



ITEM ID: 2025-277-0

TRANSMITTAL DATE: July 18, 2025

MEETING DATE: July 25, 2025

TO: Board of Directors

FROM: Lisa Bahr, Chief Customer Experience Officer

SUBJECT: Student Adventure Pass Pilot Program Summary

Issue

Staff is providing an update of the Student Adventure Pass pilot program for the period of October 2023 through June 2025.

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

Launched in October 2023, the Student Adventure Pass pilot program provided free Metrolink rides to all enrolled students across our service area, including K through 12 schools, trade programs, community colleges, and universities. Initially funded by a \$4 million grant from the Low Carbon Transit Operations Program (LCTOP), the program aimed to reduce barriers to transit, promote equitable access to opportunity, and build long-term ridership among students. At the time of launch, students made up just 17.6% of Metrolink’s ridership, and Metrolink offered students a 25% discount on regular fares.

Discussion

The Student Adventure Pass quickly proved to be one of Metrolink’s most impactful pilot programs. In its first 12 months, student ridership surpassed expectations with more than 1.69 million boardings, significantly exceeding the original projection of 1.23 million. As the program nears its conclusion, students now represent 35% of total ridership, establishing themselves as one of Metrolink’s most engaged and consistent rider segments.

Top Participating Colleges/Universities by County:

College/University	County	Active Accounts	Mobile Activations
Cal State Northridge	Los Angeles	3,667	125,051
Cal State LA	Los Angeles	3,468	119,029
University of Southern California	Los Angeles	4,863	54,439
Cal State Fullerton	Orange County	4,102	96,557
UC Irvine	Orange County	5,463	56,104
Westcliff University	Orange County	407	16,694
UC Riverside	Riverside County	6,520	68,740
Riverside Community College District	Riverside County	1,466	18,397
La Sierra University	Riverside County	142	1,403
Cal State San Bernardino	San Bernardino County	1,164	10,331
University of Redlands	San Bernardino County	613	7,369
San Bernardino City College District	San Bernardino County	916	6,882
Ventura County Community College District	Ventura County	704	6,877
Cal State Channel Islands	Ventura County	562	5,234
Cal Lutheran University	Ventura County	205	1,375
UC San Diego	San Diego County	2,092	10,200
Cal State San Marcos	San Diego County	441	2,907
San Diego State University	San Diego County	286	1,403
Out of Service Area	Various	4,067	25,430

The program played a critical role in expanding access to education, employment, and essential services by removing cost as a barrier to travel. At the same time, it introduced thousands of young people to Metrolink, helping them become familiar with the system and comfortable using it. By encouraging regular train use during a formative period, the program

helped establish lasting mobility habits and strengthened brand connection among a new generation of riders likely to continue using Metrolink as they graduate and enter the workforce.

Through partnerships with more than 50 schools across Southern California, Metrolink promoted the Student Adventure Pass to an estimated 930,000 students. These efforts spanned a diverse mix of institutions, including high schools, community colleges, trade schools, public universities, and private universities. Each partner played a key role in amplifying the program through their own communication channels, including email newsletters, posters, campus signage, social media, and student events. All outreach was provided at no cost to Metrolink. This broad, collaborative effort significantly increased program visibility and played a vital role in driving awareness and adoption across the region.

The Student Adventure Pass concluded on June 30, 2025, after successfully utilizing the full LCTOP grant due to overwhelming demand. The program far exceeded expectations and demonstrated a strong interest in student ridership. As Metrolink transitions from the pilot, the available funding will now support a permanent 50% student discount, double the 25% discount offered prior to the pilot. While staff explored opportunities to shift to a school-supported model, Metrolink does not currently have the staffing or infrastructure required to manage the complex coordination, billing, customer service, and technical systems such a model would entail. This next phase ensures continued affordability for students while allowing Metrolink to remain fiscally responsible and maintain high-quality service for all riders.

Key Impacts:

The Student Adventure Pass generated measurable and lasting benefits across ridership, brand growth, and community impact.

- **Ridership Growth:** Student ridership increased by 169% between September 2023, prior to the program's launch in October 2023, and May 2025. Overall, the program has provided more than 3.5 million rides, with students now representing over one-third of total Metrolink ridership.
- **Future Rider Development:** A total of 77,357 students from 921 schools activated a Student Adventure Pass through the Metrolink mobile app. Survey results show that 48% of these students had never ridden Metrolink before the program. Among app users, 65% became repeat riders.
- **Brand Loyalty and Equity:** The program introduced tens of thousands of students to Metrolink, many of whom relied on it regularly. Nearly half of the survey respondents reported riding at least once a week, and 60% said they do not have regular access to a car. These results underscore the program's role in building brand familiarity and delivering equitable mobility to students who need it most.
- **Community Goodwill:** The program strengthened Metrolink's reputation among students, parents, educators, and institutional partners by demonstrating a commitment to accessible and affordable transportation.
- **Operational Insights:** Travel behavior data and survey feedback have provided valuable insights into student demand, travel frequency, and mode choice. This information will help shape future fare strategies and service planning.

While the Student Adventure Pass has concluded the program clearly demonstrated the benefits of removing cost barriers and the value of investing in student-focused initiatives.

Staff will continue to explore new opportunities to support student mobility and strengthen efforts to cultivate the next generation of riders through sustainable, long-term strategies. In addition, Metrolink is actively engaged in efforts to promote funding for free fare transit programs at the state level, reinforcing our commitment to equitable access and long-term affordability. The insights gained from this pilot have positioned Metrolink to better meet the evolving needs of students and ensure that public transportation remains a relevant and reliable option throughout their lives.

Metrolink remains committed to supporting student access to education through affordable train service and will continue to partner with Member Agencies, schools, colleges, and community organizations to promote transit access for students. As we transition to this new discount model, staff will focus on maintaining strong relationships with educational institutions, engaging directly with students, and implementing targeted strategies to retain and grow student ridership in the years ahead.

Next Steps

Staff will provide an update on the performance of the 50% discount in the second quarter of FY26.

Prepared by: Amber Moyers, Manager I, Partnerships

Approved by: Lisa Bahr, Chief Customer Experience Officer