

To: Operations and Scheduling Committee

Date: 12/22/2023

From: John Sanderson Director of ADA and Specialized Services

Reviewed by: *W.C.*

SUBJECT: Means-Based Fare Program for LINK Paratransit

Background:

Among the recommended strategies for addressing “gaps” in available public transit service identified in the Contra Costa Transportation Authority’s (CCTA) Accessible Transportation Strategic Plan (ATSP) was Strategy 20: Means-Based Fare Subsidy for ADA paratransit riders, to be supported with Measure X funding.

Tri Delta Transit conducted a six-month means-based fare pilot program from April through October 2023, in coordination with CCTA. In August 2023, the CCTA ATSP Task Force recommended that the Tri Delta means-based fare pilot be “expanded” into a countywide program by implementing Tri Delta’s pilot protocols at County Connection and WestCat.

Differences in operational practices make it impractical to contemplate the wholesale implementation of Tri Delta’s procedures at other agencies. For example, the Tri Delta Transit program relies heavily on the use of paper fare media, which County Connection has been phasing out in favor of our longstanding and highly successful pre-paid paratransit fare program. However, Staff does recommend the implementation of a means-based fare-subsidy program that provides a comparable benefit to customers while being better suited to County Connection’s existing procedures and operating environment. Doing so now will be an important step toward the harmonization of transit services throughout the County, as well as providing an important benefit to some of our neediest riders. Similar efforts are also currently under way at WestCat.

Project Update:

With the lessons learned from the Tri Delta pilot period and input from Tri Delta staff and other stakeholders, Staff anticipate that a successful means-based fare program can be implemented at County Connection relatively easily and cheaply.

The existing ADA eligibility staff will be tasked with verifying program applicants’ low-income status primarily by confirming their participation in certain federal and state programs that help low-income individuals. Once approved, each program participant will receive \$50 per month deposited into their LINK pre-paid fare account, which can then be used to pay for rides on LINK paratransit. County

Connection will invoice CCTA monthly for the fare subsidy credited to riders plus administrative expenses.

Financial Implications:

CCTA has allocated \$145,000 in Measure X funds to support the County Connection means-based fare program for 12 months. If that amount proves insufficient, additional Measure X funds may be allocated or the program rules may be modified as necessary to contain program costs at a sustainable level. Program expenditures will be evaluated monthly to ensure that any necessary changes can be instituted in a timely fashion.

Recommendation:

Given the demonstrated success of Tri Delta Transit's means-based fare pilot, and the ATSP Taskforce's recommendation that means-based fare subsidies for paratransit be implemented countywide, staff recommends that a means-based fare subsidy program be implemented as soon as possible for LINK paratransit and that Memorandum of Understanding be executed with CCTA allowing for the reimbursement of County Connection's costs associated with operating the program.

Action Requested:

Staff respectfully requests that the Operations & Scheduling Committee forward to the Board of Directors a recommendation that approval be granted for the General Manager to enter into an MOU with CCTA allowing for the reimbursement of County Connection's costs associated with operating the means-based fare subsidy program.

Attachments:

Draft Rules for County Connection Means-Based fare program.

County Connection

Means-Based Paratransit Fare Subsidy Program

Scope & Operating Rules

Effective Date: XXXX, 2024

Program Description

The Program provides a fixed monthly fare subsidy to qualified low-income County Connection LINK paratransit users. The program is intended to complement the East County Means Based Fare program administered by Tri Delta Transit since 2023. Beginning in January 2024, County Connection and WestCAT will implement similar programs thereby making a comparable subsidy experience available to low-income paratransit riders throughout most of Contra Costa County. There are no known plans at this time to offer means-based paratransit fares to riders living within the portion of Contra Costa County served by East Bay Paratransit. The Program is funded with Contra Costa County Measure X revenues and is limited to one year or until the allocated funds are expended, whichever comes first.

Tasks to be Performed by County Connection

Program Outreach

Staff will produce outreach materials to promote the Program to County Connection's paratransit users. Outreach materials will include conditions for program eligibility, instructions for eligible individuals who wish to register for the Program, and a clear and concise statement explaining that the Program is funded with Measure X revenues.

The Program will be promoted via the following methods, to the extent possible:

1. mailers and other direct outreach materials about the Program should be sent to active paratransit users
2. IVR calls should be directed to riders' primary phone numbers
3. Flyers should be distributed and maintained at locations that paratransit users often visit e.g., senior centers, community centers, dialysis centers, etc.
4. Program details, including criteria for qualification and instructions for enrolling in the program should be included on agency websites and social media
5. Partner with non-governmental organizations to share the Program with their networks.

County Connection Means-Based Paratransit Fare Subsidy Program

Program Eligibility

To establish their eligibility for the Program, applicants must supply proof of their low-income status. Income verification can include:

1. Participation in one of the following programs: WIC, Housing Choice Vouchers, Medicaid, SNAP, child in the National School Lunch program, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Cash Assistance Program for Immigrants (CAPI), CalWorks, General Assistance (GA), Medi-Cal
2. Individuals who are unable to verify using any of the above options may provide one of the following: three recent pay stubs, three recent financial assistance documents, or the most recent year end social security statement. There is also the option of self-attestations, including as an exception to the above.
3. The HUD Extremely Low-Income Limits for Contra Costa County is as follows¹:

| Persons Per Household | Extremely Low-Income (30% of Average Median Income) |
|-----------------------|---|
| 1 | \$31,050 |
| 2 | \$35,500 |
| 3 | \$39,950 |
| 4 | \$44,350 |
| 5 | \$48,900 |
| 6 | \$51,450 |

New and Existing Riders' Eligibility Verification

1. New ADA paratransit applicants will be advised of the Program and given the opportunity to apply concurrently with their ADA paratransit eligibility determination process.
2. Existing ADA paratransit riders who wish to sign up for the Program may do so by contacting the ADA Eligibility Clerks and submitting proof of their low income as described above.
3. Once established, an applicant's eligibility for the Means-Based Paratransit Fare Subsidy Program will be documented in the Regional Eligibility Database (RED) and will run concurrently with their ADA paratransit eligibility.

¹ Income limits by Household Size as of June 2023

Source: US Department of Housing and Urban Development

County Connection Means-Based Paratransit Fare Subsidy Program

Subsidy Amount and Disbursement

1. Each program participant will be granted a fare subsidy equal to ten (10) one-way County Connection LINK ADA paratransit rides per month for the duration of their eligibility term, as long as they remain an active rider. Each program participant will be enrolled in County Connection LINK's pre-paid account program (if not already enrolled).
2. Subsidy disbursements will be automatically added to the Program participants' pre-paid accounts on the first day of each month.
3. During the month in which a Program participant's eligibility is established, the participant will be granted a pro-rated subsidy amount, based on the date their eligibility was established.
4. Means-Based Paratransit Fare Subsidy value is not eligible for refund or withdrawal from the customer's pre-paid fare account.

Program Reporting & Reimbursement

County Connection will prepare a monthly invoice for CCTA which will document program expenses including, fare subsidy costs, number of subsidized trips taken, administration, marketing, postage, etc. CCTA will provide reimbursement to County Connection within 30 days for all invoiced program costs.