



ITEM ID: 2023-253-0

TRANSMITTAL DATE: July 21, 2023

MEETING DATE: July 28, 2023

TO: Board of Directors

FROM: Lisa Bahr, Chief Customer Experience Officer

SUBJECT: Student Adventure Pass Program

Issue

At its meeting on June 23, 2023, the Board approved Resolution 23-140 authorizing staff to request LCTOP funds for a student pass program allowing students free travel throughout the Metrolink service area until the funds are exhausted. This item provides information on the recommended student fare program.

Recommendation

Receive and file.

Strategic Commitment

This report aligns with the Strategic Business Plan commitment 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 delight them.

Background

With an estimated 2.7 million K-12 students and 2 million post-secondary students in Southern California, student ridership represents a significant opportunity for Metrolink to regain ridership in the short-term and increase ridership in the long-term as students graduate and enter the workforce.

Currently, the Authority offers a 25% discount for student fares available with a valid student ID. During the first three quarters of this fiscal year, student ridership has grown to represent 17.6% of total ridership. This is a higher share of ridership than even prior to the pandemic and suggests the growing importance of Metrolink service for students throughout the region. With a revenue share of 15.7% of total fare revenue, student ridership also represents an important revenue source.

One-way and Round-Trip tickets account for most trips taken by students. But just over 30% of student ridership utilizes monthly or 7-day passes which suggests an opportunity to incentivize more frequent ridership by students. To capitalize on this opportunity, the Authority is developing a grant-funded pilot program to offer free fares to students during a six-month pilot program starting in September 2023.

Discussion

Metrolink is launching a new student pass pilot program, named the Student Adventure Pass, as a way to enable all enrolled students to ride Metrolink for free. The Student Adventure Pass would honor all existing transfer benefits and partnerships with Codeshare trains and Rail2Rail®. The program is designed to be an equitable, simple and seamless way for students to access school, home, and work, and explore the region by taking Metrolink.

The program would require K-12, Trade School, Community College and University students to “purchase” zero fare tickets on the Metrolink mobile app or ticket machines and conductors would visually validate their current student ID upon fare inspection. Youth who are too young to be issued a student ID will be waived from this requirement.

Benefits

Offering a free student pass program can provide many benefits to Metrolink including:

- **Increased ridership:** Metrolink can attract a larger number of students to take the train leading to increased ridership and help fill trains during off-peak hours, reducing operational costs and contributing to a more efficient and sustainable transportation system.
- **Future customer loyalty:** By providing free passes to student riders, Metrolink can build customer loyalty and cultivate a new generation of riders. Students who have a positive experience with Metrolink during their formative years are more likely to continue using the service in the future, even after they graduate.
- **Positive brand image and community engagement:** Implementing a free student pass program demonstrates Metrolink's commitment to supporting education, sustainability, and the community it serves, while enhancing Metrolink's brand image and reputation.
- **Collaborative partnerships with educational institutions:** Offering a free student pass program can help Metrolink strengthen relationships with schools, colleges and universities in the region. These partnerships can lead to future collaborative initiatives beyond the student pass program including future corporate partner program clients.
- **Data and insights:** The implementation of a student pass program can provide valuable data and insights about ridership patterns, demand, and usage trends. This information

can help Metrolink make informed decisions regarding service planning, resource allocation, and future program enhancements.

The Customer Experience team will launch a marketing and communications campaign in support of the program this summer. Staff will partner with schools, colleges and universities located near a Metrolink station to amplify messaging and promote the pilot program to students.

In May 2023, staff applied for a \$4 million LCTOP grant and is expecting notification of award in July 2023. Upon grant funding notification, the program will launch on September 5, 2023. The program will continue until (1) LCTOP funding is exhausted or (2) termination of the pilot program based on duration (6 months) or (3) additional funding is secured to continue the program. Per Board approved policy, if the program lasts beyond six months, a Title VI analysis is required.

Cost

The Student Adventure Pass program is expected to generate 1.23 million student boardings during the 6-month pilot period. This corresponds to an estimated \$3.4 million in fare revenue which would be 100% subsidized through LCTOP grant funding. Should demand exceed the requested \$4 million LCTOP funding, the program would terminate early unless additional funding becomes available.

Next Steps

Once grant funding is awarded, staff will begin planning and coordinating efforts to launch the Student Adventures Pass on September 5, 2023. Staff will report back to the Board with a comprehensive update on the performance of the Student Adventure Pass after the pilot program concludes.

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Approved by: Lisa Bahr, Chief Customer Experience Officer

Attachment(s)

[Student Adventure Pass - Board Presentation](#)