



ITEM ID: 2026-206-0

TRANSMITTAL DATE: June 18, 2026

MEETING DATE: June 26, 2026

TO: Board of Directors

FROM: Lisa Bahr, Chief Customer Experience Officer
Tom Schamber, Chief Financial Officer

SUBJECT: Adopt Fare Structure Pilot, Approve Limited Fare Increases, and Receive Results of Public Comment

Issue

On May 1, 2026, the Authority initiated public outreach to seek public feedback on proposed fare and service changes. The public comment period remained open through the Public Hearing to be held in conjunction with the June 26, 2026 Board Meeting. This report provides a summary of public comments received regarding potential fare and service changes, a Title VI equity analysis, the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) finding, and staff recommendations for limited increases in fares.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Board:

1. Adopt Metrolink's current simplified ticket and discount fare structure, including the 50% discount on student fares, as part of Metrolink's regular fare structure once the fare pilot ends on June 30, 2026; and
2. Raise the price of the SoCal Day Pass from \$15 to \$19 on weekdays, and from \$10 to \$12 on weekends, and raise the price of the one-way ticket by 14% for implementation not before October 1, 2026; and
3. Defer decisions on FY27 service reductions until next month; and
4. Adopt the CEQA finding; and
5. Receive the results of the Title VI fare equity analysis; and
6. Receive a summary of the public feedback received during the public outreach; and
7. Receive the updated Fare Policy document.

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.
- **Modernizing Business Practices:** We will improve our operational efficiency through transparency, objective metrics and streamlined governance, reducing over-reliance on subsidy while bringing our system into a state of good repair and investing in the development of our employees. The fare policy changes will strengthen the fare structure and help meet the FY27 budget requirements.

Background

Fare Pilot Evaluation

Since July 1, 2025, the Authority has tested a new simplified fare structure with fewer ticket types, lower monthly pass prices, and expanded fare discounts during a six-month pilot program to test customer response. At its meeting on November 14, 2025, the Board received a preliminary evaluation of the pilot program's performance and the new 50% student fare discount. This updated evaluation covers the period through March 2026. This evaluation utilizes the latest ticket sales data, conductor counts, and the results from recent customer opinion surveys. Results show a strongly positive customer response to the simplified fare structure and the new student discount.

Farebox revenue up 14%

In the nine months since July 2025, total farebox revenue grew by 14% to \$27,458,112 from \$24,042,436 during the same period a year earlier. Student fares alone account for 16.0% of total farebox revenue in FY26, that is up from 14.5% before the pandemic.

Ridership growth up 1%

Total ridership growth for the nine months ending March 2026 reached 1% compared to the same period a year ago, despite the end of free student fares in July 2025. Ridership among non-students grew by 3%, helping to offset a decline in student ridership since the end of the free Student Adventure Pass.

Student ridership down 6%

The transition from the free Student Adventure Pass to a 50% student fare discount resulted in an expected drop in student ridership. However, student ridership declined less than anticipated. Compared to the same period a year earlier, student ridership declined by 6% with most of that decline occurring on weekends. However, the number of active student mobile accounts of students who rode Metrolink at least once per month has reached a new record with 24,338 active mobile accounts in March. This is a 19% increase over March in 2025!

Growing Monthly Pass sales

The July 2025 fare restructuring lowered the price of monthly passes by an average of 11%. Customers responded with a 44% increase in sales and revenue growing by 25%. After accounting for the discontinuation of the 7-Day Pass and the shift of those buyers to the monthly pass, net monthly pass revenue increased by nearly 13%. Since the fare

restructuring, monthly passes account for 31% of ridership, up nearly 10 percentage points from 22% a year earlier.

Popular Day Passes

The introduction of the \$15 SoCal Day Pass and the \$5 LA Zone Pass became one of the most popular features of the fare pilot, accounting for 21% of weekday ridership. More than half (53%) of day passes are purchased with a discount, such as student, senior, disabled, military, or low-income. Sales of the new L.A. Zone Pass reached 3,072 in March. The total number of trips with both origin and destination within the L.A. Zone grew by 22%, with the L.A. Zone Pass accounting for 11% of those trips.

Growth in discounted ridership

The introduction of the Veterans Discount and the greater availability of all discounts made the service more accessible for disadvantaged populations. Despite a 6% decrease in student ridership, this decline was offset by strong ridership growth among seniors, the disabled, the military, and veterans. Regular (undiscounted) ridership remained unchanged from a year ago, while total discounted ridership grew by 2% to account for 44% of total ridership, which is unchanged from a year earlier.

Budget Shortfall

In response to an expected budget shortfall for FY27, the Authority has developed plans to reduce operating costs by significantly reducing service in FY27 and generate new fare revenue by increasing the price of certain fare products. On May 1, 2026, the Authority initiated the public outreach process to seek public feedback on proposed fare and service changes.

This item provides a discussion of recommended fare policy changes below. Recommendations for service reductions in response to the FY27 budget shortfall have not yet been finalized and will be presented to the Board in July.

Discussion

Fare Recommendations

Adopt Fare Pilot:

The current fare pilot will end on June 30, 2026. Unless adopted as part of Metrolink's regular fare structure, fares will revert to the old fare structure and result in higher costs and confusion for customers who have grown accustomed to the current ticket types and discounts. Customer feedback shows overwhelming support for keeping the current pilot fare structure. Staff recommends adopting the fare pilot, including the 50% student fare discount, as part of Metrolink's regular fare structure.

Fare increase:

The Authority has not raised fares in 13 years. Given the current budget constraints, staff recommends the following limited fare increases to balance the need for service reductions in FY27.

- **One-way Tickets** are Metrolink's most popular ticket type, accounting for 34% of trips taken. In the last 13 years, the price of the Metrolink One-way Ticket has not changed.

On some lines, such as the Antelope Valley Line and the San Bernardino Line, the price is even 25% lower today than it was in 2013. Staff recommends raising the price of the One-way Ticket by 14%, which reflects an average price increase of \$0.81, from \$5.78 to \$6.59. For comparison, overall prices have increased by 44% due to inflation since 2013.

- **SoCal Day Passes** have become a popular choice for new and infrequent Metrolink riders and now account for 21% of weekday ridership. Weekday SoCal Day passes are priced at \$15 full fare. However, since the majority (53%) of SoCal Day Passes are sold with a discount, the average revenue per pass sold is reduced to \$11.08 which has resulted in lower than expected farebox revenue. Staff recommends raising the regular full fare price from \$15 to \$19 on weekdays, and from \$10 to \$12 on weekends. Since most of the SoCal Day Passes are sold with a discount, the actual price increase will be less for most riders.

Fare structure calculation rules may result in minor price adjustments for certain station pairs for other ticket types. Based on fare elasticity calculations, the recommended fare increases are expected to increase fare revenue by 6.2%, while reducing ridership by 3.5%.

Public Feedback

On May 1, 2026, the Authority opened the public comment period to solicit feedback on the fare pilot, and the planned fare increase and service reduction. More than 1,700 survey responses were received.

Support for the Current (Pilot) Fare Structure

Riders expressed strong support for the fare pilot structure introduced in July 2025, primarily due to its simplicity and affordability. Since May 1, 2026, the Authority received more than 1,500 customer survey responses, 74% of respondents support the current pilot structure, with one rider noting, *"The fare is simplified and makes it much easier to understand. Cal Train in the Bay Area has a similar structure and it just works."* (Commuter, Rancho Cucamonga).

Strong opposition to combining service reductions with fare increases

In public outreach, more than 1,500 riders weighed the choice between fare increases and service cuts. The feedback was unequivocal: Riders prefer higher fares over the "catastrophic" impact of reduced service.

While fare increases are never "popular" in public polling, elasticity calculations and the empirical evidence show that Metrolink customers are more sensitive to service frequency than cost.

For transit-dependent, low-income riders, the choice between fare increases and service cuts is often described as a lose-lose scenario, though service cuts are frequently viewed as more catastrophic because they physically remove the "lifeline" to work and school. While fare increases create immediate financial strain that may eventually price them out, service cuts represent an absolute barrier that often leads to job loss or the inability to complete an education. Essential Workers, including teachers and hospital staff noted that their rigid schedules (e.g., 10-hour shifts) make them particularly vulnerable to even minor schedule changes.

For many regular commuters and students, service cuts represent a direct threat to their livelihood. Riders frequently noted that if the train schedule no longer aligns with their work hours, they will be forced to quit, risk being fired, or face severe financial distress. While acknowledging the financial strain the higher fares would bring for some, 77% of survey respondents said they would continue to ride Metrolink: *"As much as I would hate a fare increase, it's better than a service reduction... with less service, I don't ride at all."* (Student, Riverside).

A summary of public feedback is provided in Attachment C.

Fare Policy: Compliance and Equity

CEQA: Environmental Review and Findings

The proposed fare increases are exempt from CEQA by operation of the statutory exemption contained in Public Resources Code 21080(b)(8) which states in relevant part that CEQA does not apply to the *establishment, modification, structuring, restructuring or approval of rates, tolls, fares and other charges by public agencies which the public agency finds for the purpose of:*

- A. *Meeting operating expenses, including employee wage rates and fringe benefits,*
- B. *Purchasing or leasing supplies, equipment or materials.*
- C. *Meeting financial reserve needs and requirements,*
- D. *Obtaining funds for capital projects, necessary to maintain service within existing service areas*

As set forth in Attachment B, the proposed fare policy changes qualify for an exemption under Public Resources Code 21080(b)(8). The funding from this action will be devoted exclusively to permissible purposes; primarily the operation and maintenance of Metrolink service within existing service areas and it will not fund capital projects to expand the system (Attachment A).

Title VI Fare Equity Report

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 on certain segments of the population (Reference: Circular FTA C 4702.1B). A fare equity analysis has determined that the proposed fare changes are in full compliance with Title VI requirements (Attachment B).

Restatement of Metrolink Fare Policy Document

Staff has updated the Metrolink Fare Policy document with the recommended fare changes, as well as previously approved fare policies (Attachment D).

Budget Impact

Assuming current service levels, the October 1, 2026 fare increase will generate \$1.667 Million in additional fare revenue in FY27.

Next Steps

June 30, 2026: Fare pilot and 50% student fare discount end unless adopted as part of the regular fare structure.

October 1, 2026: Earliest launch of fare increase

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Attachment(s)

[Attachment A - CEQA Finding](#)

[Attachment B-1 - Title VI Metrolink FY26 Fare Restructuring](#)

[Attachment B-2 - Title VI for Fall 2026 Fare Increase](#)

[Attachment C - Public Comment Materials](#)

[Attachment C-1 - Survey Data](#)

[Attachment D-1 - Fare Policy rev. 13.0 - CLEAN](#)

[Attachment D-2 - Fare Policy rev. 13.0 - REDLINED](#)

[Presentation - Fare Restructuring Recommendation](#)