

To: Marketing, Planning, & Legislative Committee

Date: 06/30/2022

From: Melody Reeb, Director of Planning, Marketing, & Innovation

Reviewed by: *RF*

SUBJECT: October Free Rides Promotion

Background:

In September 2021, County Connection offered a month of free rides on all routes as part of a regional "Return to Transit" marketing effort to encourage transit use. There was a nearly immediate boost in ridership because of the promotion, with an overall increase of about 17% compared to the prior month. However, a subsequent rise in COVID-19 cases resulted in ridership declines over the following few months. As ridership begins to recover again and with federal stimulus funds still available, staff proposes offering another month of free rides to encourage additional transit use, especially as commuters return to work. This effort to make transit more accessible aligns well with the goals of the Blue-Ribbon Transit Recovery Task Force and the principles adopted by the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) for the distribution of federal stimulus funds.

Fare-free October

This year, staff is proposing to offer the free ride promotion during the month of October instead of September. Pre-COVID, October has typically been one of the highest ridership months due to schools being in session and a lack of any major holidays. The timing also avoids any overlap with the Pass2Class program, which is offered in partnership with 511 Contra Costa and allows students to ride free during the months of August and September. With the two fare promotions, students will be able to ride County Connection for free for three consecutive months in the upcoming school year.

Financial Implications:

Staff will be presenting the item to the Administration & Finance Committee for approval of the free rides financial impact.

It is estimated that ridership would increase about 30% compared to last October as a result of free fares, in addition to more commuters returning to work. Ridership in October 2021 was close to 170,000. Assuming an average fare of \$2 and a 30% increase in ridership, the estimated fare revenue loss would be about \$442,000. County Connection would apply federal stimulus funds to this promotion. All costs associated with marketing the free fares are included in the FY 2022 promotions budget.

Recommendation:

None, for information only.

Action Requested:

None, for information only.

Attachments:

None.