

To: Operations & Scheduling Committee

Date: September 24, 2026

From: Andrew M. Smith, Director of Planning & Marketing

Reviewed by: *Ref*

SUBJECT: Youth Ride Free (YRF) Update

Background:

County Connection funded and operated a two-month summer Youth Ride Free (YRF) pilot in June and July 2025, offering fare-free rides to riders aged 5 to 18 systemwide, with Tri Delta Transit and WestCAT participating using their own funding. This program was repeated in June and July 2026, with County Connection's portion funded by Transportation Partnership and Cooperation (TRANSPAC) and the Southwest Area Transportation Committee (SWAT). The success of the pilots demonstrated how a no-pass, no-signup, "get on and go" program like YRF was a very cost-effective method of increasing youth ridership on transit and normalizing transit use for our younger generation.

Technical Issues:

County Connection buses are equipped with Automatic Passenger Counters (APCs) to track passenger boardings and alightings at each stop. This information is further enhanced by fare data entered by bus operators as passengers board the bus. This additional layer helps staff track fare type usage and calculate billing for stakeholder-funded programs (such as YRF and Pass2Class). Fare data is also used as a secondary validation of the APC numbers.

During July, Clever Devices, the vendor for our passenger counting systems, deployed a defective software update across the bus fleet, preventing fare collection data from being recorded for the second half of the month. While APC data was automatically and accurately collected without interruption, the loss of operator-entered fare data resulted in an artificial drop in reported fare-specific ridership numbers such as YRF. Because Clever Devices generates ridership reports strictly on a monthly basis, the dataset for July was, therefore, incomplete. Staff collaborated with Clever Devices to analyze their methodology, isolate valid data from the first half of the month, and expand the numbers for the full month, benchmarked to the total ridership numbers reported by the APCs. Although the expanded dataset reflects typical monthly trends, staff decided to use the official Clever Devices monthly data (the "true count" of the available, though limited, data) for stakeholder billing, and is only using the expanded data for evaluation and planning purposes.

YRF Ridership:

As shown in the table below, this summer's YRF pilot saw higher ridership compared to last year's, with an increase of just over 4% on County Connection and additional increases on Tri Delta Transit and WestCAT.

	June-July 2025	June-July 2026	% Change
County Connection	25,411	26,513	+4%
Tri Delta	19,596	31,614	+61%
WestCAT	6,130	13,805	+125%
TOTAL	51,137	71,932	+41%

While it isn't possible to know definitively the reason why there was a difference in YRF ridership between County Connection and the other two transit operators, after consulting with their staffs, County Connection staff has identified the following likely contributors:

- Tri Delta Transit serves an area with a younger overall population and a higher number of youth programs, foster programs, and low-income communities.
- WestCAT offered free rides to all passengers on weekends from May through August, which provided a longer promotional runway.
- For the 2025 summer YRF pilot, County Connection staff conducted an extensive community outreach program through schools, libraries, community centers, and city government offices, beginning more than a month prior to the start of the YRF program and the end of the school year. In addition to the County and all 10 cities in our service area, media toolkits and promotional materials were mailed directly to 38 middle and high schools, 15 community organizations, 12 libraries, and six youth centers, with many followed by in-person visits from staff. Additionally, staff conducted direct in-person outreach to youths at 18 schools and libraries and on three bus routes prior to the end of the school year. These efforts were not repeated for the 2026 summer YRF pilot.

With continued funding and a more effective school outreach program, staff believes Youth Ride Free could continue to be an increasingly successful summer program, and more so as a year-round program. To that end, County Connection recently submitted a funding proposal to TRANSPAC for a year-round YRF program and will keep the Board informed of its future progress.

Financial Implications:

Due to the aforementioned technical issues with Clever Devices, the fares for approximately 5,000 youth trips will not be reimbursed, resulting in an approximately \$5,000 loss in fare revenue. A total of \$21,470 is being invoiced to TRANSPAC and SWAT for this summer's YRF program.

Recommendation:

None, for information only.

Action Requested:

None, for information only.

Attachments:

None.