

To: Board of Directors

Date: 12/11/2024

From: Pranjal Dixit, Manager of Planning

Reviewed by: AMS

SUBJECT: Monument Free Ridership Update

Background:

In July 2019, County Connection launched a free fare pilot program on three weekday bus routes serving the Monument Corridor in Concord (Routes 11, 14, and 16). These routes connect Concord BART to various destinations in Martinez, Pleasant Hill, and Walnut Creek, including other BART stations, Amtrak, and the Contra Costa Regional Medical Center. This initiative was funded by a grant from California's Low Carbon Transit Operations Program (LCTOP), which supports projects that reduce greenhouse gas emissions and benefit disadvantaged communities.

In July 2022, the program expanded to include three weekend routes on the Monument Corridor (Routes 311, 314, and 316). This expansion was made possible by additional funding and the reduced ridership impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The success of this pilot led to the permanent expansion of the free fare program for weekend routes in December 2022.

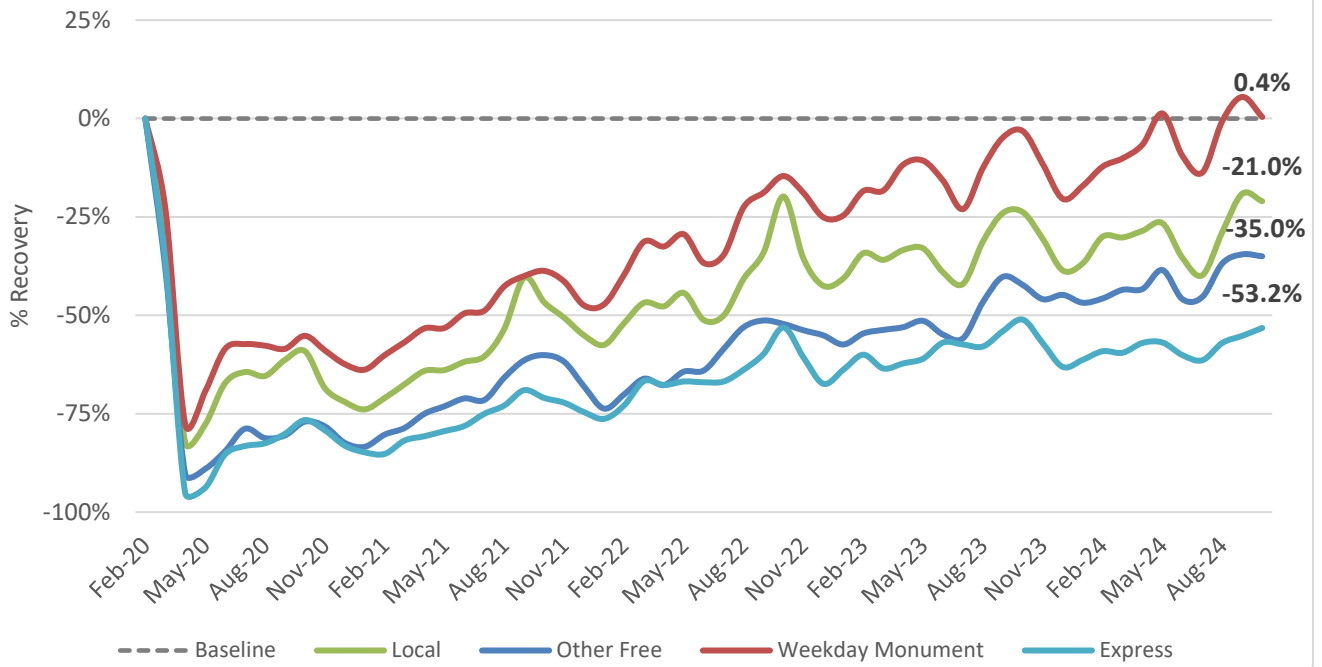
Ridership:

In March 2020, the onset of the shelter-at-home order led to a system-wide decline in ridership as businesses closed and remote work became prevalent. The pandemic exacerbated existing social inequities, as essential workers, often from low-income and minority communities, continued to rely on transit.

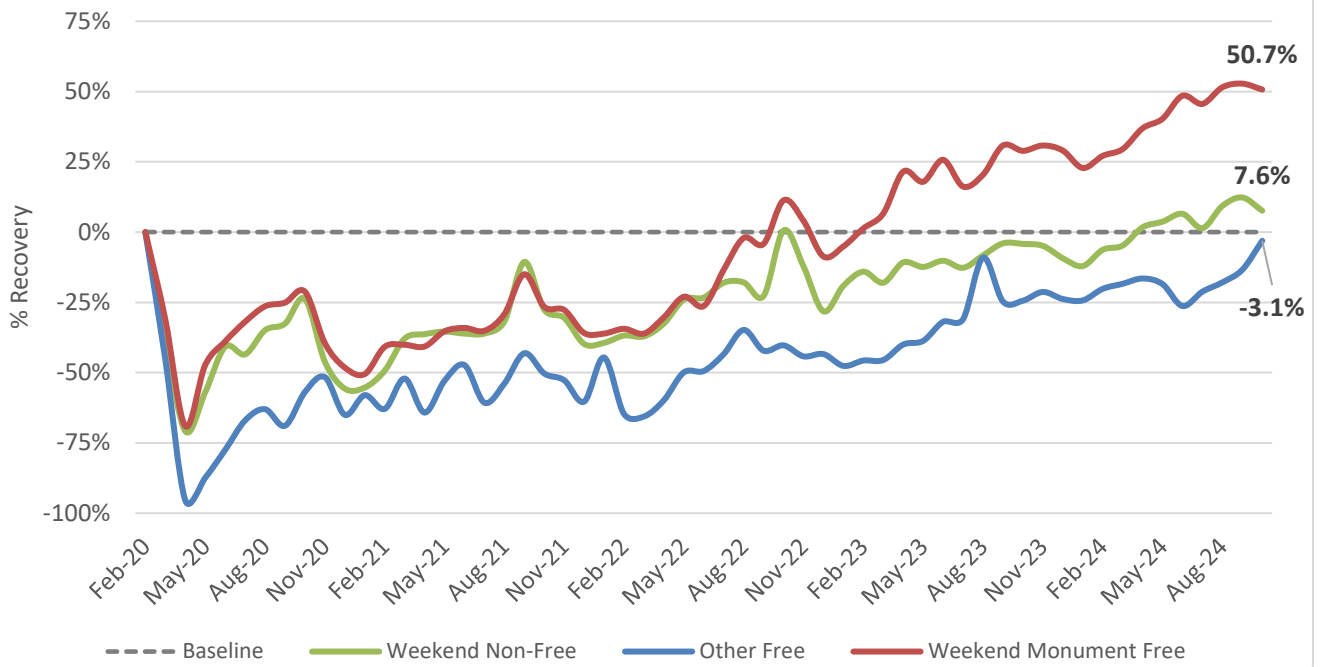
While Monument Corridor routes serving predominantly disadvantaged communities experienced a similar initial ridership drop, they have seen a more pronounced recovery compared to other fixed routes. As of October 2024, weekday ridership on Routes 11, 14, and 16 have exceeded pre-pandemic levels. In contrast, on Routes 4, 5, 7, and 99X, which are also free, weekday ridership remains at approximately 65% of pre-pandemic levels.

Post-pandemic shifts in ridership patterns have also impacted weekend service along the Monument Corridor. Routes 311, 314, and 316 have seen a 50% increase in weekend ridership over pre-pandemic levels, whereas, by comparison, weekend ridership on Route 4 is about the same as its pre-pandemic levels.

Weekday Ridership Recovery Comparison



Weekend Ridership Recovery Comparison



Title VI:

County Connection prepared a Fare Equity Analysis prior to implementing free fares on the Monument Corridor routes on a permanent basis, as required by Federal Transit Administration (FTA) regulations. The equity analyses and public hearings were conducted in March 2020 for the continuation of weekday free fares, and in December 2022 to add weekend free fares. Following these processes, the Board approved a resolution to make the free fare program permanent, contingent on continued funding availability.

Given that all six routes serve a higher proportion of low-income and minority riders compared to the system-wide average, both equity analyses concluded that the Monument Free program did not disproportionately impact minority riders or burden low-income riders.

Financial Implications:

None. County Connection intends to operate the Program as long as funding remains available through California's Low Carbon Transit Operations Program (LCTOP) or through another funding source.

Recommendation:

None, for information only.

Action Requested:

None, for information only.

Attachments:

None