



July 8, 2021

To: Transit Committee

From: Darrell E. Johnson, Chief Executive Officer

Subject: Youth Ride Free Promotional Pass Expanded to Include 18 and Under

Overview

The Orange County Transportation Authority plans to launch a promotional free pass for youth ages 13 and under in September 2021, funded by Low Carbon Transit Operation Program grant funds. Based on feedback from the Board of Directors, staff is recommending expanding the eligible age of the pass to include ages 18 and under. The revised promotional “Youth Ride Free” pass would be available to all youth riders (six to 18 years old), from September 2021 to February 2022.

Recommendations

- A. Expand the eligible age of the current “13 and Under Ride Free” youth fare promotion from six to 13 years old to include ages 14 to 18 years old.
- B. Authorize staff to make all necessary amendments, as well as execute any necessary agreements to facilitate the above recommendation.

Background

Staff has developed a phased customer comeback program to help address reductions in OC Bus ridership caused by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. This program was presented to the Board of Directors in May 2021. As part of this program, a “Welcome Back” promotional discounted fare was included in a campaign highlighting the benefits and safety of public transit to encourage riders to return, in addition to attracting new OC Bus riders.

The “13 and Under Ride Free” program, which is set to be launched at the same time as the comeback program, has been under development since early 2021 and was delayed in being implemented due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This program would provide a free promotional pass to Orange County youth ages six to 13 years old, as OC Bus already allows up to three children five years old or younger to ride for free with each paying customer. Grant funds for the program

were previously approved as a discounted age-based fare program in the Fiscal Year 2019-20 Low Carbon Transit Operations Program (LCTOP) funding recommendations approved by the Board of Directors (Board) on March 23, 2020.

Based on Board feedback to explore the opportunities of discounted or free fares for additional groups of riders, including high school-aged students, staff has developed an expanded youth ride free program for Board consideration.

Discussion

Staff has explored various options to determine an effective recommendation for a discounted or free pass program for high school-aged students.

The considerations for developing a program included:

- A discounted or free pass program would help support the economic recovery of Orange County and help mitigate the financial impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic on low income and diverse populations who represent the majority of OC Bus riders.
- The youth market has consistently been identified as a key transit market; attracting youth riders early helps develop long-term riders.
- Due to COVID-19 impacts, OC Bus service has available capacity to accommodate an increase in youth ridership.
- A targeted fare promotion would demonstrate the value of public transit and provide important usage data for future program development.

After exploring several options and addressing the considerations above, staff recommends expanding the current “13 and Under Ride Free” program to include ages 14 to 18 years old. This would provide a limited term “Youth Ride Free” promotional pass available to youth between the ages of six to 18 years old.

The proposed “Youth Ride Free” pass would continue to be supported using existing LCTOP funds that were allocated for the “13 and Under Ride Free” program. The promotional pass will be limited to six months to meet the Federal Transit Administration Title VI guidelines for the maximum length of a promotional or temporary fare adjustment. The cost of the “Youth Ride Free” pass could potentially exceed available LCTOP funding, which would result in a loss of fare revenue to OCTA. However, given the impacts of the pandemic to ridership, the likelihood of a potential loss in fare revenue is low. If the promotional pass program proves successful, staff will seek additional funding sources and utilize the findings of the promotion to develop future youth pass programs.

Next Steps

With Board approval, staff will work with the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), which administers the LCTOP grant funds, to take necessary action to expand the eligible ages for the “Youth Ride Free” program. Subject to Board, Caltrans, and California Air Resources Board approval, staff will take appropriate actions to implement the program.

Summary

A promotional “13 and Under Ride Free” program funded by LCTOP grant funds was planned for implementation in September 2021. Based on Board direction and in response to a known transportation need, staff recommends the expansion of the “13 and Under Ride Free” program to include ages 14 to 18 years old. If approved, the resulting “Youth Ride Free” promotional fare would be available to ages six to 18 beginning in September 2021, providing free youth fares until February 28, 2022.

Attachment

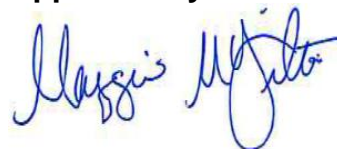
None.

Prepared by:



Ryan Maloney
Section Manager, Customer
Engagement & Data Analytics
714-560-5451

Approved by:



Maggie McJilton
Interim Executive Director,
External Affairs
714-560-5824