



**ITEM ID:** 2023-203-0

**TRANSMITTAL DATE:** July 7, 2023

**MEETING DATE:** July 14, 2023

**TO:** Executive Committee

**FROM:** Paul Hubler, Chief Strategy Officer  
Lisa Bahr, Chief Experience Officer

**SUBJECT:** Public Outreach for Low-Income Fare

### **Issue**

At its meeting on May 26, 2023, the Board directed staff to initiate a public outreach process to solicit feedback on adopting the Low-Income fare discount as part of Metrolink's regular fare structure until grant funding is exhausted or other funding sources are identified. The public outreach will conclude with the Public Hearing conducted at the July 28, 2023 Board meeting.

### **Recommendation**

It is recommended that the Committee recommend the Board:

1. Receive public feedback and the results of the Title VI equity analysis;
2. Hold a Public Hearing by the full Board of Directors on July 28, 2023;
3. Vote on adopting the Low-Income fare discount as part of Metrolink's regular fare structure until grant funding is exhausted or other funding sources are identified.

### **Strategic Commitment**

This report aligns with the Strategic Business Plan commitments of:

- **Customers Are Our Business:** We respect and value our customers, putting them at the heart of all we do, and work hard to attract and retain new customers by understanding their needs and finding new and innovative ways to bring them on board. A Low-Income fare discount will open the option of transit to many riders who would otherwise not be able to afford it.
- **Advancing Key Regional Goals:** We will grow the role of regional rail in addressing

climate change, air quality, and other pressing issues by advancing toward zero emissions, making rail a compelling alternative to single-occupant automobiles and advancing equity-focused opportunities for all communities throughout Southern California. A Low-Income discount will encourage new ridership focused on serving disadvantaged communities, addressing both emissions reduction and equity.

## **Background**

In 2020, the Authority embarked on a study to evaluate accessibility and affordability to its system and identify solutions that could serve the needs of transit-dependent and vulnerable riders, improve conditions for everyone on its system, and capture lapsed and new riders in a return to pre-pandemic ridership levels and to grow beyond that in the future. A key recommendation of that study was the creation of a systemwide 50% discount program for Low-Income riders.

At its regular Board meeting on May 28, 2021, the Board adopted a resolution to authorize use of grant funding through the Low Carbon Transit Operations Program (LCTOP) for the purpose of implementing a subsidized Low-Income fare discount pilot program for all trips made by Low-Income riders throughout the entire Metrolink service area until the funds are exhausted. Proof of eligibility was to be established at the point-of-sale at the Ticket Vending Device with no additional proof required during fare inspections. This is accomplished by swiping a State-issued EBT Cal-Fresh (food-stamp) card. The pilot program was launched in September 2022 after technical modifications to the Ticket Vending Devices to accept State-issued EBT cards. Given the continued growth in program utilization, staff recommends making the Low-Income fare discount part of the Authority's regular fare structure. In compliance with Title VI requirements, staff conducted a public outreach and completed a fare equity analysis (Attachment A).

## **Discussion**

### **Pilot Results**

The Authority has been one of the first transit agencies to implement automatic verification of Low-Income eligibility using EBT cards. The required technical modifications to the Ticket Vending Devices to read EBT cards as proof of eligibility have proven extremely successful and Metrolink's Low-Income program has become a model for other agencies. Since its launch in September 2022, the number of Low-Income passes and tickets sold has exhibited consistent increases from month to month. Low-Income fare transactions have grown from 3,216 transactions in September 2022 to 9,165 in May 2023. Low-Income fare transactions now account for more than 9% of all transactions on ticket vending devices.

### **Low-Income Fare Transactions**

<b>Month</b>	<b>Transactions</b>
Sep 2022	3,216
Oct 2022	5,251
Nov 2022	5,832
Dec 2022	6,221
Jan 2023	6,850

Feb 2023	6,832
Mar 2023	7,964
Apr 2023	8,316
May 2023	9,165

One-way and Round-trip Tickets are most popular accounting for 92% of all Low-Income transactions. Senior and Disabled riders have been shown to take advantage of the Low-Income fare at a higher rate than other types of riders and now account for more than 26% of Low-Income fare transactions.

As a recipient of Federal Transit Administration (FTA) financial assistance Metrolink is required to comply with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and to carry out the U.S. Department of Transportation's Title VI regulations by evaluating fare changes at the planning and programming stages to determine whether those changes have a discriminatory impact.

A fare equity analysis was prepared and determined that the fare discount does not have a Disparate Impact on minority riders or a Disproportionate Burden on low-income riders. The low-income fare discount benefits minority and low-income riders to a greater extent than non-minority and non low-income riders. A larger share of minority and low-income boardings are expected to be made with Low-Income Fare Reduction products, compared to non-minority and non low-income boardings.

### Results from Public Outreach

Extensive public outreach has been done on the LCTOP low-income discount for EBT card holders. The number of people buying the discounted tickets has grown month over month. We have worked with a number of elected officials who have posted information regarding the discount in their newsletters, postings have been made on social service social media in Los Angeles, Orange, San Bernadino and Riverside County. Notices regarding the discount have been hand distributed at a number of identified low-income housing projects. Additionally, fliers have been distributed at a number of Metrolink outreach events and posts on Next Door in both English and Spanish (over 4 million Next Door members have had access to information regarding the discount). Postings on Metrolink social media have also been provided. A survey regarding the discount has been posted on the Metrolink website highlighting the June 21, 2023 public meeting. Notices regarding the July 28, 2023 public hearing will be posted in approximately 14 non-English speaking newspapers requesting comments regarding the public's thoughts on the LCTOP discount. While comments regarding the discount have been limited, we are hopeful that as a result of the June 21, 2023 public meeting, newspaper ads and social media postings we will receive a more robust response.

### **Budget Impact**

There is no budget impact. One hundred percent of the cost of the low-income fare discount is funded through a grant from the Low Carbon Transit Operations Program (LCTOP).

### **Next Steps**

A Public Hearing will be conducted during the Board meeting on July 28 at which time the Board will vote on the continuation of the low-income fare discount. All feedback received during the public comment period will be used to make improvements to marketing efforts, messaging, outreach, and services. Our goal is to serve this population to the best of our ability and promote equity on our system.

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