

INTER OFFICE MEMO

To: Board of Directors

Date: 06/27/2022

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

Reviewed by: *Ref*

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 as a result of the promotion, with an overall increase of about 17% compared to the prior month. However, a subsequent rise in COVID cases resulted in ridership declines over the following few months. As ridership begins to recover again and with federal stimulus funds still being available, staff proposes offering another month of free rides in order to encourage additional transit use, especially as employees return to the office. 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.

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.

Financial Implications:

Based on the promotion that was offered last September, staff estimates that ridership would increase about 30% compared to last October as a result of free fares, in addition to more employees returning to office 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.

Recommendation:

The A&F Committee and staff recommend offering free rides during the month of October 2022.

Action Requested:

The A&F Committee and staff request that the Board authorize free rides and the use of federal funds to cover passenger fares during the month of October 2022.

Attachments:

None.