



Southern California Association of Governments
Remote Participation Only
April 6, 2023

To: Transportation Committee (TC)

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S
APPROVAL

From: Krista Yost, Assistant Regional Planner
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A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Kome Ajise". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Subject: Transit Ridership Update

RECOMMENDED ACTION:

Receive and File

STRATEGIC PLAN:

This item supports the following Strategic Plan Goal 3: Be the foremost data information hub for the region.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

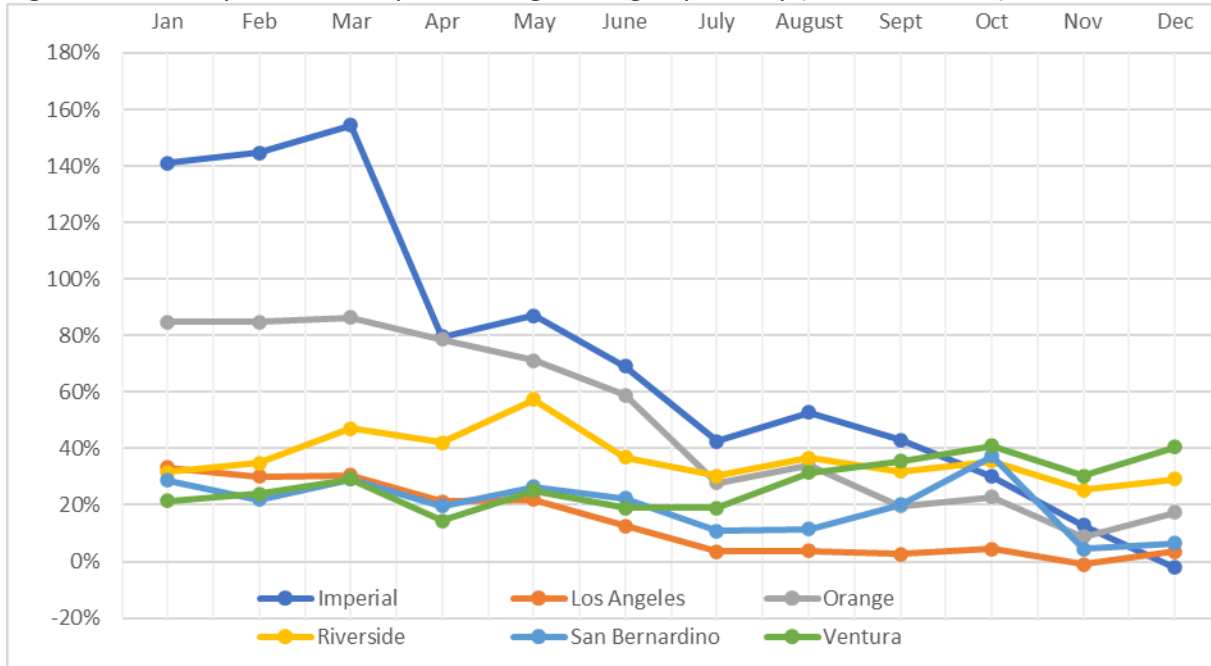
Since before the pandemic, SCAG staff has monitored transit system performance and reported it to the Regional Transit Technical Advisory Committee and in Connect SoCal. In response to last summer's Transportation Committee member comments, staff committed to presenting quarterly transit ridership data for transit operators across the region. Though transit ridership has improved over the course of the past several years, it is still significantly less than it was prior to the pandemic. Overall, the region's bus ridership levels are currently 23% below what they were pre-pandemic. For Metro, bus ridership has recovered more than rail ridership. For example, when comparing December 2019 to December 2022, bus ridership was down 21% and rail ridership was down 43%. The issue with rail ridership recovery extends to Metrolink whose ridership is currently 61% lower than it was pre-pandemic at this time. Though some transit operators are optimistic that higher gas prices and worsening traffic congestion may motivate more ridership, driver shortages present an immediate challenge, and many remain uncertain of what the longer-term future normal may look like, particularly if remote working remains a norm for discretionary riders who tend to take rail.

BACKGROUND:

In response to past Transportation Committee member comments regarding transit ridership recovery, SCAG staff has prepared this update depicting the ongoing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on transit ridership. Figures 1 and 2 and Table 1 below reflect National Transit Database (NTD) information reported by urban Full Reporters. These graphics demonstrate that bus ridership

levels have improved over the course of the past year, though they are nowhere near their pre-pandemic levels.

Figure 1. Monthly Bus Ridership Percentage Change by County (Year-Over-Year)



Source: National Transit Database, <https://www.transit.dot.gov/ntd/data-product/monthly-module-adjusted-data-release> as of December 2022.

Most counties in the region have experienced gains in transit ridership over the course of the past year, with Ventura County experiencing the most significant increase (40%, comparing December 2021 to December 2022), Riverside and Orange Counties reflecting modest gains (29% and 17% respectively, comparing December 2021 to December 2022), and San Bernardino and Los Angeles Counties reflecting low gains (6% and 3% respectively, comparing December 2021 to December 2022). Imperial County is the only county in the region experiencing a loss in ridership (-2%, comparing December 2021 and December 2022). Regional bus ridership overall increased 6% over the same time period. Note: the December increases across the board are similar to those of preceding months. For example, bus ridership overall increased 8% comparing October 2021 to October 2022 and 6% comparing September 2021 to September 2022.

Table 1. Bus Ridership Change by Operator, Fiscal Year-Over-Year

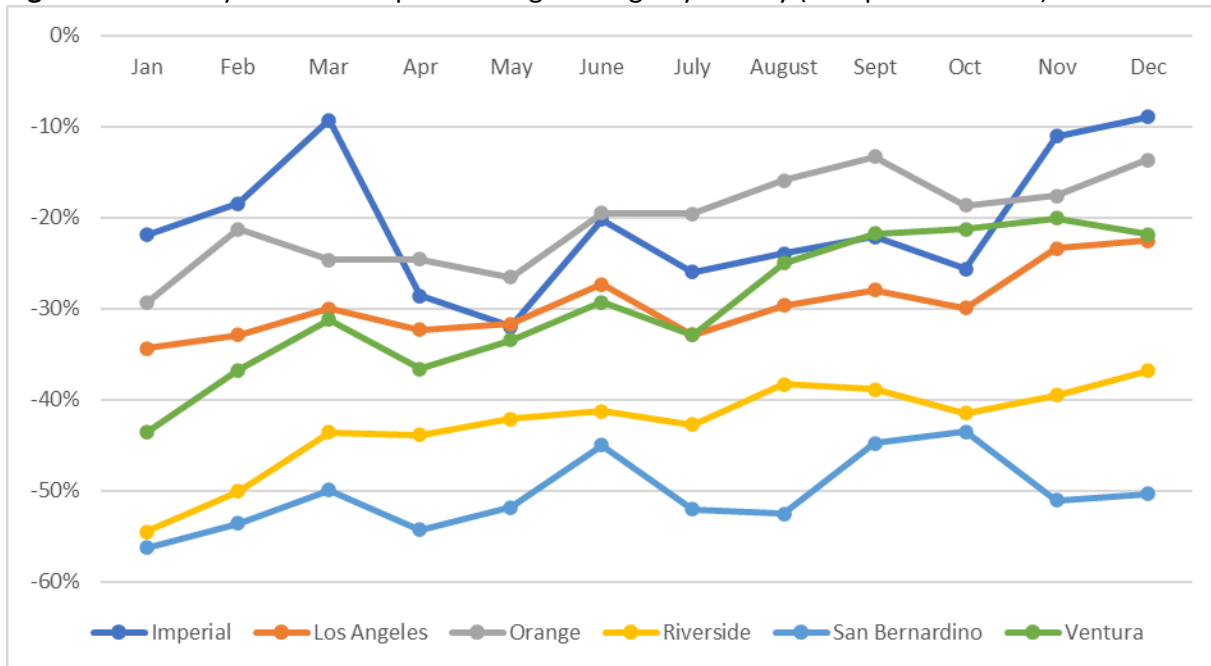
Bus Operator	Qtr3 Jan-Mar	Qtr4 Apr-Jun	Qtr1 Jul-Sep	Qtr2 Oct-Dec
Anaheim Transportation Network*	114607%	2659%	36%	9%
Antelope Valley Transit Authority	32%	23%	24%	0%
Beach Cities Transit (City of Redondo Beach)	96%	43%	19%	-3%
City of Commerce Municipal Buslines	149%	181%	155%	152%
City of Glendale	51%	54%	55%	39%
City of Los Angeles Department of Transportation	43%	47%	23%	22%
City of Pasadena	24%	30%	20%	22%
Culver City Municipal Bus Lines	40%	23%	2%	19%
Foothill Transit	26%	19%	13%	19%
Gold Coast Transit	24%	21%	28%	36%
City of Gardena Transportation Department	41%	24%	-1%	32%
Imperial County Transportation Commission	147%	79%	46%	13%
Long Beach Transit	23%	13%	3%	4%
Los Angeles County Metro	31%	16%	1%	0%
Montebello Bus Lines	46%	14%	-2%	-21%
Norwalk Transit System	25%	17%	32%	-5%
Omnitrans	32%	25%	17%	12%
Orange County Transportation Authority	46%	41%	25%	19%
Riverside Transit Agency	56%	63%	39%	37%
Santa Clarita Transit	56%	21%	39%	30%
Santa Monica's Big Blue Bus	34%	35%	26%	25%
SunLine Transit Agency	15%	19%	23%	18%
Torrance Transit System	-4%	-6%	-27%	-17%
Ventura Intercity Service Transit Authority	54%	51%	32%	20%
Victor Valley Transit Authority	-5%	-6%	-10%	51%
TOTAL	36%	24%	7%	5%

Source: National Transit Database, <https://www.transit.dot.gov/ntd/data-product/monthly-module-adjusted-data-release> as of December 2022. *These extreme percentages may be due to a data reporting error or due to service cuts (see pages 1 and 2 of the following report: <https://rideart.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Agenda-Item-17-Annual-Report.pdf>).

Overall, these trends are better than where the region was in December 2020 when overall transit ridership was down by 45%. However, bus ridership is still nowhere near what it was pre-pandemic for all counties aside from Imperial County as reflected in Figure 2 below. In Imperial County, bus ridership is 9% below what it was pre-pandemic for the most recent month of data, December, which is a significant improvement from preceding months (e.g., Imperial County

bus ridership was 22% below pre-pandemic levels in September). In Orange, Ventura, and Los Angeles Counties, bus ridership remains 14%, 22%, and 23% below where it was pre-pandemic for the most recent month of data, December. And in Riverside and San Bernardino Counties, bus ridership is 37% and 50% below where it was pre-pandemic for the most recent month of data, December. Overall, the region’s bus ridership levels are currently 23% below what they were pre-pandemic.

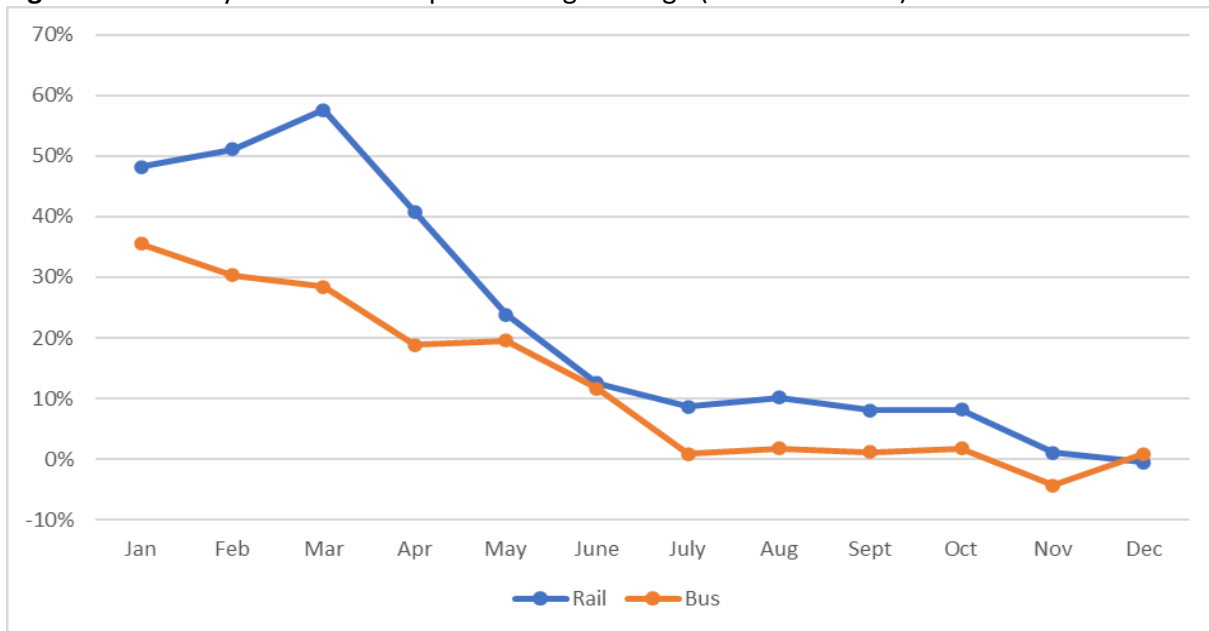
Figure 2. Monthly Bus Ridership Percentage Change by County (Compared to 2019)



Source: National Transit Database, <https://www.transit.dot.gov/ntd/data-product/monthly-module-adjusted-data-release> as of December 2022.

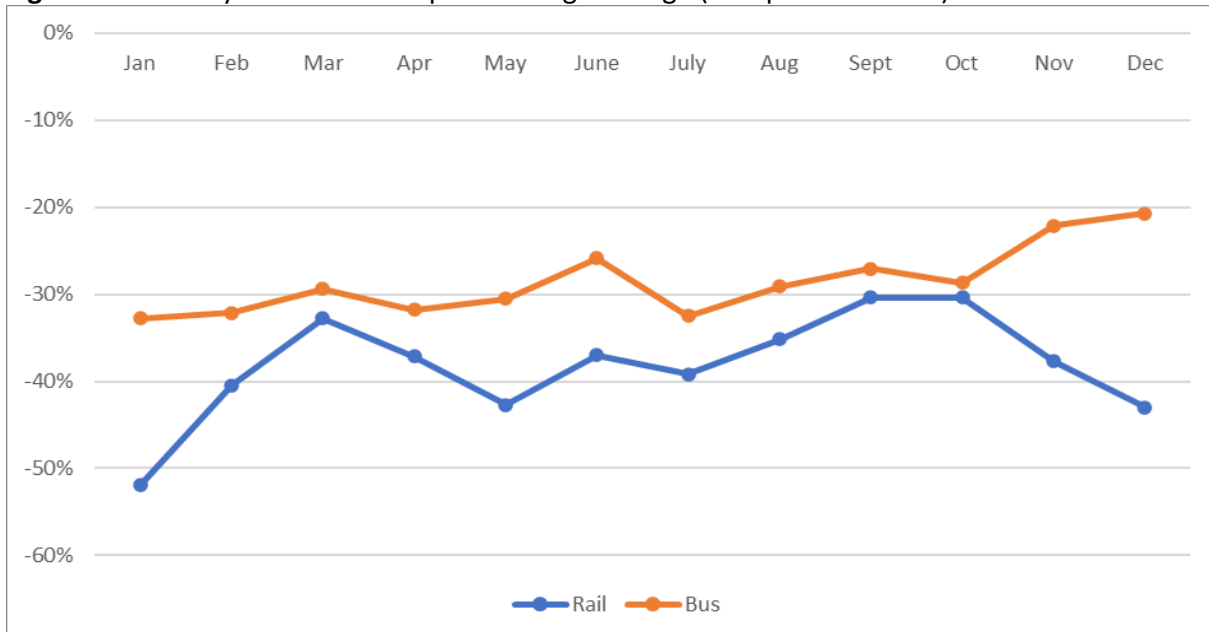
Data reported by Metro for its bus and rail systems through December 2022 are reflected in Figures 3 and 4 below. Metro bus ridership is up by only 1% in December 2022 compared to December 2021. Metro rail ridership is down by 1% for the same time period. Similar to other transit operators, Metro ridership increases were more significant in May when they were 20% (bus) and 24% (rail). While these trends are better than where the region was in December 2020, they are still well below pre-pandemic levels. For example, when comparing December 2019 to December 2022, bus ridership was down 21% and rail ridership was down 43%.

Figure 3. Monthly Metro Ridership Percentage Change (Year-Over-Year)



Source: Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority, <https://isotp.metro.net/MetroRidership/Index.aspx> as of December 2022.

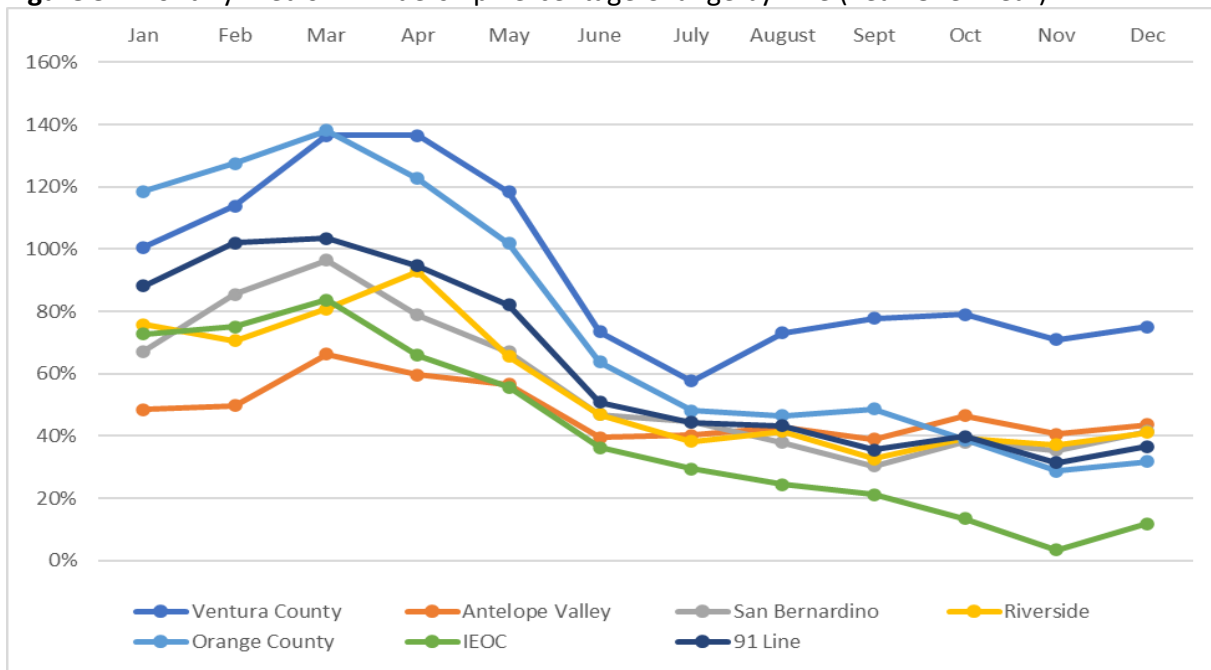
Figure 4. Monthly Metro Ridership Percentage Change (Compared to 2019)



Source: Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority, <https://isotp.metro.net/MetroRidership/Index.aspx> as of December 2022.

Figure 5 below reflects total monthly ridership data reported by Metrolink by line through December 2022. Overall, Metrolink commuter rail ridership is up by nearly 38% in December 2022 compared to December 2021, with the Ventura County Line experiencing the most significant increase (75%). The remaining lines, Antelope Valley (44%), San Bernardino (41%), Riverside (41%), 91 Line (37%), Orange County (32%), and Inland Empire-Orange County (IEOC) (12%) reflect modest ridership increases when compared to December 2021. Though this represents an improvement, total ridership is still 61% lower than it was pre-pandemic at this time (December 2022 compared to December 2019). Metrolink estimates that it has only recovered 40% of its pre-pandemic ridership. Pre-pandemic, 80% of Metrolink trips were commute trips. That figure has declined to just over half (52%) of total ridership. At the same time, the percentage of non-commute trips has more than doubled, from 20% pre-pandemic to currently 48%. Metrolink has noted that higher gas prices and worsening traffic congestion may help it to continue to attract traditional commuters.¹

Figure 5. Monthly Metrolink Ridership Percentage Change by Line (Year-Over-Year)



Source: Southern California Regional Rail Authority, as of December 2022.

¹ Metrolink 2022 Customer Survey Staff Report:

<https://d2kboa27fdvtw.cloudfront.net/metrolink/97954c01397b5cd4e13a0002dbcc1ef20.pdf>



American Public Transportation Association (APTA) Ridership Trends Dashboard

APTA and the Transit app developed a dashboard to track demand for transit and estimate real-time changes in ridership. The dashboard compares the differences between pre-pandemic ridership, using ridership figures reported by agencies and estimated ridership during the pandemic. Estimated ridership values for each week are extrapolated values from the most recent quarterly actual ridership figures reported by transit agencies. Estimated ridership values are modeled based on measures of Transit app usage to provide a current measure of demand for public transit. These estimates do not represent actual reported ridership counts from agencies. The dashboard supports comparisons by size, region, and agency and includes estimates for 17 of the largest transit agencies in the SCAG region. The dashboard is available at <https://transitapp.com/apta>.

NEXT STEPS:

Staff will continue to provide updates for ridership trends using the NTD's monthly adjusted data release as the data becomes available.

FISCAL IMPACT:

None.
