County Connection

INTER OFFICE MEMO

**To:** Administration & Finance Committee **Date:** 05/26/2021

**From:** Ruby Horta, Director of Planning, Marketing & Innovation **Reviewed by**: WC.

**SUBJECT: September Free Rides Promotion**

**Background:**

After 15 months of restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the State has announced its reopening plan for June 15th. California will convert back to zero restrictions on indoor and outdoor capacity limits and physical distancing within the next three weeks. In anticipation of this change transit agencies have deliberated on how to get people back on transit. The Healthy Transit Plan describes transit agencies' efforts in ensuring a safe and healthy trip. The goal is to provide returning passengers with a sense of comfort in using public transit. Although there have been no major outbreaks linked to public transit use, transit agencies recognize many passengers may have exchanged a transit trip for a vehicle trip during the pandemic and passengers may need incentives to return to transit.

**Cooperative Efforts**

During the pandemic, many agencies, including County Connection stopped collecting fares for an extended period. As we look ahead toward the "Return to Transit" efforts, agencies are proposing various fare discounts to incentivize transit use. To lure riders back on transit, the BART Board approved a 50% discount on all Clipper fares during the month of September. County Connection serves eight (8) BART stations in Contra Costa County and one (1) in Alameda County with most service linked to at least one BART station.

As a result of this robust and direct connection with BART service and with the availability of federal stimulus funds, staff proposes offering free rides on County Connection during the month of September 2021. This coordinated 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 for the distribution of federal stimulus funds.

**Financial Implications:**

It is estimated that ridership may double with schools back in session and free fares available in September 2021. Ridership in September 2020 was close to 100,000. Assuming an average fare of $2 and a 100% increase in ridership, the estimated fare revenue loss would be about $400,000. County Connection would apply federal stimulus funds to this promotion.

**Recommendation:**

Staff recommends that the A&F Committee authorize free rides and the use of federal funds to cover passenger fares during the month of September 2021.

**Action Requested:**

Staff requests the A&F Committee forward the promotional free rides recommendation to the Board, for approval.