



# Information Item

Date: March 25, 2016

To: Mayor and City Council  
From: Edward F. King, Director of Transit Services  
Subject: Impacts of Big Blue Bus Route Changes in Venice

## Introduction

This report provides an update on Big Blue Bus' Evolution of Blue Expo Light Rail Line service integration to Venice, outreach efforts to the Venice community, the Venice community response to these bus service changes, and next steps.

## Background

The Evolution of Blue Plan to restructure Big Blue Bus services to better integrate with Expo Phase II was approved by Council on [April 28, 2015](#). The Evolution of Blue plan is a set of intricately assembled interdependent route segments that aim to provide Expo connectivity from the far corners of BBB's 51-square mile service area as well as from various communities within. Designed to provide first-last mile linkages to critical regional mobility connections, the Plan culminated from an 18-month BBB-Expo service integration study and outreach process. The results include:

- Modifications to every BBB route,
- Elimination of service redundancy with partner agencies, and
- Addition of several new routes.

Implementation of the plan is scheduled over four service changes, which began in August of 2015 and is scheduled to be completed with the August 2016 service change.

The Evolution of Blue service enhancements include the addition of six new routes (15, 16, 17, 18, 42, and 43). In addition, 15 remaining routes have been or will be adjusted

such that every Big Blue Bus route has a transfer point at an Expo Phase II station, and every single new station is served by at least one Big Blue Bus route. With the six new routes, Big Blue Bus is adding 47 directional route miles of new service (one mile of new service in one direction is a directional route mile) and 227 new bus stops on streets throughout the region that did not previously have Big Blue Bus service. These new routes provide critical north-south connections to rail on the 4<sup>th</sup> street, 14<sup>th</sup> Street, 20<sup>th</sup> Street/Walgrove, Centinela, Bundy and 26<sup>th</sup> Street Corridors within the Big Blue Bus service area.

Phase 2 of the Evolution of Blue plan was implemented with the February 21, 2016 service change, expanding service to key destinations such as Venice's Abbot Kinney and Marina Del Rey, along with regional service connections to the Exposition Light Rail Stations, thereby improving mobility for the region and providing mobility choices for new customers. Big Blue Bus has positioned itself as one critical piece of the mobility solution by providing north-south connectors approximately every half mile to seven new rail stations along the Expo Line, with origins/destinations to high density areas and job centers. Staff expects that these phased service changes will increase system-wide ridership, providing true mobility freedom, flexibility and choice for customers.

#### Evolution of Blue Outreach & Venice Neighborhood Feedback

The Evolution of Blue planning and outreach efforts conducted in 2013-2015 involved an extensive process including three online surveys, two rounds of stakeholder and community meetings, and various outreach media and events that resulted in the collection of more than 12,000 individual comments provided by members of the public throughout the Los Angeles area. Early in the process, Big Blue Bus held several meetings with the public and with other transit providers to ensure that public participation as well as reduction in service duplication would be core elements of the plan.

During the outreach process, Big Blue Bus invited the Venice Neighborhood Council to provide feedback in August 2014, December 2014 and January 2015. All affected

neighborhood councils, as well as Los Angeles City Councilmember Mike Bonin's office were sent links to online surveys in the summer of 2013, spring of 2014 and the fall of 2014 to solicit comment.

In February 2015, Big Blue Bus staff alerted Councilmember Bonin's staff that the Venice Neighborhood Council had been unresponsive to invitations to participate in the stakeholder process. Despite the efforts, the outreach process concluded the following month with no significant input from Venice area groups, other than individuals who had attended meetings or answered surveys. Of the survey responses that offered a home zip code, 3% were from the 90291 zip code in Venice.

On February 21, 2016, Big Blue Bus made significant changes to Routes 1 and 18 in Venice as part of the Evolution of Blue Expo Integration plan. Prior to the service change implementation date, notices were mailed to residents living adjacent to new stop locations notifying them of planned bus stop construction and bus service. Upon implementation of the February service change, which included service extensions to Venice and Marina del Rey, staff heard from several residents from Ocean and 7<sup>th</sup> Avenues indicating that they were unaware that there would be new service along those streets.

Following the service change in February 2016, Los Angeles Councilmember Bonin's staff member, Paul Backstrom, contacted Big Blue Bus, informing staff that the Councilmember had received 90 complaints pertaining to the route changes. He requested that Big Blue Bus attend a community meeting to further understand residents' concerns.

On Wednesday, March 9<sup>th</sup>, Big Blue Bus staff attended a community meeting at Westminster Elementary School in Venice. BBB staff presented a review of the Venice routes, the planning process, and the rationale behind the changes. A group of residents then presented photos and text detailing what they saw as needed improvements. The

meeting was attended by 142 people, of whom 92 filled out comment cards and 43 made oral comments or asked questions when called upon.

The focus of the citizens' PowerPoint presentation at the meeting was the idea that Big Blue Bus service is not appropriate for Ocean Avenue in Venice. Topics covered included safety, impacts to traffic, noise, congestion, and damage to trees. Nearly half of the comments focused on Ocean Avenue and those who live on the street requested an immediate end to bus service on Ocean Avenue.

Other topics of concern included lack of appropriate outreach prior to changes, new service on 7<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Avenues, loss of service, the need for service in other areas and issues related to safety, as well as supportive comments in relation to general topics such as governance and process.

At the conclusion of the meeting, Councilmember Bonin formally requested that Big Blue Bus consider the routing options presented by some of the presenters and return to the community with the outcome of those considerations.

## **Discussion**

### **Safety**

The routes in Venice were vetted and approved by the Big Blue Bus Operations and Safety Divisions. While some streets are narrow, the routes are not substantially different from other areas in which Big Blue Bus currently operates. Extensive safety training and route orientation was provided to all BBB MCOs and staff prior to the implementation of service. In light of the safety concerns raised, Big Blue Bus Lead Training Coordinator, Sherryon Calhoun, who attended the public meeting, will review the Venice routings and will conduct refresher safety training to all operators assigned to Routes 1 and 18.

### Stakeholder Input

Throughout the public outreach process, Big Blue Bus sought Venice community input and continues to welcome it. The lack of feedback by local stakeholders during the outreach phase has resulted in the assessment by Venice community members who attended the March 9<sup>th</sup> meeting that their input was not solicited or valued. In response to these community concerns, Big Blue Bus will conduct a series of meetings to understand more fully what might best serve Venice residents, and to consider the options presented.

### Alternatives Presented

While many of the alternative route options presented were widely embraced by those in attendance at the meeting, there are numerous and complex issues that require careful reflection. Travel time, ridership projections, additional operating costs, ADA accessible bus stops, adequate sidewalk space, opinions of other stakeholders in affected areas, and bus connectivity are all important components to consider with any route change. Some of the route suggestions overlap LA Metro and Culver City Bus routes; as a result, Big Blue Bus must obtain their input as well as input from LADOT and other jurisdictional bodies as appropriate.

### **Next Steps**

The goal of increased public input can be best met by careful consideration and outreach before implementing any further modifications to the bus routes. Any changes considered must be analyzed against the entire service plan as changes to such a plan cannot be made without consequential impacts in other parts of the system, whether in service gaps or cost implications. Due to the extensive factors aforementioned, to cease bus operations, even to a limited area, or to make immediate changes as requested by some Venice community members would not be feasible.

Big Blue Bus staff will re-engage Venice Neighborhood Council, Councilmember Bonin's Office, and community stakeholders to consider options and obtain feedback, as well as to engage customers who use and depend on the service, and to conduct appropriate analysis. Staff will make the requisite analysis and return to Council to share findings and any recommendations.

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