

Meeting of Dec. 13, 2021

Board Recognizes December Employees of the Month

The Orange County Transportation Authority's board of directors recognized three employees of the month for December.

The honors went to:

- Ricardo Pascual, a coach operator at the Garden Grove base who joined OCTA in 1997. In addition to his excellent reliability and adaptability, Ricardo recorded an incredible 24 years of safe driving in June.
- Glenn Huggins, a journeyman mechanic at the Santa Ana base who joined OCTA in 2002. Glenn recently volunteered to perform an engine replacement in one of OCTA's road call trucks, even though it was outside of his bus mechanic responsibilities, and successfully completed the replacement with no issues.
- Bill Habib, a Transit Technical Services Manager in the Maintenance Department. Bill is responsible for all bus procurements and was instrumental in engineering various modifications to OCTA's buses during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, including the driver shields and face mask and hand sanitizer dispensers.

Board Receives Update on Zero-Emission Bus Pilot Program

The OCTA board received an update on the agency's zero-emission bus pilot program, which is testing both hydrogen fuel-cell electric buses and battery-electric buses.

OCTA began operating 10, 40-foot hydrogen fuel-cell electric buses in early 2020. The buses are deployed on regular OC Bus routes within disadvantaged communities in Orange County. In their first 20 months of operation:

- Fuel economy is 2.3 times that of a compressed natural gas-powered bus.
- Cost per mile, which accounts for maintenance, is lower than CNG buses by approximately 17 percent.
- The percentage of days that the hydrogen buses were available compared to the total number of days they were planned for service dropped.
- Miles between road calls was also substandard. A road call is when a bus has to be replaced on route or causes significant delays in the route schedule due to mechanical or system failure.
- Considering this technology is new, both bus availability and miles between road calls are expected to improve as issues are resolved.

OCTA will also begin testing 10 plug-in battery-electric buses in the coming months. The first two buses are expected to arrive soon, with the remaining eight expected to begin arriving in spring 2022.

Testing both types of zero-emission buses will help determine which technology – or mix of technologies – will work best for Orange County moving forward.

OCTA's efforts align with California's Innovative Clean Transit Rule, a first-of-its kind regulation in the U.S. that sets a goal for public transit agencies to gradually transition to 100 percent zero-emission bus fleets by 2040. The Innovative Clean Transit Rule is part of the state's comprehensive program helping to achieve California's air quality and climate goals.

Board Receives Employment and Travel Survey Results

The OCTA board received the results of a survey that measures how the COVID-19 pandemic has altered public attitudes, working arrangements, travel behaviors and transit mode decisions.

The survey was conducted in September and was a follow-up to a similar survey conducted in July 2020.

Highlights include:

- Although the remote work tide has receded somewhat with vaccines and modified guidelines, it is expected to remain well above pre-pandemic levels.
 - The percentage of employees working from home one or more days per week (48 percent) is well above pre-pandemic levels (23 percent) and is expected to remain above pre-pandemic levels even after the pandemic is over (44 percent).
 - The average number of days employees work from home (1.97) has more than doubled from pre-pandemic levels (0.76) and is expected to remain so (1.55) in the future.
 - Employees generally find remote work to be beneficial to their work experience and work-life balance.
- The trend back toward pre-pandemic commute, travel and activity patterns is expected to continue.
 - The percentage of employees driving alone to work increased to 60 percent and is expected to reach 69 percent once the pandemic is over (10 percent below pre-pandemic levels).
 - The percentage of employees who expect to commute by public transit, carpool or vanpool, active transportation, and other modes after the pandemic is over, is within 1 percent of pre-pandemic values.
 - Respondents expect to drive alone in a vehicle less often after the pandemic.

OCTA Continues Delivering on Promises with Updated Next 10 Plan

The OCTA board adopted the updated 2021 Measure M Next 10 Delivery Plan, which outlines how improvements to transit, streets and freeways, and protection for the environment will be delivered through 2030.

In 2006, Orange County voters approved the renewal of the Measure M half-cent sales tax for transportation improvements, now known as OC Go.

The updated Next 10 Plan incorporates this year's Measure M forecast. Measure M is now expected to generate \$13.2 billion for transportation improvements through 2041, a 13.8% increase compared to last year's forecast.

Next 10 Plan highlights include:

- Deliver 14 freeway projects
- Return 18 percent of streets and roads funding to cities and the county for transportation needs
- Provide annual grants to cities and the county to address street bottlenecks and gaps
- Fund ongoing coordination of 2,200 traffic signals
- Continue Metrolink operations and fund station improvements
- Complete OC Streetcar construction and begin operations
- Offer enhanced mobility options for seniors and persons with disabilities
- Continue to support local transit options
- Provide ongoing grants for water cleanup projects