

To: Board of Directors

Date: 04/10/2025

From: Ruby Horta, Assistant General Manager

Reviewed by: *W.C.*

SUBJECT: Youth Ride Free Pilot Program

Background:

Since 2018 the Summer Youth Pass program has provided discounted three-month youth passes during the summer months, and since 2001 the Pass2Class program has provided free transit passes to students for the first three months of the school year. In addition to providing an increased freedom of mobility for our youth riders, and reduced costs for their parents, these programs have helped normalize riding the bus for our future adult customers.

Due to a reallocation of funding administered by the Contra Costa Transportation Authority (CCTA), the Summer Youth Pass program will not be available this summer. County Connection Board members directed staff to explore options to mitigate the impact of not having such a program. Over the last several months County Connection staff have been working with partner agencies, including CCTA and the two Regional Transportation Planning Committees (RTPCs) representing the County Connection service area (TRANSPAC – representing the central county area, and SWAT – representing Lamorinda and San Ramon Valley) to pilot a program that would replace the Summer Youth Pass.

Youth Ride Free Pilot Program:

Initially, staff considered implementing a six-month Youth Ride Free pilot program that would have been in place from June through November of this year. This program would have replaced both the Summer Youth Pass and Pass2Class programs. However, due to timing constraints associated with aligning the various funding sources from TRANSPAC, SWAT and CCTA, CCTA staff has proposed starting the six-month pilot in August.

To prevent a gap in a youth fare program, County Connection staff propose to shift the pilot length to two summer months, June 1st through July 31st, and use our marketing budget to cover the costs. County Connection's Planning & Scheduling staff have already devised a way to track the number of youth passengers making use of the program, thereby making it possible to measure its efficacy in comparison to the previous Summer Youth Pass, and Marketing staff have developed a marketing and outreach program that can begin immediately. Based on feedback received from the Marketing Planning & Legislative Committee, this initial pilot would not require youth to show identification or a pass, which staff beliefs have been a deterrent for youth. Drivers will be authorized to ask for proof of age for anyone that may appear over 18.

Potential for Growth:

Presuming that the requirements for passengers taking advantage of the Youth Ride Free pilot program will be less burdensome than the application and payment process for the Summer Youth Pass program, staff anticipate a significant systemwide increase in youth ridership over the term of the pilot program. With a lower barrier to entry, the Youth Ride Free pilot program will expand upon the valuable social benefits to the community offered by the Summer Youth Pass. Additionally, we will have access to a captive audience of youth riders whom we can promote the transition to the Pass2Class or an extension into a separate pilot funded by TRANSPAC, SWAT and CCTA.

While rolling out the two-month pilot program, staff will continue to work with TRANSPAC, SWAT, CCTA, and 511 Contra Costa towards the goal of making this a permanent year-round program, something which will require sustained funding, as well as a fare equity analysis conducted in compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Financial Implications:

All direct costs of the program (i.e. the fare subsidy) will be covered by County Connection's marketing budget. Estimated costs are not expected to exceed \$20,000.

Recommendation:

The MP&L Committee members and staff recommend implementing a two-month Youth Ride Free Pilot Program from June 1st to July 31st.

Action Requested:

The MP&L Committee members and staff request Board approval of the proposed pilot program.

Attachments:

None.