



Existing Conditions of San Bernardino County Transit System

San Bernardino County Long Range Multimodal
Transportation Plan

August 9, 2023





INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

Contents

1	County Public Transportation Overview	1
1.1	Rich and Vibrant Transportation History	1
1.2	Defined Regional Mobility Goals	1
1.3	Orienting to the Traveler	2
1.4	Embracing Multimodalism	2
2	Performance at Countywide Levels	3
2.1	Regional Transit Ridership Patterns	3
2.2	A Closer Picture of More Recent Transit Performance	5
2.3	Vanpool Public Transportation in the County	7
3	Operator Initiatives Aimed at Rebuilding Public Transit	8
3.1	Multiple Strategies to Grow Transit Ridership	8
3.2.2	Balancing Coverage and Frequency	9
3.2.3	Safety	12
3.2.4	Fare Initiatives	13
3.2.5	Multi-Modal Campaigns	15
3.2.6	Supporting Rideshare and Specialized Transportation Initiatives	16
3.2.7	Implementing Zero Emission Bus Rules	17
4	Where Does This Leave Us?	18
5	References	19

Figures

Figure 1-1. San Bernardino County Public Transportation Services	1
Figure 1-2. Envisioning a Customer-Focused Multimodal Environment ACTION PLAN FOR CUSTOMER-FOCUSED, TECHNOLOGY-ENABLED MULTIMODALISM (2018)	2
Figure 2-1. Transit Trips Per Capita. Relatively flat nationally but trending downward in Southern California	3
Figure 2-2. Countywide Annual Performance of San Bernardino County Public Transportation, All Bus/ Van Operations with pre-Pandemic years in dark blue and fiscal years since 2020 in lighter blue	4
Figure 2-3. Recent Quarterly Ridership History Since 2019	5
Figure 2-4. Revenue Hours by Quarter for San Bernardino County's Large Bus Operators Since 2019	6
Figure 2-5. Revenue Hours by Quarter for San Bernardino County's Small Bus Operators Since 2019	6
Figure 2-6. San Bernardino County Two Programs' Vanpool Ridership	7
Figure 3-1. Countywide Public Transit Coverage	10
Figure 3-2. Countywide Public Transit Service Areas	10
Figure 3-3. Countywide Public Transit Frequencies	11
Figure 3-4. San Bernardino Valley Public Transit Frequencies, Highlighting the San Bernardino Transit Center	12
Figure 3-5. Countywide Public Transit Safety Campaign to promote and inform riders of transit's health and safety commitments (2020)	12

Figure 3-6. Countywide Multimodal "Welcome Back", three-phased campaign promoting transit safety (2021).	13
Figure 3-7. SBCTA-Supported Free Fare Special Events and Countywide Promotions.....	13
Figure 3-8. Omnitrans K-12 Student Free Fare Campaign, Supported by SBCTA Countywide in 2023	14
Figure 3-9. Other San Bernardino County Public Transit Fare Initiatives to Attract New Riders	14
Figure 3-10. An Early Multimodal, Bi-lingual , Countywide Campaign Promoting Transit.....	15
Figure 3-11. Multimodal Campaign to Encourage Train and Microtransit Use	16
Figure 3-12. VVTA and Omnitrans Are Testing Operation of Zero-Emission Bus Technology.....	17
Figure 4-1. Regional Network Campaign Simplified Map	18

INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK

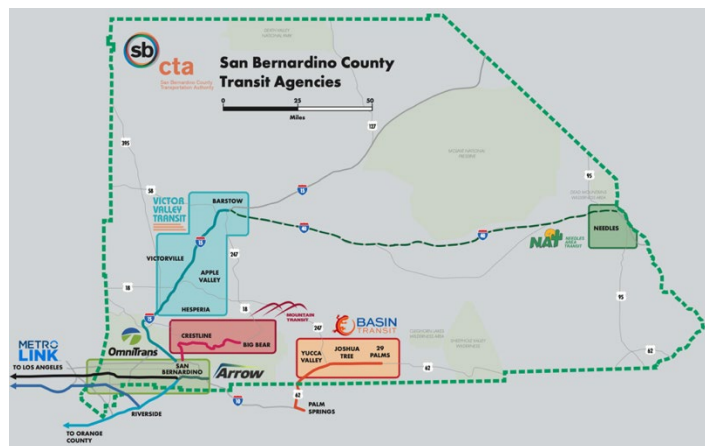
1 County Public Transportation Overview

1.1 Rich and Vibrant Transportation History

The San Bernardino region has a long public transportation history, dating back to the end of the 19th century with the construction of inter-continental railroads connecting in San Bernardino County to bring a host of visitors and settlers to Southern California. The streetcar and local railway era followed in the early 20th century, culminating in the Pacific Electric and its Red Cars. A single interurban company, under the “Great Merger”, combined multiple localized companies to establish lines that crisscrossed the Inland Empire and the Los Angeles basin. Their operations through the mid-20th century contributed to the growth of San Bernardino, declining only when the rise of the rubber-tired buses and the private auto helped to put the Red Car lines out of business.

With the 1964 Urban Mass Transportation Act and the subsequent establishment of Omnitrans in the 1970’s as a multi-city authority, the region’s public transportation network has grown steadily, becoming complex, vibrant and far-reaching. The most recent network expansion was the Arrow rail line, commencing operation in October 2022 to add nine miles of track and four stations to the Metrolink network, extending service from the San Bernardino Transit Center to the University of Redlands.

Figure 1-1. San Bernardino County Public Transportation Services



1.2 Defined Regional Mobility Goals

Providing public transportation across this vast region, with its low-density, suburban sprawl and extensive rural regions has and continues to be a significant challenge. As the regional transportation planning agency, the San Bernardino County Transportation Authority (SBCTA) grew the County’s rich transportation historical experience and network, seeking to connect riders in communities across the county with employment, basic services and education.

To design and improve transportation connections, the 2010 *San Bernardino County Long Range Transit Plan* identified high-level transportation goals. Goals were also articulated in the 2015 *Countywide Transportation Plan* (CTP) and the 2021 *Interim Update* of the CTP, which cited consistency with the goals of the *California Transportation Plan 2050* (CTP 2050) and described an updated transit vision for San Bernardino County. The CTP 2050 goals include:

- **SAFETY:** Provide a safe and secure transportation system
- **CLIMATE:** Achieve statewide GHG emission reduction targets and increase resilience to climate change
- **EQUITY:** Eliminate transportation burdens for low-income communities, communities of color, people with disabilities, and other disadvantaged groups

- **ACCESSIBILITY:** Improve multimodal mobility and access to destinations for all users
- **QUALITY OF LIFE & PUBLIC HEALTH:** Enable vibrant, healthy communities
- **ENVIRONMENT:** Enhance environmental health and reduce negative transportation impacts
- **ECONOMY:** Support a vibrant, resilient economy
- **INFRASTRUCTURE:** Maintain a high-quality, resilient transportation system
- **PARTNERSHIPS:** Support partnerships with and connections to small businesses and non-profit organizations

These goals prescribed integrated, safe transportation projects that promote mobility and support economic development for San Bernardino County residents, as well as quality of life dimensions of affordable housing and environmental quality. They call for stewardship of resources and development of adequate funding to support mobility projects led by a range of stakeholders.

1.3 Orienting to the Traveler

To enrich these broad goals, an orientation to the customer increasingly emerged, even before the Pandemic. This was seen as critical to increasing use of San Bernardino County's extensive investments in rail, bus rapid transit, bus, and vanpool services. SBCTA's 2018 Customer-Based, Ridesharing and Transit Interconnectivity Study set out customer-oriented principles and specific strategies by which to remove barriers to use, to build a customer-focused, multimodal environment to attract transit users traveling the diverse regions of San Bernardino County.

Figure 1-2. Envisioning a Customer-Focused Multimodal Environment ACTION PLAN FOR CUSTOMER-FOCUSED, TECHNOLOGY-ENABLED MULTIMODALISM (2018)



1.4 Embracing Multimodalism

The experience of the Pandemic years of 2020 through 2023 sharpened the focus on both multimodalism and the customer, as the region's public transportation providers refined countywide mobility goals through a public transit lens and by their individual operating experiences as they grappled with Pandemic realities. More transit-specific mobility goals were reflected in the *Coordinated Public Transit-Human Services Transportation Plan 2021-2025*. A compilation of goals directs energy and resources to:

1. **Grow ridership** and promote use of the county's investment in public transportation modes to attract previous and new riders, in the face of Pandemic-impacted ridership losses.
2. **Improve connectivity and the rider experience** across San Bernardino County public transportation modes by working collaboratively.
3. **Ensure safe and secure operations** to address customer and employee needs.

4. **Embrace innovation** at all levels in the delivery of public transit services.
5. **Promote reduced vehicle miles traveled** through increasing use of public transit, vanpool and rideshare to meet state and regional environmental goals.
6. **Grow zero-emission transit fleets** to comply with rules of the State of California Air Resources Board.

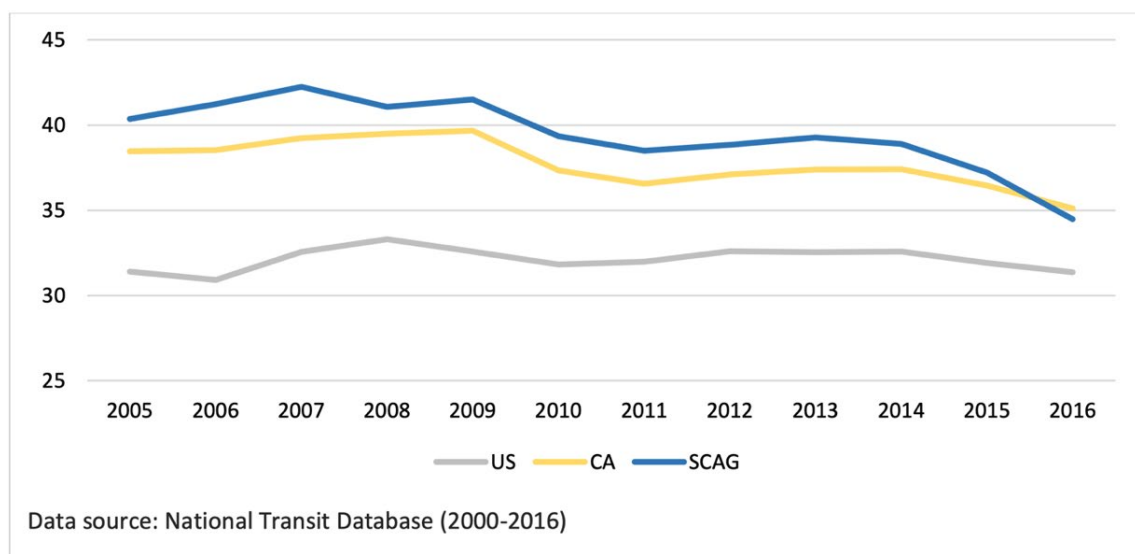
2 Performance at Countywide Levels

2.1 Regional Transit Ridership Patterns

Descriptions of San Bernardino County's public transit performance of bus and rail modes follows. Considering operating experience over the past ten years can inform the process for charting its future.

Across the Los Angeles Basin, and elsewhere in the United States, there was a downturn in public transit ridership that pre-dated the dramatic ridership losses of the Pandemic period. Recognizing regional declines in public transit use between 2008 and 2016, the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) undertook a region-wide analysis to help understand this decline and to identify strategies of response. University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) researchers identified **dramatically increased car ownership**, particularly among lower-income households, as a critical influence in decreasing public transit use through the early 2010s (Manville, Taylor and Bluemenberg 2018). The measure of transit trips per capita showed steady decline, even as the Southern California region's population and transportation services grew.

Figure 2-1. Transit Trips Per Capita. Relatively flat nationally but trending downward in Southern California



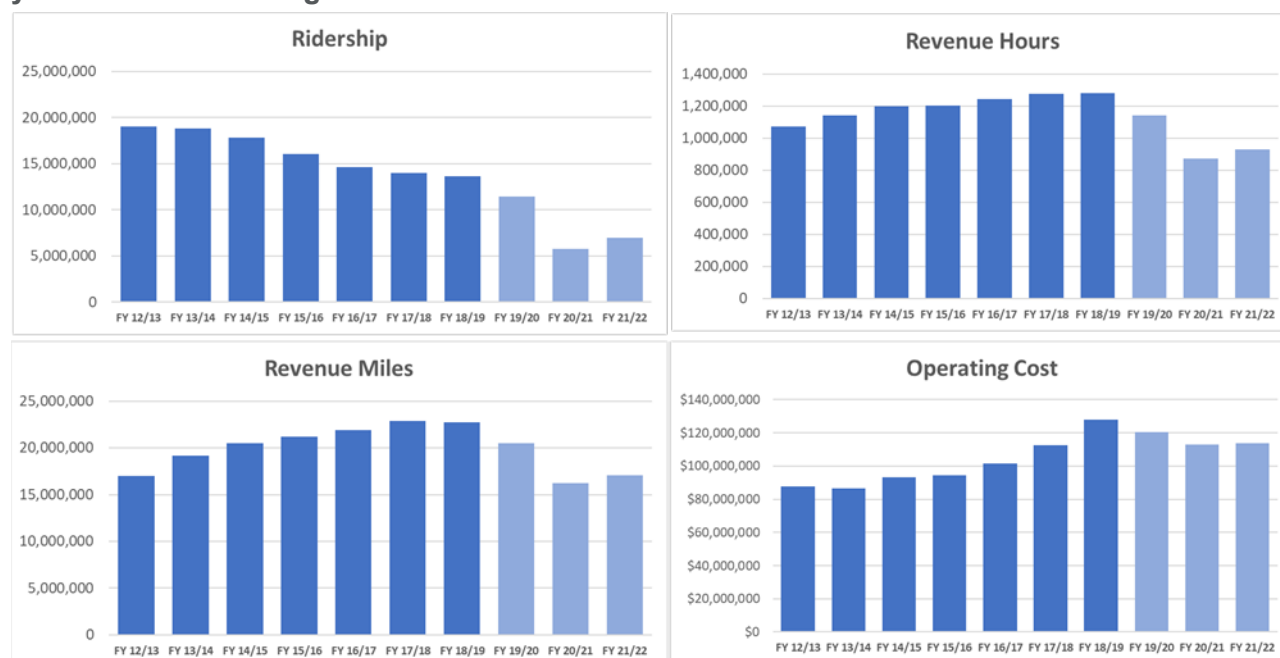
The good news articulated by these UCLA authors was that **shifting the focus to incidental riders**, getting some persons to use transit for some trips, could help to turn around the ridership losses of the previous period. They suggested that getting one in every four non-transit users to take a transit trip just once every two weeks, “annual ridership would grow by 96 million, more than compensating for the losses of recent years”, a pre-Pandemic forecast.

It should also be noted, however, that the Pandemic disrupted the patterns of the 2010s that led to increased car ownership. Supply chain disruptions resulted in lower production of new cars, which led to increases in new car prices and even more dramatic increases in used car prices, while recently rising interest rates combine with these high prices to increase the monthly cost of vehicle ownership (DePillis and Smialek 2023). As interest rates rise and inflation persists, drivers are struggling to afford car payments and are increasingly falling behind on loans (Rezvani 2023). Transit will continue to be an important alternative for San Bernardino County residents seeking to avoid these cost burdens.

In post-Pandemic times, attracting incidental riders and incidental trips can also recognize changes in travel requirements. Many workers no longer travel to work sites five days per week, or even at all. At the same time, some industries such as health care and the region's distribution centers still require on-site workers with resultant commute trips. However, work schedules for these industries do not always follow the typical 9-to-5 pattern of traditional office work.

In San Bernardino County, patterns of declining ridership that predate the Pandemic presented among public transit operators, exclusive of Metrolink. The following graphs present annual Countywide summaries of bus and paratransit van ridership and resources over the past decade, prior to and during the Pandemic years (Figure 2-2).

Figure 2-2. Countywide Annual Performance of San Bernardino County Public Transportation, All Bus/ Van Operations with pre-Pandemic years in dark blue and fiscal years since 2020 in lighter blue



Countywide transit ridership in San Bernardino County followed the national pattern of declining transit use prior to the Pandemic. In FY 2012/13 bus transit ridership was peaking at over 19 million trips. By FY 2018/19 this fell to 13.6 million, then declining to 11.4 million trips in FY 2019/20 which included those first months of California's stay-at-home order. Trip-making fell most precipitously in FY 2020/21 to 5.7 million trips but has been climbing steadily – if slowly – since.

Countywide revenue hours for FY 2012/13 were just over 1 million, again exclusive of rail, and grew by 19% between FY 2012/13 to FY 2018/19, to almost 1.3 million. The first year of the Pandemic, FY 2019/20, saw a decrease of almost 140,000 revenue hours, an 11% decrease. FY 2020/21 saw a

greater 32% decrease from FY 18/19 to 874,000 revenue hours provided that year. FY 20/21 began restoration of service, with a 6% increase countywide from the prior year, adding 53,000 hours of revenue service.

Countywide revenue miles grew through the first six years of this period from 17 million to 22.7 million in FY 2018/19, a 34% increase. In FY 2019/20 revenue miles decreased by 10% from the prior year, with a greater 29% decrease in FY 2020/21, when compared to the pre-Pandemic year of FY 2018/19. Revenue miles increased to 17 million miles in FY 21/22, a 5% increase over the immediate prior year, FY 20/21.

Countywide public transit annual operating costs peaked at \$128 million in FY 2018/19, declining from that to almost \$114 million by FY 2021/22.

2.2 A Closer Picture of More Recent Transit Performance

A countywide picture of quarterly transit utilization over the past three and a half years is presented in Figure 2-3, inclusive of the Inland Empire/Orange County and San Bernardino Metrolink lines. This depicts the precipitous drop in ridership in the initial months of the Pandemic, down to a low of 1.54 million passenger trips during the fourth quarter of FY 2019/20. Each subsequent quarter reflects the slow, but steadily increasing use of public transit to almost 2.9 million passenger trips in the quarter ending March 31st, 2023, 80% above the ridership lowest point of 2020.

Figure 2-3. Recent Quarterly Ridership History Since 2019.

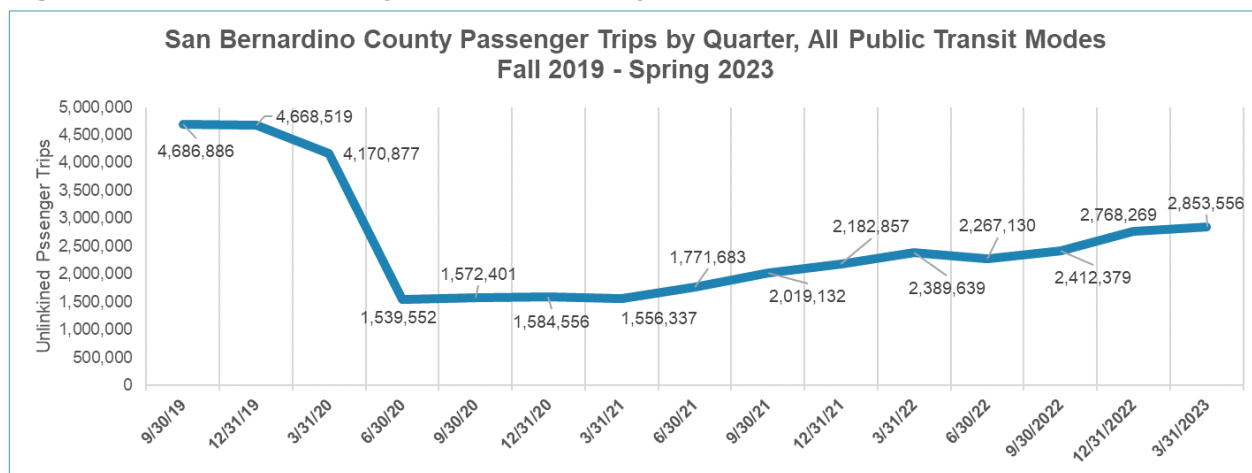


Figure 2-4. Revenue Hours by Quarter for San Bernardino County’s Large Bus Operators Since 2019

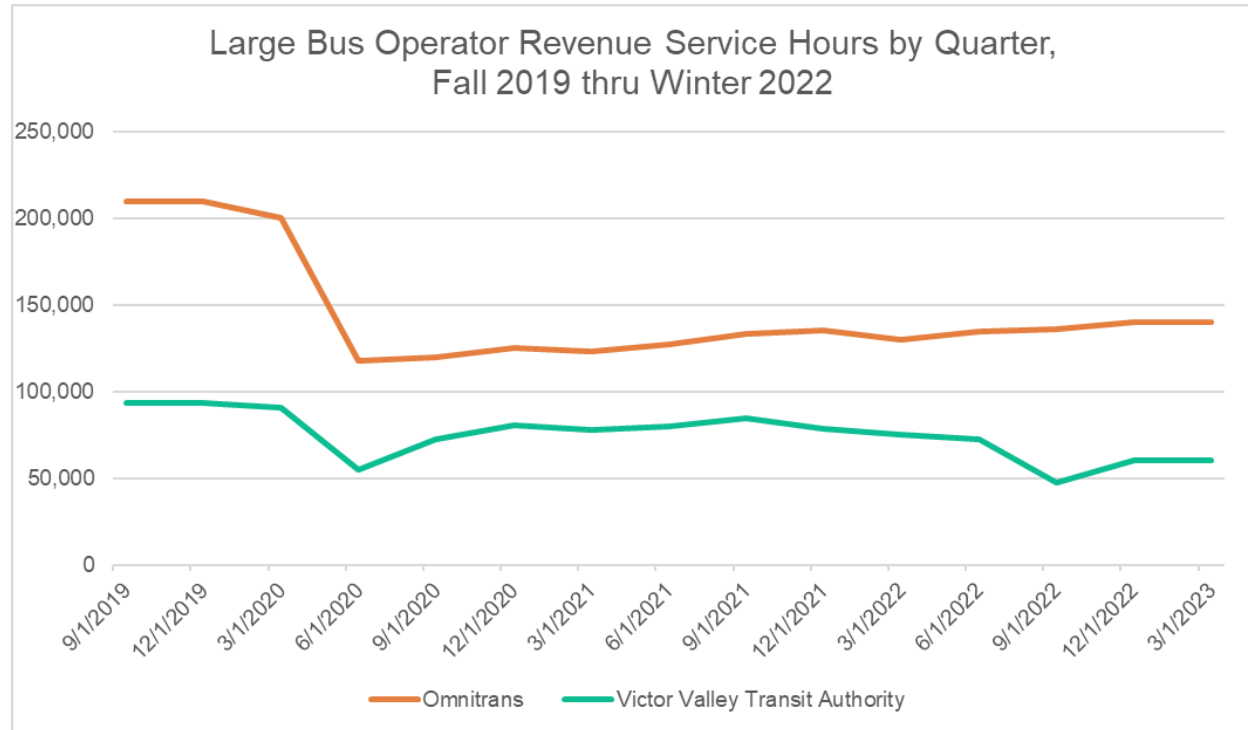


Figure 2-5. Revenue Hours by Quarter for San Bernardino County’s Small Bus Operators Since 2019

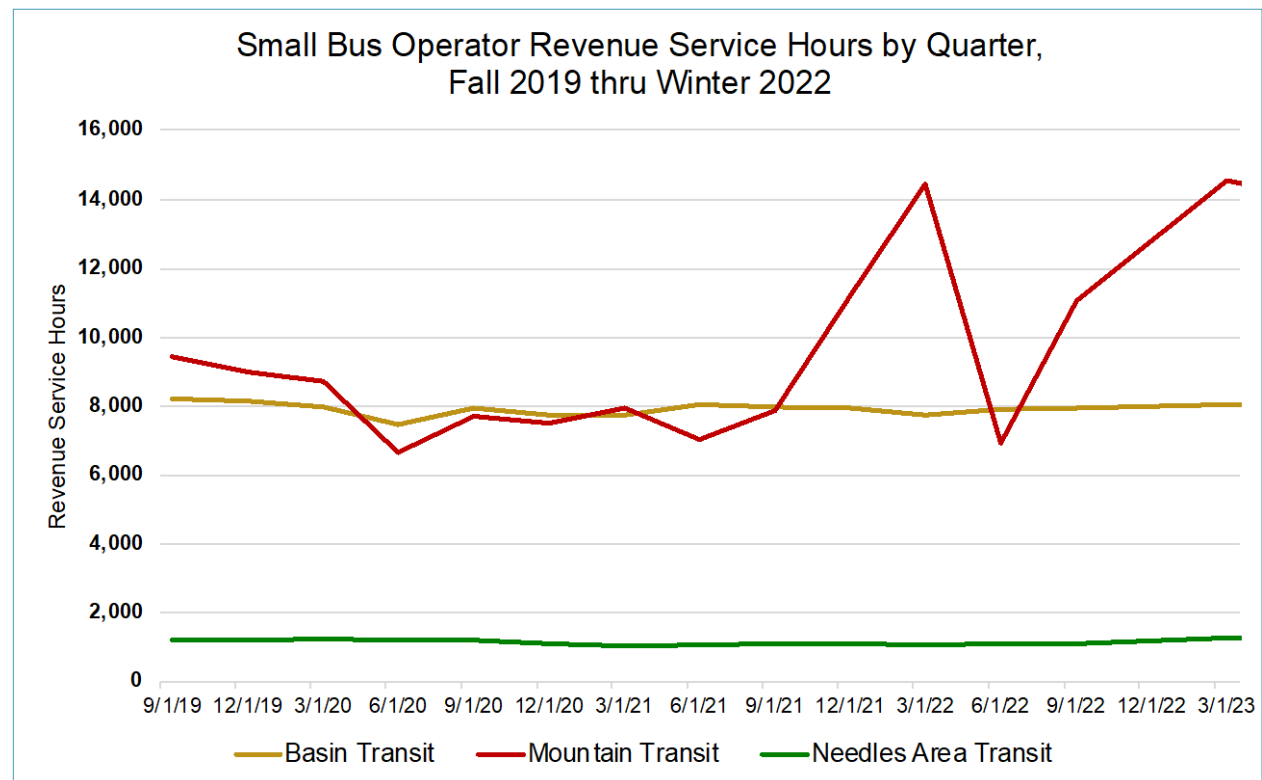


Figure 2-4 and Figure 2-5 reflect quarterly information about available service levels for the large and small transit operators, respectively. Larger Omnitrans and Victor Valley Transit Authority (VVTA) both saw early declines in revenue service hours, as service levels were reduced through June 2020. Both operators worked to reverse that trend, with Omnitrans steadily increasing to almost 150,000 revenue hours. VVTA climbed, then dropped as driver shortages translated to reductions, but is again increasing revenue service.

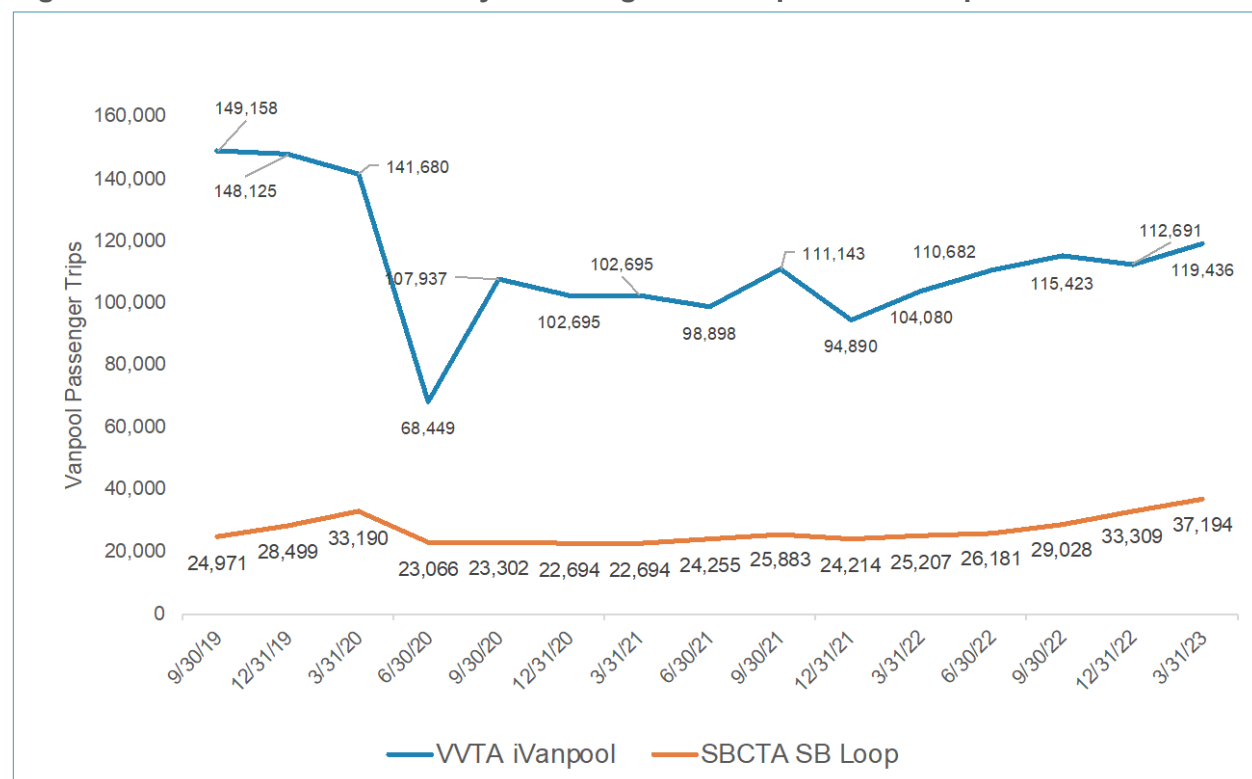
Of the smaller operators, Basin Transit (formerly Morongo Basin Transit Authority, through 2022) and Needles Area Transit both held relatively consistent service hours. Mountain Transit saw greater fluctuation with significant recent increases in service hours reflecting new partnerships between public transit and the mountain's ski industry.

2.3 Vanpool Public Transportation in the County

Recognizing air quality and other benefits of vanpools, FTA considers vanpool a public transportation mode when it is subsidized on an ongoing basis and meets certain FTA requirements. Vanpools – along with carpooling - have been important in San Bernardino County where many residents make very long commutes. **iVanpool** administered by VVTA, started in 2012, and **SB Loop** administered by SBCTA, started in 2018.

Vanpool ridership, as with public transit services, is re-bounding as the Pandemic recedes (Figure 2-6).

Figure 2-6. San Bernardino County Two Programs' Vanpool Ridership



VVTA's **iVanpool** saw a precipitous drop by June 2020 of 55% from its highpoint of almost 150,000 vanpool passenger trips, when many of its down-the-hill commuters ceased traveling. The **SB Loop** program was newer and saw a smaller decline of 31% over the same period. Reflected in Fall and

Winter 2022 upticks in ridership, both programs are re-building and attracting new vanpool users, even as the commuting public sorts out its needs.

Vanpool performance data, notably passenger miles, is reported into the National Transit Database (NTD) for inclusion in the calculation of FTA Section 5307 share to the region. This increases the region's primary federal transit revenue funds. San Bernardino County's public transportation programs have thereby benefited financially from its two vanpool services.

3 Operator Initiatives Aimed at Rebuilding Public Transit

3.1 Multiple Strategies to Grow Transit Ridership

As the operators confront and address the effects of the Pandemic – both on public transit services and the broader community – multiple actions are being undertaken by San Bernardino County's public transit providers. The vast majority of strategies are oriented to **growing transit ridership** and to **restoring service levels**, both dramatically reduced as a consequence of the Pandemic.

Multiple service improvement strategies have been documented in operator-level strategic plans, in short and long-range transit plans, comprehensive operational analyses and in the *San Bernardino County Multimodal Transportation Quarterly Updates*. Drawing upon these, actions to improve public transit for San Bernardino County residents fall generally into seven thematic areas:

1. **Service Delivery** - Restructuring service delivery to support communities, return service levels, introduce innovation and grow new partnerships.
2. **Coverage and Frequency** - As operators work to restore basic service levels, balancing the dual needs of expanding coverage and increasing frequency is key to increasing equitable access and attracting new riders.
3. **Safety** – Promoting and improving safety for riders, employees and the general public to instill confidence and grow use.
4. **Fare Initiatives**– Utilizing free fares, special event and targeted special fares to grow ridership; implementing new fare technology to make public transit easier to use.
5. **Multi-Modal Campaigns** - Enhancing public transit's visibility through countywide multimodal campaigns that promote ease-of-use and connectivity.
6. **Supporting Rideshare and Specialized Transportation Initiatives** - Ensuring that employee-based rideshare expands through vanpool and carpooling, even as specialized transportation services fill gaps and unmet needs of disadvantaged groups and individuals.
7. **Implementing Zero Emission Bus Rule** – Complying with the California's Air Resource Board requirements for zero emission transit fleets, as well as Federal mandates through Federal Transit Administration (FTA) State of Good Repair rules require continuing attention and funding.

3.2 Operator Actions in Seven Thematic Areas

Example activities within these thematic areas across San Bernardino County are highlighted below.

3.2.1 Service Delivery

When the March 2020 stay-at-home orders came into place, public transit operators embraced new levels of flexibility and nimbleness in how to address community needs. For example, in the Victor Valley, VVTA drivers worked extensively to distribute food and other non-essential items. This included using paratransit buses to assist food banks in picking up large amounts of foods for subsequent distribution to residents. In the Morongo Basin, public transit worked with a local non-profit, Reach-Out Morongo, to ensure home delivery of meals to seniors and others.

At the same time, most San Bernardino County operators moved quickly to reduce revenue hours, operating hours and even operating days during FY 2019/20 and on into the next year. Initially this was in response to the Pandemic and then later reflected difficulties in driver recruitment, hiring and retention. Omnitrans reduced service to 55% of its pre-COVID service levels early in the Pandemic, largely by reducing frequency. VVTA reduced revenue hours by reducing operating days, focusing more on holding service steady on weekdays and reducing weekend operating levels. Mountain Transit saw some service reduction, including pulling back its Route 5, Off-the-Mountain service. Morongo Basin Transit Authority reduced its service into Palm Springs as the Marine Corp base held its personnel on the base, halting and then minimizing leave.

Later, less-planned service reductions were not uncommon as San Bernardino County's operators struggled to hire and retain bus drivers. During FY 2022/23, this sometimes translated to cancellation of scheduled service and specific vehicle runs.

Even as they worked to attract and hold drivers with significant incentives, pay increases and other promotions, the County's operators began rebuilding service delivery and exploring new service models. These included exploration of microtransit, including OmniRide, OmniConnect at Ontario airport and in downtown San Bernardino, as well as VVTA's Micro-Link.

New partnerships that open doors to both new riders and new funding include Mountain Transit's successful partnering with local Big Bear and Crestline employers as transit and the ski industry worked together to attract skiing visitors and new ridership to transit. The county's two vanpool programs continue their active partnerships with employers across the county, VVTA's long-standing **iVanpool** and SBCTA's new in 2018 **SB Loop**; each having to re-grow their vanpool base in light of many employees' continuing preference to work-from-home.

3.2.2 Balancing Coverage and Frequency

As has been noted, the great continuing challenge confronting San Bernardino County public transit providers is to **balance coverage over large service areas with sufficient frequency to meet needs and attract or hold riders**.

Figure 3-1 depicts the existing footprint of the County's public transit operators. Coverage issues are clearly reflected in the large areas without transit – often with very few inhabitants – of this 20,000 square mile county.

Figure 3-1. Countywide Public Transit Coverage

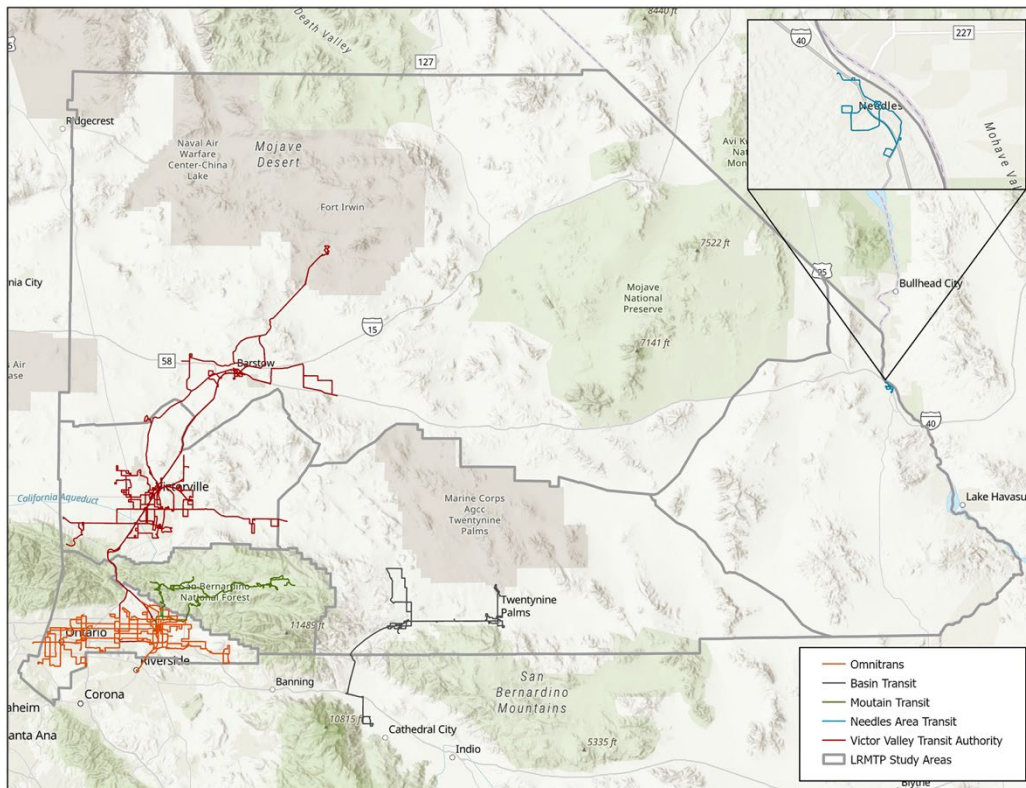


Figure 3-2. Countywide Public Transit Service Areas

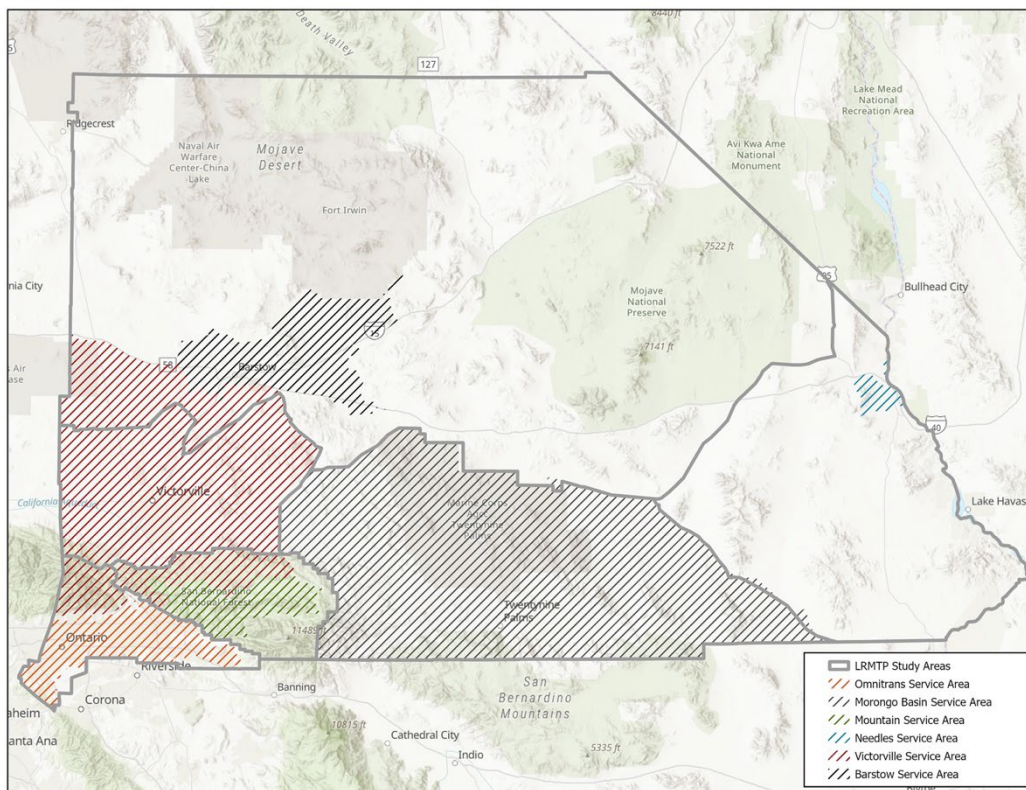


Figure 3-2 presents the basic service areas of each of San Bernardino County’s public transit operators. Even *within* operators’ service areas, there are pockets of unserved neighborhoods and communities. For example, within the Morongo Basin, this includes the communities of Wonder Valley and Morongo Valley where no local service operates. Victor Valley Transit Authority coverage reaches many parts of its large service area – including connecting Barstow and Victorville – but sprawling housing developments often include cul-de-sacs and curvilinear streets that make some neighborhoods unfriendly to transit. Mountain Transit’s small, isolated communities, such as Fawnskin, are among those without public transit connections. And within the San Bernardino Valley, communities with limited-to-no-fixed route, such as Bloomington, are among those where Omnitrans is experimenting with micro-transit to fill gaps.

Finally, frequency is key to attracting new riders. Running buses at fifteen-minute intervals or better makes it so that riders don’t have to worry about “missing the bus” or even to adhering tightly to a schedule when they have confidence that the next bus will be along shortly.

Figure 3-3 reveals that San Bernardino County has extremely limited high frequency service, with just two Omnitrans dark green routes, plus its SBX, operating with headways of 15 minutes or less. As operators restore service, they face tradeoffs in using limited resources to expand coverage to unserved areas or to improve frequency on existing routes with demonstrated demand. A more detailed version of transit frequencies within the San Bernardino Valley is shown in Figure 3-4, with a inset that depicting frequencies serving the San Bernardino Transit Center.

Figure 3-3. Countywide Public Transit Frequencies

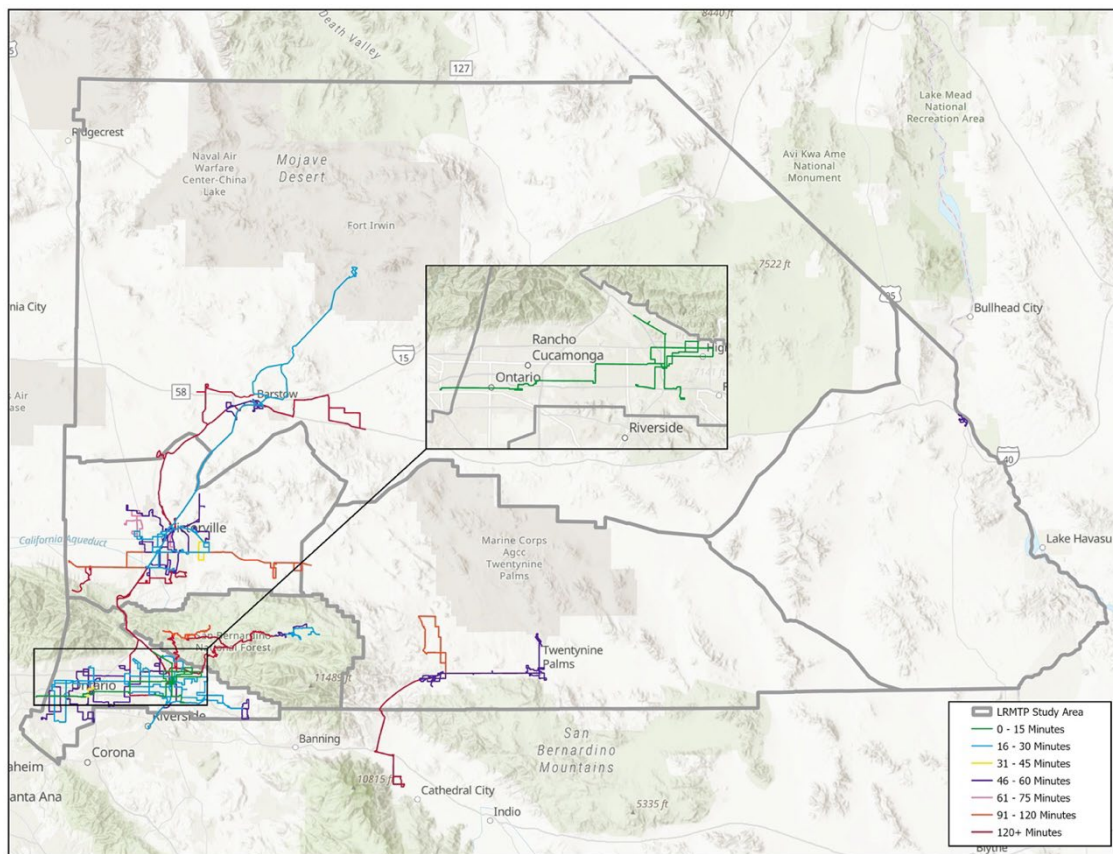
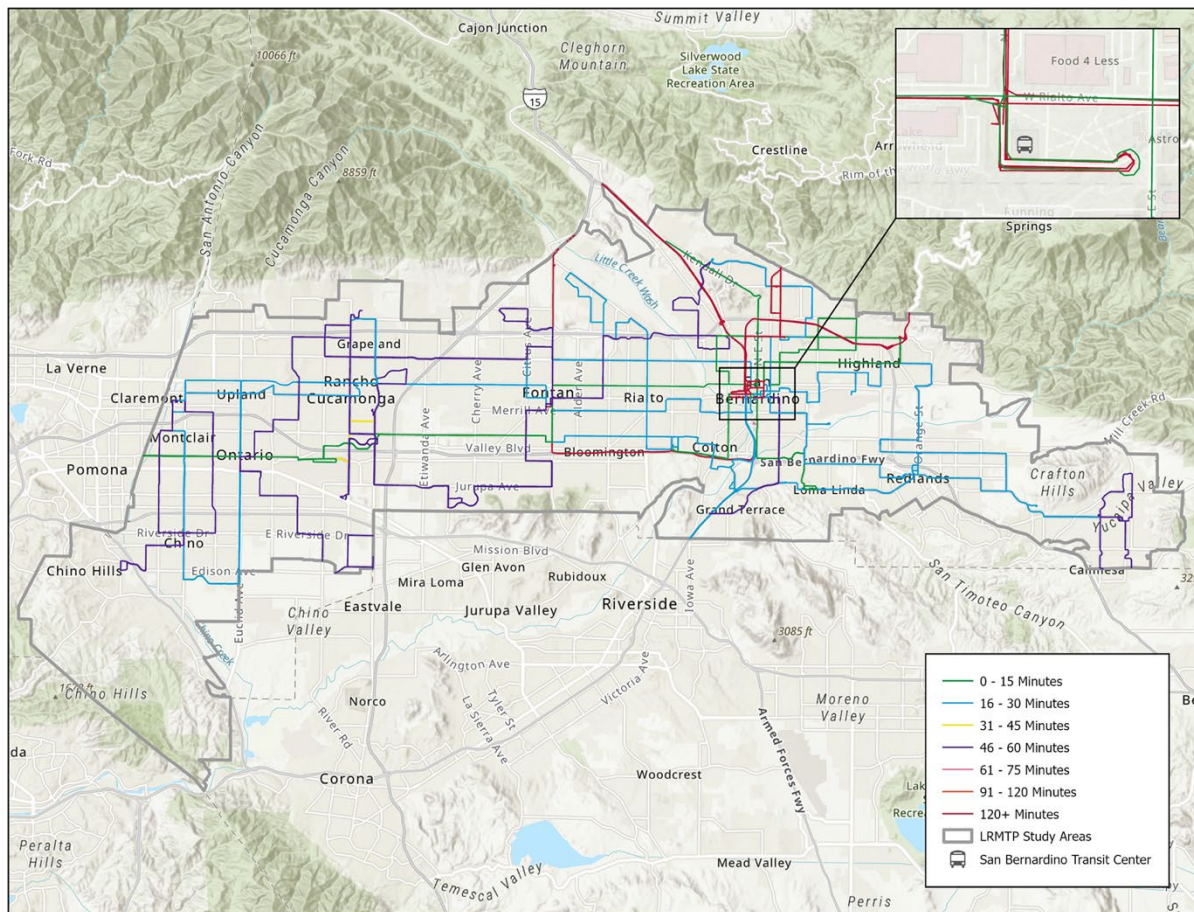


Figure 3-4. San Bernardino Valley Public Transit Frequencies, Highlighting the San Bernardino Transit Center



3.2.3 Safety

In the early days of the Pandemic, as public transit sought to entice stay-at-home riders back to buses and trains, SBCTA led a countywide Health and Safety campaign to promote the APTA safety seal on behalf of San Bernardino County transit operators. SBCTA developed its first countywide campaign to educate the general public around the cleaning of buses and the wearing of masks to convey the County's commitment to safety (Figure 3-5).

Figure 3-5. Countywide Public Transit Safety Campaign to promote and inform riders of transit's health and safety commitments (2020).



Figure 3-6. Countywide Multimodal "Welcome Back", three-phased campaign promoting transit safety (2021).



This was followed, in early 2021, by an SBCTA-led, three phase “Welcome Back” marketing campaign. Extensive campaign collateral was prepared by SBCTA and utilized by each of the County’s operators, including Metrolink, to convey that transit was “clean, easy and ready for you” (6).

Safety in use of public transportation about the San Bernardino region has been a long-standing theme. Omnitrans Strategic Plan 2021-2025 places it as first among its values **“We will continue to put the safety and security of our employees and riders first”**, in part realizing this through extensive rider surveying to identify safety topics and specific locations at which to implement bus stop improvement programs. Basin Transit, as with the other smaller operators, work actively on long-standing bus stop improvement programs, among other operator initiatives to improve rider safety.

3.2.4 Fare Initiatives

Fare policies and fare payment technology were used throughout the Pandemic years to support continuing riders, essential workers and those making essential trips.

Free and Reduced Fare Policies. In the spring and summer of 2020, fare collection was suspended by Omnitrans, VVTA, Basin Transit and Mountain Transit. Fare suspension served goals of assisting riders struggling with reduced income, unemployment and layoffs and to encourage social distancing by eliminating driver and rider interactions around fare payment. Needles Area Transit and Metrolink continued to collect fares.

Special event fare policies were introduced for individual operators around Car Free Day and Earth Day. SBCTA began, in 2022, to annually support free fares for Transit Equity Day, in conjunction with the February birthday of Rosa Parks (Figure 3-7). Notably, Metrolink took part in this SBCTA initiative and offered free fares systemwide.

Before the Pandemic, Omnitrans had a long-standing agreement with California State University San Bernardino, expanded to include Chaffey College, Crafton Hills College and San Bernardino Valley College. VVTA and Victor Valley College were in agreement for provision of free fare public transit to VVC students and with selected charter schools. These collaborations were expanded. In 2021, Omnitrans introduced free fares for younger students,

Figure 3-7. SBCTA-Supported Free Fare Special Events and Countywide Promotions

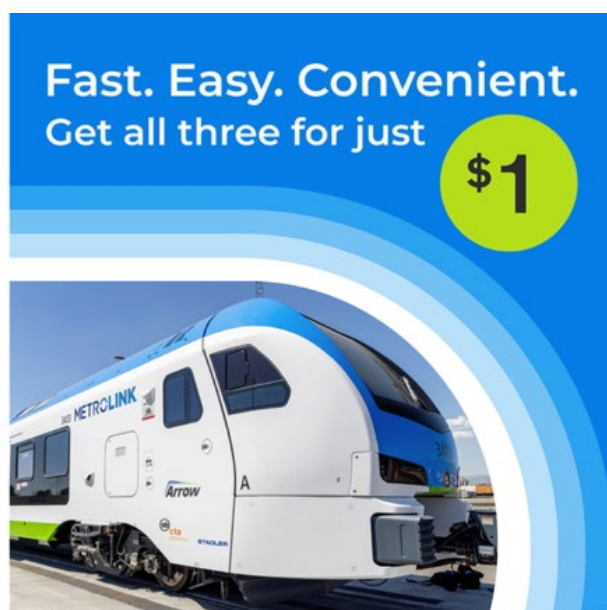


in grades K-12. This was followed in 2023 by an SBCTA decision to support this policy countywide, offering free fares on public transit for all youth in grades Kindergarten through 12th, intending both to help young riders and to grow a new generation of bus users (Figure 3-8).

Figure 3-8. Omnitrans K-12 Student Free Fare Campaign, Supported by SBCTA Countywide in 2023



Figure 3-9. Other San Bernardino County Public Transit Fare Initiatives to Attract New Riders



New services were introduced with free and reduced fares: the February 2023 Arrow promotion of \$1 round-trip fare and VVTA's Micro-Link launched in October 2022. Free Micro-Link fares were offered that first month of service, as well as on all other VVTA services including its ADA and commuter services (Figure 3-9).

A new, reduced fare program was introduced by Metrolink in September 2023, initiating a low-income fare discount. Any Metrolink passenger with a California Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card is eligible for a 50% discount on any Metrolink ticket.

Fare Technology. During the Pandemic period, operator experience grew with electronic fare payment to reduce reliance upon cash-based fares. Fare apps removed the inconvenience to riders of not having exact change or a current bus pass and simplified driver responsibilities in relation to fare collection. Basin Transit, Mountain Transit and Omnitrans embraced Token Transit, also used by Riverside Transit Agency, while Victor Valley Transit Authority employed the UMO fare payment app.



Increased Monetary Incentives. San Bernardino vanpool and rideshare programs are also using increased subsidies to attract new participants. Ridesharing (transit, vanpool, carpool, walk and bike) incentives for \$5 per day up to \$125 in gift cards, and entry into monthly gift card drawings have been heavily promoted.

SBCTA's vanpool program, **SB Loop**, increased its monthly subsidy by \$200, from \$400 to \$600 a month. And for those operating zero emission vanpools, new policy establishes that the monthly subsidy will be \$700.



3.2.5 Multi-Modal Campaigns

By 2017, SBCTA with Metrolink had extended Metrolink service one mile from the Santa Fe Depot to the downtown San Bernardino Transit Center. SBCTA invested heavily to build this new mile of track and planning had commenced for the further Metrolink extension to Redlands. Importantly, SBCTA wanted to ensure that residents, businesses, workers and visitors were aware of and could make optimal use of these continuing investments in San Bernardino Valley's transportation network. Concurrently, there was recognition of a region-wide downturn in transit ridership that pre-dated the Pandemic and interest in countering that trend.

In pursuing strategies to invite new riders and retain existing riders to use transit, SBCTA focused on its regional multi-modal network. SBCTA convened its **Multi-Modal Working Group** in 2019 to foster these goals via a series of projects seeking to introduce more persons to public transit, and in doing so, to consider the full, multimodal trip. This meant promoting transit as an opportunity to riders and potential riders. And thinking about trip-making from a multi-modal point of view, where riders may use two or more modes to make complete trips.

Early initiatives developed through the **Multi-Modal Working Group** included the Earth Day, Try Transit campaign (Figure 3-10). SBCTA provided campaign collateral to the San Bernardino County operators in English and in Spanish, numerous campaign pieces for distribution on buses, placement in physical settings and for use on social media.

Figure 3-10. An Early Multimodal, Bi-lingual , Countywide Campaign Promoting Transit



Metrolink and Omnitrans have partnered around OmniConnect shuttle services to improve multimodal connectivity and to build awareness and use of both modes. OmniConnect promotional flyers are shown in Figure 3-11.

- ONT CONNECT (and its predecessor ONT Lyft which had served four stations) links the Ontario International Airport with the single station, Rancho Cucamonga to provide regular connections for train-bus-plane trips.
- SB CONNECT was implemented in Fall 2023, concurrent with the new ARROW service, to support travel to San Bernardino via Metrolink or Arrow for workers' and public riders connections to their downtown destinations on SB CONNECT.

3.2.6 Supporting Rideshare and Specialized Transportation Initiatives

Responding to air quality improvement goals to further reduce vehicle miles traveled (VMT), in 2019 SBCTA started up a new vanpool program, **SB Loop**, to complement its longstanding rideshare programs that assisted employers in complying with South Coast Air Quality Management District Rule 2202. This joined the large vanpool program, **iVanpool** that VVTA has operated since 2012, the two programs offering San Bernardino County-based programming, incentives and reporting to encourage vanpooling. VVTA manages over 170 vanpools while **SB Loop** now exceeds its pre-Pandemic vanpools with almost 80 vanpools operating.

Rideshare activities are managed collaboratively with Riverside County Transportation Commission, as **IE Commuter**, to provide incentives to employees and rideshare program and Rule 2202 support to employers. Increasing cooperation with the five-county region around ridesharing initiatives has led to adoption of a common regional rideshare database, making it easier for carpoolers and vanpoolers to find one another. In addition to San Bernardino and Riverside Counties, this database includes Orange County, Los Angeles County and Ventura County residents.

Through two **Consolidated Transportation Services Agencies** (CTSAs) administered by each of the County's largest public transit operators, Omnitrans and VVTA, up to two dozen community-based programs provide trips to older adults, persons with disabilities, veterans, limited English speaking persons, youth, persons experiencing homelessness and others with individualized mobility needs. While small in scale, individually providing between 1,000 to 5,000 passenger trips annually, these programs serve critical long-distance non-emergency medical trips, door-through-door transportation and meet other hard-to-meet mobility needs.

Figure 3-11. Multimodal Campaign to Encourage Train and Microtransit Use



3.2.7 Implementing Zero Emission Bus Rules

To support its public bus operators, SBCTA prepared a *Zero Emission Bus (ZEB) Study Master Plan*, followed by the *Final Countywide ZEB Rollout Plan* (2020) to provide guidance to the transit operators in complying with the California Air Resource Board's Innovative Clean Transit (ICT) regulation. Transit operators were required to develop compliance rollout plans, with the expectation that ZEB conversion begins in 2024, towards achieving 100% zero emission fleets by 2040.

This un-funded mandate requires bus operators to use an array of creative funding strategies to plan for the full replacement of their bus fleets: 155 fixed route buses and 74 paratransit vehicles countywide, as of December 2022. The new technology, whether electric or hydrogen-based, requires operators to develop confidence in operations, even as the range of these vehicles – how long a ZEV-charged battery will last – is limiting and often insufficient based on current schedules. Vehicle range is impacted by variables such as weather, including high and low temperatures, terrain and elevation, as well as the driving habits of individual drivers. These all contribute to the operational challenges of implementing this new technology.

Operators each commenced their own exploration of new fueling options with VVTA introducing its first seven battery-electric buses in 2019.

Omnitrans also introducing alternative fueled vehicles into operations, prepared its first *Climate Action Capital Plan* (FY 2022/2023) to catalogue and document the approach to complying with state requirements for zero emission buses, alongside continuing Federal compliance with the State of Good Repair and the Americans with Disabilities Act.

San Bernardino County's smaller transit providers continue to work to identify funding and address operating challenges to enable operation of alternate fueled transit buses in their respective service areas.

Figure 3-12. VVTA and Omnitrans Are Testing Operation of Zero-Emission Bus Technology



4 Where Does This Leave Us?

San Bernardino County's public transportation programs are working in numerous areas to rebuild public confidence and grow use of an increasingly robust regional network, that harkens back to an equally robust period during Southern California's Red Car era (Figure 4-1)

At the same time, the Count's public transit operators are exploring what can be done now to improve transit's value to those with few alternatives, as the Pandemi recedes. There is a particular focus on serving well those individuals who continued to rely upon public transit during the height of the Pandemic to get them where they needed to go as essential workers and for essential trips.

To support existing riders and to attract new ones, San Bernardino County's public transportation bus and rail operators are aggressively implementing a breadth of strategies. These involve maintaining a customer focus, communicating with and educating both riders and potential riders, improving service levels and frequencies while implementing new technology for trip planning and fare payment. Concurrently, public transportation programs are important to California's climate action efforts to reduce vehicle miles traveled. The region continues to do so through vanpools, carpools and utilization of zero emission transit vehicles.

Figure 4-1. Regional Network Campaign Simplified Map



5 References

- Manville, P., Taylor, B., and Bluemenberg, E. Falling Transit Ridership: California and Southern California. Prepared for the Southern California Association of Governments. 2018.
- DePillis, Lydia and Smialek, Jeanna. Why Is Inflation So Stubborn? Cars Are Part of the Answer. New York Times. May 20, 2023. <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/05/20/business/economy/car-prices-inflation.html>
- Rezvani, Arezou. What's driving auto loan delinquencies. National Public Radio. <https://www.npr.org/2023/04/13/1169808261/whats-driving-auto-loan-delinquencies>