



ITEM ID: 2023-203-0

TRANSMITTAL DATE: May 19, 2023

MEETING DATE: May 26, 2023

TO: Board of Directors

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

SUBJECT: Public Outreach for Low-Income Fare

Issue

In September 2022, the Authority launched a pilot program with a 50% discount on all Metrolink fares for eligible Low-Income individuals. This item seeks Board approval to initiate the fare change process consistent with the Authority's Public Participation Plan (Attachment A) to make the Low-Income fare discount a regular part of the Metrolink fare structure.

Recommendation

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE RECOMMENDED (4-0) the Board approve the initiation of the public comment period as required under Title VI for the continuation of Metrolink's Low-Income Fare.

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 recommends the Committee recommend the Board direct staff to open the public comment period for the proposed change.

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 doubled from 3,216 transactions in September to 7,964 in March 2023. Low-Income fare transactions now account for more than 9% of all transactions on ticket vending devices.

Low-Income Fare Transactions

| Month | Transactions |
|--------------|---------------------|
| 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 |
|----------|-------|

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.

Public Outreach

The goal of the LCTOP program, a Caltrans-funded program, is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and improve transportation sustainability by providing new and expanded bus and rail service for disadvantaged and Low-Income communities. This program creates a 50% fare reduction for EBT card holders.

Title VI public outreach activities are required to be follow the Authority's Board-approved Public Participation Plan. To ensure that the identified demographic is made aware of the discount, Metrolink staff will perform the required Title VI public outreach.

Public outreach activities include: a 30-day public comment period, one public meeting (virtual), noticing in multiple language newspapers, posting on Next Door, an e-comment feature and one public hearing held before the SCRRA Board of Directors to evaluate the development and implementation of the Low-Income Transit Operations Program (LCTOP) program. Staff will also provide an equity analysis that is prepared in accordance with the Authority's Board-approved Title VI Policies in order to determine if the fare discount results in any disparate impacts or disproportionate burdens.

Tentative timeline includes:

May 26, 2023

- Board considers initiation of the public comment period, which will commence upon approval
- News release and webpage launched
- Electronic blast (E-blast), texts, social media, and will be sent out with link to survey

June 12-15, 2023

- Staff holds virtual community meeting. At this virtual meeting participants will learn more about the LCTOP program and provide their opinions regarding the program.
- Reminders sent existing databases including Next Door, Title VI and elected officials about electronic options to complete survey and submit comments.
- Public comment period closes on July 14, 2023.

July 28, 2023

- Board holds public hearing
- Staff presents the results of the Title VI fare equity analysis and public outreach.
- Board votes on the continuation of the LCTOP low-income fare program.

Budget Impact

Title VI Public Outreach costs are included in the Adopted Operating Budget for FY2022-23

(\$20,000). The Low-Income fare program is subject to the continued availability of LCTOP grant funding.

Next Steps

- May 26: Board will open public comment period.
- July 14: Staff will return to the Executive Committee with the results of the public outreach and the Title VI equity analysis.
- July 28: Board will vote recommendations from the Executive Committee to continue or revise the low-income fare program.

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Attachment(s)

[Attachment A - Title VI Civil Rights Program 2022 Public Participation Plan](#)