

7 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR OTHER SERVICES AND ADDITIONAL STUDIES

In addition to recommendations for fixed-route transit, the OC Transit Vision includes recommendations for other types of service and for other areas of OCTA activity. These include the following:

- **OC Flex.** OCTA will soon introduce on-demand “microtransit” service in limited areas as part of a pilot program. Assuming the pilot is successful, this service could be expanded to locations throughout the county.
- **OC Vanpool Expansion.** OCTA’s existing program to incentivize employee vanpools could expand in a number of ways, including in conjunction with continued expansion of the county’s high-occupancy vehicle lane network.
- **Paratransit Enhancements.** Costs for ACCESS paratransit services have been rising and will likely continue to rise. To keep the program sustainable, OCTA will need to further existing efforts to manage demand.
- **Additional Studies.** Chapter 5 identified a need for new and ongoing corridor-level project development efforts in two corridors, as well as a countywide study of freeway-based bus rapid transit (BRT). Additionally, OCTA should continue its engagement efforts with partners including local cities and developers as well as with Los Angeles County Metro.

OC FLEX

OC Flex is a microtransit pilot program that will start in mid-2018, and last at least one year. Like other microtransit services, including those currently in development in Los Angeles County, OC Flex service will be on-demand, meaning customers will use a smartphone app or call to reserve a vehicle that should arrive within 15 minutes. It will also be a shared-ride service, meaning that vehicles may stop along the way to serve other passengers (see Figure 7-1).

In a broad sense, OC Flex will resemble on-demand, shared-ride services offered by transportation network companies (TNCs) such as Uber and Lyft. However, OC Flex will be available to those without smartphones, cash payments will be accepted, vehicles will be fully wheelchair-accessible, and drivers will be trained by OCTA. Fares will also be lower than those charged by TNCs, and as a shared-ride service, OC Flex should generate fewer vehicle miles traveled. Service will be available seven days a week, until mid-evening.

Figure 7-1 OC Flex Vehicle



OC Flex is OCTA's attempt to use emerging technology to offer a new type of service that has the potential to both better serve some existing customers as well as attract new customers. It might also serve as a replacement for fixed-route service in areas where regular bus service has proven costly and ineffective. At the same time, microtransit can extend the reach of the fixed-route system by providing connections to areas not served by regular transit. Successful micro-transit services could serve as the foundation for new fixed-route bus service.

OC Flex will operate within two service zones approximately six square miles in size (compact enough so they can be served with one or two vehicles at most times). Trips must begin and end within the service zones.

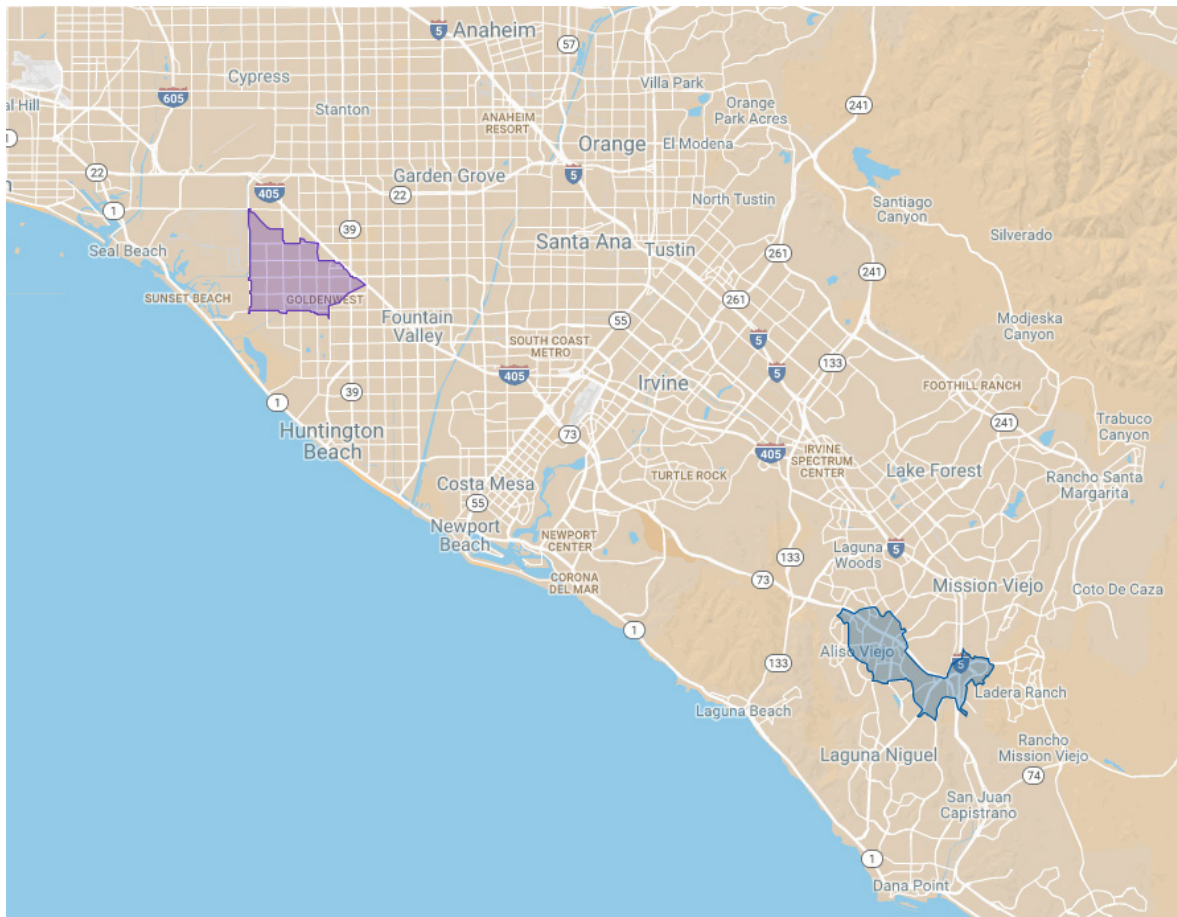
To develop the pilot program, OCTA first conducted market surveys of potential customers to establish demand. Staff then evaluated seven possible zones located throughout Orange County in a variety of land use and demographic contexts. In general, these were areas where fixed-route service has proven relatively unproductive, and has either been reduced or eliminated, or may be reduced or eliminated in the near future. They were also areas featuring major destinations such as Metrolink stations and other transit hubs where on-demand customers could potentially connect to the fixed-route transit network.

OCTA evaluated potential zones based on criteria identified through the OC Transit Vision propensity analysis (see the *State of OC Transit Report*). Factors included population; employment

and enrollment; low-income population density; traffic volumes (an indicator of travel demand); intersection density (an indicator of walkability); transit connections; and major trip generators. The analysis also accounted for existing fixed-route and ACCESS paratransit ridership.

Based on this evaluation, OCTA selected two zones for the pilot program: Bolsa Dorado, in northern Huntington Beach near Westminster Mall and the Goldenwest Transportation Center; and Aliso Niguel in Aliso Viejo and Laguna Niguel, near Aliso Viejo Town Center and the Laguna Niguel/Mission Viejo Metrolink station (see Figure 7-2). Notably, the former is in the older, northern part of the county, where the built environment is more transit-oriented, while the latter is a newer area in more aut-centric South County.

Figure 7-2 OC Flex Pilot Program Zones



At the conclusion of the pilot program, OCTA will evaluate its success based on a variety of factors. The agency’s goal is to serve at least six passengers per revenue hour at a subsidy of less than \$9 per passenger. The pilot program also aims to serve multiple passengers on at least 25 percent of trips, connect to transit hubs on at least 25 percent of trips, and satisfy 85 percent of customers.

If OCTA eventually formalizes the program, it must then determine whether to continue service in both existing zones. The pilot may offer valuable lessons about the context in which microtransit can succeed. OCTA may also make adjustments in other program areas, such as fares and fleet size. If the agency expands the program, the logical step would be to add some or all of the five additional zones initially evaluated. OC Flex might also be used to provide paratransit service (see Paratransit Enhancements section below).

OC VANPOOL EXPANSION

OCTA's commuter vanpool program is already quite popular: there are approximately 530 vanpools in the county. Since vanpool vehicles have 7 to 15 seats and must be at least 50 percent occupied, this means that daily combined ridership on vanpools totals several thousand—more than many OC Bus routes. Additionally, vanpools require a lower subsidy than express bus service. Vanpooling is an essential component of the transportation system in Orange County, even more so because it reduces traffic congestion during peak periods.

There are three ways that OCTA could leverage and expand on this success:

- **Increase the financial incentives offered to participants.** Currently, OCTA offers up to \$400 per month toward vehicle leases, which could be increased. However, this existing subsidy already results in substantial savings for vanpool program participants—OCTA estimates that vanpooling can save participants up to \$650 per month in reduced fuel, repairs, and other costs.
- **Expand outreach efforts to employers.** Under new policies described in Chapter 8, California employers will be increasingly required to reduce solo driving by their employees and may be good partners in encouraging OC Vanpool use (see Figure 7-3).
- **Continue partnering with Caltrans to expand the high-occupancy vehicle (HOV) lane network on freeways.** Caltrans is studying “managed” lanes in Orange County, which allow solo drivers to use the lanes for a fee, while remaining free to carpoolers and vanpoolers. Additionally, OCTA and Caltrans are proceeding with a project on Interstate 405 north of State Route 73 to the Los Angeles County line that will convert the existing HOV lanes to managed/express lanes and add a second express lane in each direction. HOV lane expansion, including managed or express lanes, would offer benefits for rideshare vehicles of all kinds, including vanpools.

Figure 7-3 OC Vanpool Employer-Focused Advertising



HAVE YOUR EMPLOYEES START THEIR OWN VANPOOL

Their vanpool. Their rules. We'll walk them through the process of getting started.

GET STARTED HERE →

PARATRANSIT ENHANCEMENTS

Like other transit operators, OCTA provides paratransit services for customers with mobility limitations. OC ACCESS is the agency's legally-required, curb-to-curb, shared-ride van service available by reservation (or on a subscription basis) for eligible or certified customers. The agency also offers same-day taxi service, provides rides to and from Regional Center of Orange County programs for people with developmental disabilities, and subsidizes group trips provided by nonprofit senior day programs under cooperative agreements.

Both demand and costs for OCTA's paratransit services have escalated: between 2008 and 2015, paratransit's share of OCTA's transit budget increased from 10 percent to 19 percent. Additionally, while 72 percent of current OC ACCESS riders are under age 65, projected growth in the population of older Americans will boost paratransit demand in the future.



The City of San Juan Capistrano received a grant from OCTA to offer no-cost transportation to the community center for seniors residing in the city.

Source: City of San Juan Capistrano

Recognizing the rapid growth in paratransit costs, OCTA has begun taking steps to manage demand, including continued support of senior mobility programs; expanding cooperative agreements; and expanding the same-day taxi program. Going forward, the following additional steps are recommended:

- Develop and promote economical supplementary services to provide customers with disabilities added convenience or flexibility not available on ADA paratransit.
- In addition to the existing same-day taxi service and cooperative agreements with senior day programs, explore opportunities to provide paratransit using OC Flex (see previous section). Monitor developments in the ability and willingness of TNCs like Uber and Lyft to participate in programs for people with disabilities while meeting regulatory requirements.
- Track technology developments with the potential to increase the efficiency of ADA paratransit while maintaining or improving customer experience.

ADDITIONAL STUDIES

Chapter 5 recommended that OCTA undertake several near-term studies to advance promising Transit Opportunity Corridors (TOCs):

- **Corridor-level investment studies for the North Harbor/Santa Ana and Westminster/Bristol corridors.** Through its Central Harbor Boulevard Transit Corridor Study (now nearing completion), OCTA is exploring the potential for streetcar or bus rapid transit on Harbor north of Westminster. It should initiate a similar effort for the Westminster/Bristol corridor. As for the OC Streetcar, these studies serve as first steps in the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) project development process—which requires alternatives analysis, design and engineering, and environmental review—that can ultimately result in federal grants. While the OC Transit Vision explored rapid streetcar or bus rapid transit lines in these corridors, the actual project design and mode would be determined through the project development process, which would include extensive public engagement.
- **A Freeway BRT system study.** Two “Freeway BRT” corridors, I-5 and SR-55, were included among the TOCs. As envisioned, Freeway BRT service would be unlike today’s freeway express routes: it would operate all day, in both directions, relatively frequently. However, there is much to be defined. Freeway BRT might have its own infrastructure, including transit-only ramps and stations in the freeway right-of-way, similar to the Los Angeles County Metro Silver Line on Interstates 10 and 110; or, it could use existing park-and-rides and street stops near freeway interchanges; or, there could be some combination of those approaches. A systemwide study of Freeway BRT would help answer these questions, provide more detailed analysis of potential costs and ridership, and confirm the corridors (if any) to be advanced for further study.

In addition to advancing the TOC-related studies, OCTA should continue to partner with other agencies on a variety of planning and project development efforts (see Chapter 8 as well). Specifically, OCTA should collaborate with regional partners, including Los Angeles County Metro, to advance intercounty connections (see Figure 7-4, and note that dates are based on current Metro timelines and are subject to change). Recently, Metro staff have reached out to OCTA staff and Board members to discuss future connections, including the possible extension of a planned Metro light rail line in the Pacific Electric right-of-way into Orange County. While this was not identified as one of the final TOCs in Chapter 5, a rapid transit line extending into Los Angeles County as far as Downtown Los Angeles would merit further study.

Figure 7-4 Potential TOC Connections to LA Metro Lines

