

Meeting of May 11, 2020

Board Receives COVID-19 Update

The Orange County Transportation Authority's board of directors received an update on how the agency is responding to the coronavirus pandemic.

OCTA has continued to make changes to the OC Bus system to ensure the health and safety of passengers and employees, including enhanced nightly bus cleaning, implementing rear-door passenger boarding, limiting the number of passengers on board each bus when possible, adding signages to bus seats reminding passengers to practice social distancing and adding service on busier routes to accommodate fewer passengers on each bus.

Most recently, OCTA also installed hand sanitizer dispensers near the rear doors of every OC Bus to give passengers the opportunity to sanitize their hands as they enter and exit the bus.

OCTA is also closely monitoring ridership to respond to demand while continuing to protect passengers and coach operators. Ridership has started to increase slightly over the last couple of weeks. To keep pace with the ridership trends and to allow for continued on-board social distancing, OCTA expects to adjust service levels and provide added trips on some routes in the coming month.

Efforts also continue on OCTA's projects to accelerate construction where possible because of low traffic volumes on freeways and streets. On the I-405 Improvement Project, these efforts have been successful, and it is estimated that extended closures have provided more than 5,000 additional work hours for contractors.

However, construction on the I-5 improvements in south Orange County is being impacted by delays in utility work as a result of state orders that restrict utility companies from implementing outages through the end of June. The impacts to the project are unknown at this time, and the contractor is making efforts to deploy resources to other areas of the project.

SR-55 Improvements Expected to Break Ground Next Year

The OCTA board also received an update on the SR-55 Improvement Project, which will speed up travel times between I-405 and I-5 through one of the most highly congested stretches of freeway in the county.

The Measure M project will add one regular lane and one carpool lane in each direction of SR-55 through the cities of Irvine, Santa Ana and Tustin, along with auxiliary lanes between interchanges. Measure M, also known as OC Go, is Orange County's half-cent sales tax for transportation improvements renewed by nearly 70 percent of voters in 2006.

The project's final design was submitted to Caltrans late last month, and right-of-way, utility relocation coordination and public outreach activities are ongoing.

The project, expected to break ground in 2021, is anticipated to cost \$411 million and is scheduled to be completed in 2024.

Workshop Held to Discuss Proposed FY 2020-21 Budget

The OCTA board held a budget workshop to discuss the proposed \$1.4 billion balanced budget for fiscal year 2020-21.

Preparation of the budget began in December, but revenue projections were updated in March based on the impacts of the coronavirus pandemic.

Although the COVID-19 pandemic is expected to impact sales tax revenues, the Measure M program will continue to fund improvements to the county's freeways and streets, along with multiple transit programs. Included in the proposed budget is \$417.7 million to help fund freeway improvement projects on I-405, I-5, SR-55, SR-57 and SR-91, and approximately \$147 million to improve roads. In addition, \$62.3 million is included for transit programs, including \$31.6 million for ongoing construction of the OC Streetcar.

With the help of the CARES Act, the FY 2020-21 proposed budget includes the same level of fixed-route bus service that was included in the 2019-20 budget. While the budget assumes the same level of service as before the state stay-at-home order, actual restoration of bus service may occur throughout the year based on ridership demand and public health considerations.

The proposed budget will return to the board on June 8 for a public hearing and for consideration.