demographics in Orange County—as well as Orange County's overall transportation network—present both challenges and opportunities for effective transit service.

- While Orange County is suburban, it does exhibit some attributes of urban areas, including racial and economic diversity (particularly in the north/central part of the county), pockets of density, and major employment centers.

- The county features major destinations, including college campuses, retail centers, and unique recreational attractions such as Disneyland and popular beaches. The recreational

destinations are busiest on weekends, when there is traditionally less transit service. And these major destinations are dispersed across the county rather than concentrated as they would be in a traditional downtown.

- The northern part of the county presents a well-connected street grid suited to both transit and walking. However, wide, high-speed arterials featuring few crosswalks discourage walking. The image below shows a typical Orange County intersection at which pedestrians must cross eight lanes of traffic.

- South County has a more disconnected street network that creates out-of-direction pedestrian pathways. The irregular street network in South County and its auto-oriented land-use patterns are difficult to serve effectively with transit.

Typical Orange County Intersection

Long-term trends offer a mixed message.

- There are both positive and negative signs for growth in Orange County transit ridership. Although cultural and demographic trends point in the right direction, ridership has declined lately, in part because of the rise of alternatives such as transportation network companies (Uber and Lyft) and reduced barriers to driving.

- New technologies may be both blessings and curses. Smartphones allow transit agencies to provide customers with real-time arrival information and app-based passes. They also connect potential riders to Uber and Lyft, which can provide a convenience benefit but may add to overall traffic congestion.

- Improving connectivity is key to future success, including both first-/last-mile feeder connections as well as connections between longer distance destinations.

- Transportation network companies could play a vital role in improving connectivity, including providing an alternative to traditional fixed-route service to lower-demand areas. Similarly, autonomous vehicle technology could benefit transit by reducing operating costs.

OC TransitVISION