



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

To: Transportation Committee (TC)

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S
APPROVAL

From: Krista Yost, Assistant Regional Planner
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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.

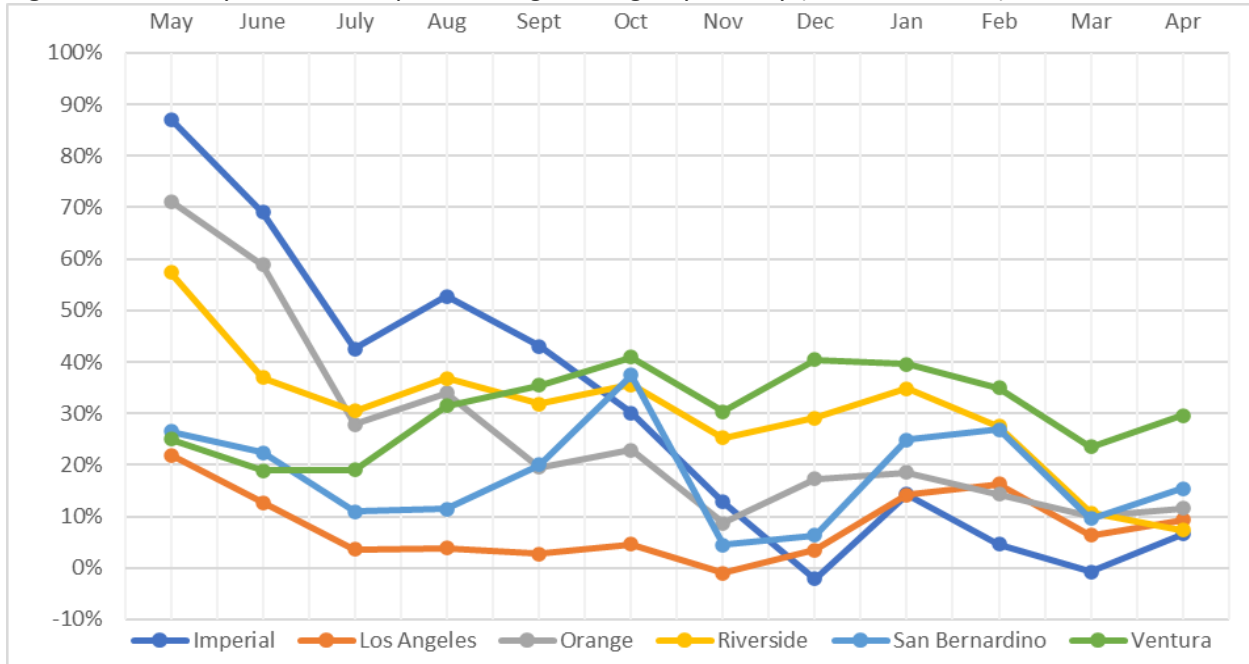
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Since before the COVID-19 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 few years, it is still significantly less than it was prior to the pandemic. Overall, the region's bus ridership levels are currently 26% below what they were pre-pandemic. For Metro, bus ridership has recovered more than rail ridership. For example, when comparing April 2022 to April 2023, bus ridership was down 23% and rail ridership was down 36%. The issue with rail ridership recovery extends to Metrolink whose ridership is currently 57% 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, 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 April 2023.

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 (30%, comparing April 2022 to April 2023), San Bernardino and Orange Counties reflecting modest gains (15% and 12% respectively, comparing April 2022 to April 2023), and Los Angeles, Imperial, and Riverside Counties reflecting low gains (9%, 7%, and 7% respectively, comparing April 2022 to April 2023). Regional bus ridership overall increased 10% over the same time period. Note: the April increases across the board are lower than they were for the preceding months. For example, bus ridership overall increased 17% comparing February 2021 to February 2022 and 15% comparing January 2021 to January 2022.

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

Bus Operator	Qtr4	Qtr1	Qtr2	Qtr3
	Apr-Jun	Jul-Sep	Oct-Dec	Jan-Apr*
Anaheim Transportation Network	2869%**	36%	9%	13%
Antelope Valley Transit Authority	23%	24%	0%	4%
Beach Cities Transit (City of Redondo Beach)	43%	19%	-3%	-19%
City of Commerce Municipal Buslines	181%	155%	152%	58%

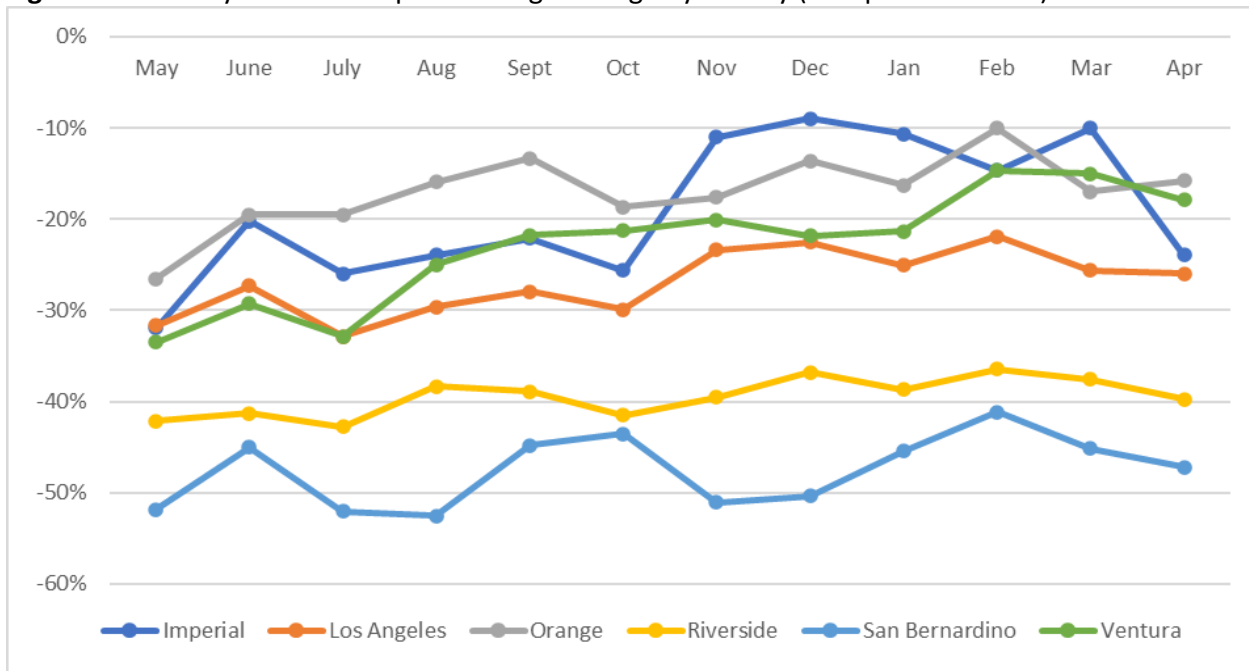


City of Glendale	54%	55%	39%	36%
City of Los Angeles Department of Transportation	47%	23%	22%	9%
City of Pasadena	30%	20%	22%	-5%
Culver City Municipal Bus Lines	23%	2%	19%	23%
Foothill Transit	19%	13%	19%	10%
Gold Coast Transit	21%	28%	36%	32%
City of Gardena Transportation Department	24%	-1%	32%	20%
Imperial County Transportation Commission	79%	46%	13%	6%
Long Beach Transit	13%	3%	4%	-14%
Los Angeles County Metro	16%	1%	0%	14%
Montebello Bus Lines	14%	-2%	-21%	-6%
Norwalk Transit System	17%	32%	-5%	-7%
Omnitrans	25%	17%	12%	17%
Orange County Transportation Authority	41%	25%	19%	14%
Riverside Transit Agency	63%	39%	37%	20%
Santa Clarita Transit	21%	39%	30%	-3%
Santa Monica's Big Blue Bus	35%	26%	25%	21%
SunLine Transit Agency	19%	23%	18%	16%
Torrance Transit System	-6%	-27%	-17%	0%
Ventura Intercity Service Transit Authority	51%	32%	20%	9%
Victor Valley Transit Authority	-6%	-10%	51%	29%
TOTAL	24%	7%	5%	12%

Source: National Transit Database, <https://www.transit.dot.gov/ntd/data-product/monthly-module-adjusted-data-release> as of April 2023. *This quarter includes an additional month of data, April 2023, to allow for the utilization of the most up-to-date data. **This extreme percentage 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 April 2021 when overall transit ridership was down by 47%. However, bus ridership is still nowhere near what it was pre-pandemic for all counties aside from Orange and Ventura Counties as reflected in Figure 2 below. In Imperial and Los Angeles Counties, bus ridership remains 24% and 26% below where it was pre-pandemic for the most recent month of data, April. In Riverside and San Bernardino Counties, bus ridership is 40% and 47% below where it was pre-pandemic for the most recent month of data, April. Overall, the region's bus ridership levels are currently 26% below what they were pre-pandemic.

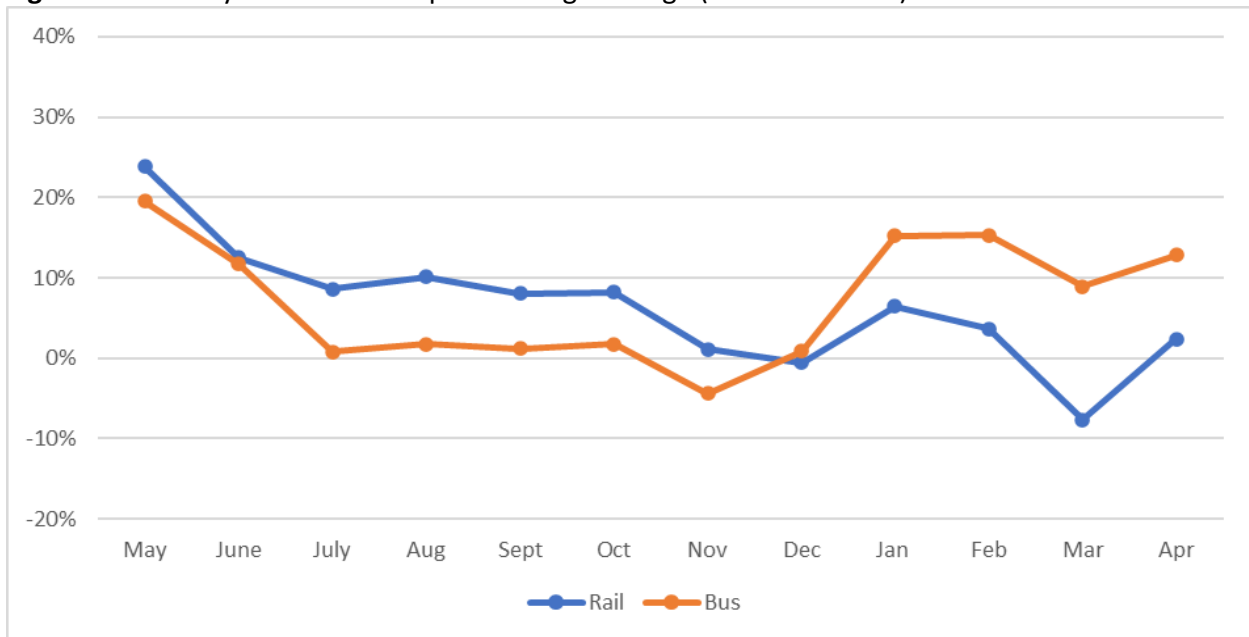
Figure 2. Monthly Bus Ridership Percentage Change by County (Compared to 2019)



Source: National Transit Database, <https://www.transit.dot.gov/ntd/data-product/monthly-module-adjusted-data-release> as of April 2023.

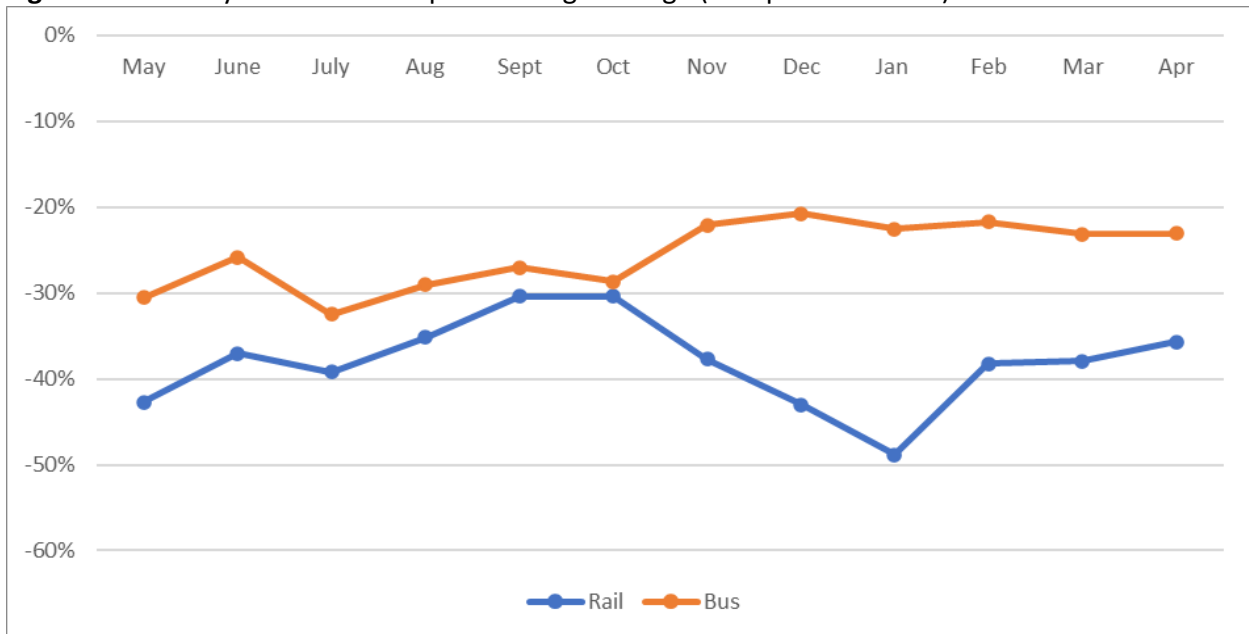
Data reported by Metro for its bus and rail systems through April 2023 are reflected in Figures 3 and 4 below. Metro bus ridership is up by nearly 13% in April 2023 compared to April 2022. Metro rail ridership is up by only 2% for the same time period. Similar to other transit operators, Metro ridership 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 April 2021, they are still well below pre-pandemic levels. For example, when comparing April 2019 to April 2023, bus ridership was down 23% and rail ridership was down 36%.

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 April 2023.

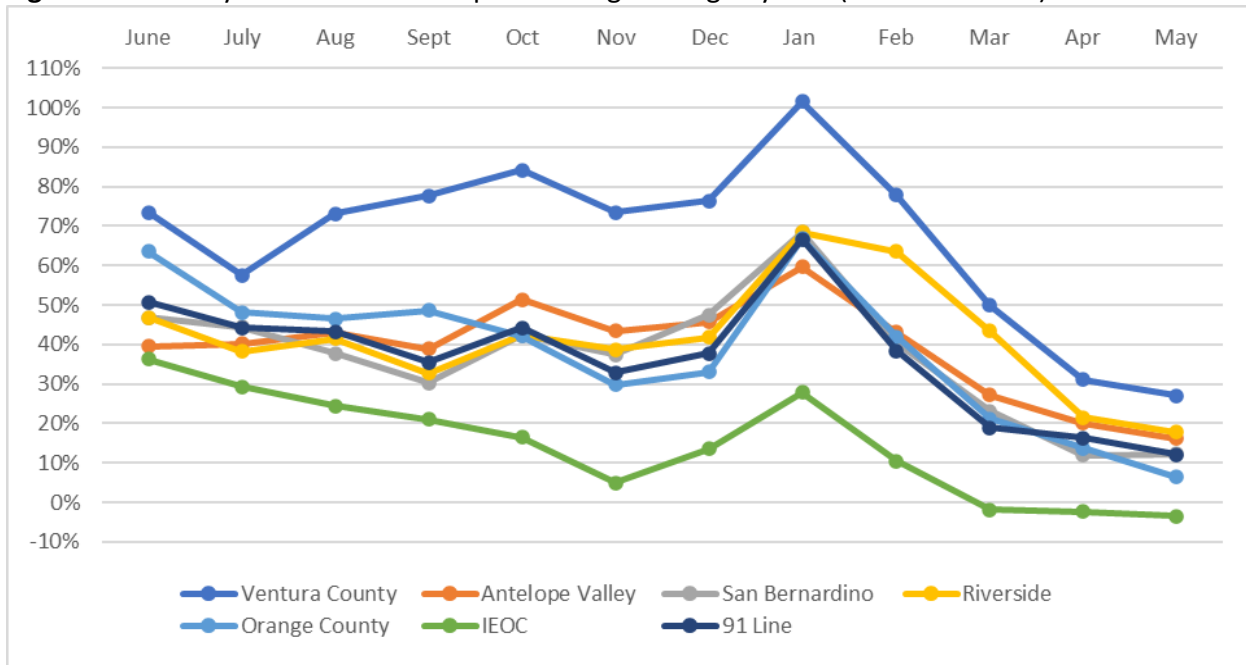
Figure 4. Monthly Metro Ridership Percentage Change (Compared to 2019)



Source: Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority, <https://isotp.metro.net/MetroRidership/Index.aspx> as of April 2023.

Figures 5 and 6 below reflect total monthly ridership data reported by Metrolink by line through May 2023. Overall, Metrolink commuter rail ridership is up by approximately 11% in May 2023 compared to May 2022, with the Ventura County Line experiencing the most significant increase (27%), and the Riverside (18%), Antelope Valley (16%), San Bernardino (12%), 91 Line (12%) and Orange County (7%) lines reflecting modest ridership increases. The Inland Empire-Orange County (IEOC) line is the only Metrolink line experiencing a loss in ridership (-4%, comparing May 2022 and May 2023). It is important to note that the May increases across the board are significantly lower than they were for the preceding months. For example, Metrolink ridership overall increased 41% comparing February 2022 to February 2023 and 63% comparing January 2022 to January 2023.

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

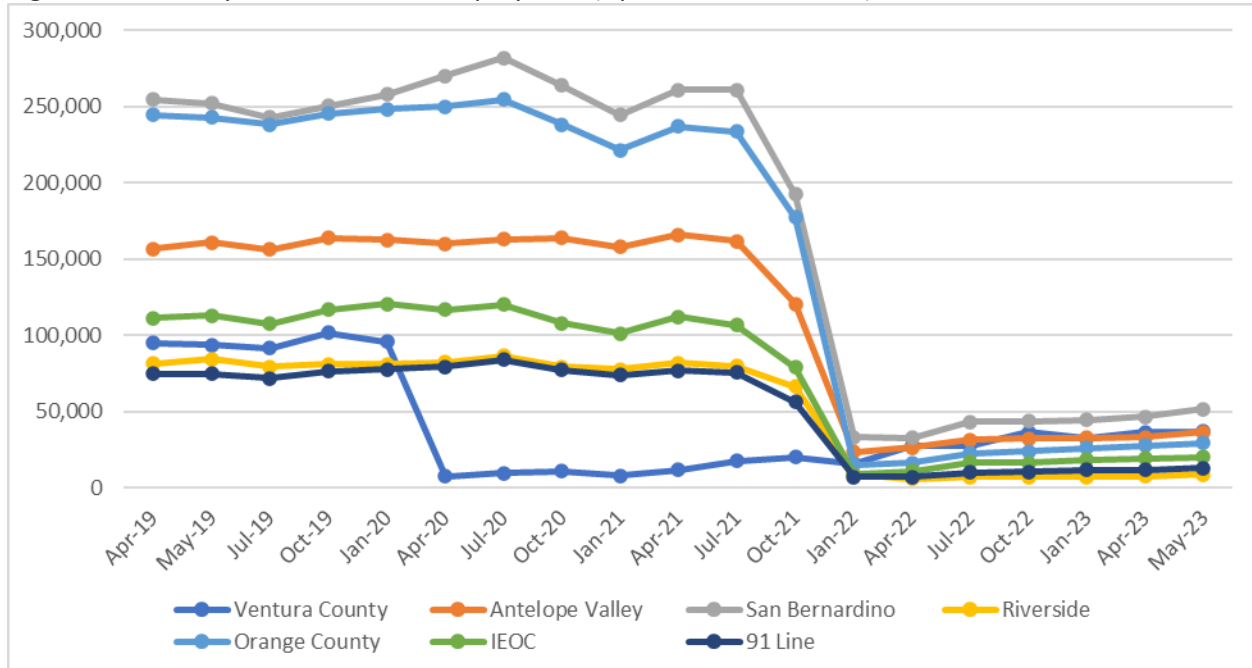


Source: Southern California Regional Rail Authority, as of May 2023.

In addition, total ridership is still 57% lower than it was pre-pandemic at this time (May 2023 compared to May 2019). Metrolink estimates that it has only recovered roughly 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 6. Monthly Metrolink Ridership by Line (April 2019 to Present)



Source: Southern California Regional Rail Authority, as of May 2023.

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.

¹ Metrolink 2022 Customer Survey Staff Report:

<https://d2kbo27fdvtw.cloudfront.net/metrolink/97954c01397b5cd4e13a0002dbcc1ef20.pdf>



FISCAL IMPACT:

None.