



August 10, 2017

To: Transit Committee

From: Darrell Johnson, Chief Executive Officer 

Subject: Low Carbon Transit Operations Program College Student Pass Pilot Program Update

Overview

On February 13, 2017, the Orange County Transportation Authority Board of Directors approved the use of state Cap-and-Trade Low Carbon Transit Operations Program funding for a fare adjustment program that would target ridership growth which may include colleges and universities.

Recommendation

Approve the use of fiscal year 2016-17 Low Carbon Transit Operations Program funds of \$900,000 for a three-year pilot pass program with Rancho Santiago Community College District.

Background

OC Bus 360°, the Orange County Transportation Authority's (OCTA) comprehensive plan to improve bus service and increase ridership, identifies college students as a key audience for ridership growth. According to OCTA's bus customer satisfaction surveys, work and school are the top trip purposes for bus riders. OCTA has been working with area colleges to encourage transit ridership through pass sales and cross-promotions. In addition, to support the OC Bus 360° initiative and further develop the ridership potential in the college market, OCTA reached out to various colleges throughout the county to seek partnerships which could include a potential new pass program that would allow every student access bus services with a valid student ID.

Transit agencies throughout the country have successfully implemented similar student pass programs. The Riverside Transit Agency implemented a two-year pilot pass program that provided free rides to students in the Riverside Community College District (District). After the free-ride period ended, students voted to financially participate through a cost share arrangement to continue the

program for an additional five years. Overall, this program helped significantly increase the student usage of transit and was recently extended for an additional four years.

Discussion

On February 13, 2017, as part of the funding recommendations for Low Carbon Transit Operations Program (LCTOP) through California's Cap and Trade Program, the Board of Directors approved using a portion (\$0.9 million) of fiscal year 2016-17 LCTOP funds for fare adjustment programs that target ridership growth, which may include colleges and universities. LCTOP provides funds to transit agencies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and improve mobility, with a focus on providing benefits to disadvantaged communities.

In order to utilize the approved LCTOP funds, OCTA identified colleges that may meet the funding eligibility requirements to include disadvantaged communities. Within the District, Santa Ana College (SAC) showed the most interest in establishing a new pass program to support the College's priorities of managing parking demand and providing affordable public transportation for more students. SAC is located in a high transit-demand area and its students meet the disadvantaged community demographic requirements for LCTOP recipients and is served by several bus routes in OCTA's core service area.

The SAC student government initiated a student transportation fee as part of its annual Associated Student election ballot. OCTA, based on this proposal, suggested a new three-year pilot pass program to allow every full and part-time student from SAC to ride OCTA's fixed-route bus service with a valid student ID. The three-year pilot program would include the first year of ridership paid by LCTOP funds, with the second and third year paid for by the student transportation fee. In May 2017, SAC students voted and passed the per-semester student transportation fee for all students funding the program from fall 2018 through summer 2020. After its passage, OCTA and SAC administrative staff reviewed key program implementation requirements including student IDs' interoperability on OCTA's farebox system and finalized additional logistics.

While developing the SAC student pass program, the Continuing Education Division within the District, expressed interest in extending the student pass program to include its continuing education students. Continuing education students who are enrolled with a minimum of 12 weekly hours of adult education would be eligible for the program.

The proposed extension, to be included as part of the three-year pilot pass program would allow continuing education students to participate during the first academic year (fall 2017 to summer 2018). For the second and third years, the District will pay per-student transportation costs for each eligible continuing education student. OCTA's participation in this additional program is contingent upon state authorization amending the inclusion of continuing education students.

The student pass program for the District presents an opportunity to grow the student market and future public transit riders in the core of Orange County. Staff will regularly report back on the results of the program. Collaborative promotion of the student pass programs will start with the fall semester of 2017, pending agreement approval from the Rancho Santiago Community College District Board of Trustees.

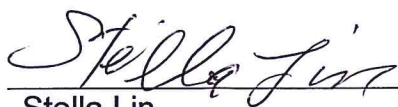
Summary

To increase bus ridership among college students, OCTA has established a pilot pass program for students within the Rancho Santiago Community College District. The LCTOP and college-funded program is expected to provide a cost-effective daily transportation alternative for students as they travel throughout Orange County, help improve school accessibility, and build transit ridership.

Attachment

None.

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