

CITY OF SANTA ROSA
CITY COUNCIL

TO: MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL
FROM: YURI KOSLEN, TRANSIT PLANNER
TRANSPORTATION AND PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT
SUBJECT: AMENDMENT TO MOU WITH SANTA ROSA JUNIOR COLLEGE
TO EXTEND PILOT PROGRAM FOR UNLIMITED ACCESS PASS
TO STUDENTS THROUGH JUNE 30, 2018
AGENDA ACTION: RESOLUTION

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended by the Transportation and Public Works Department that the Council, by Resolution, approve Amendment No. 1 to the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Santa Rosa Junior College, extending the CityBus pilot unlimited pass program for Santa Rosa Junior College students through June 30, 2018.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Santa Rosa Junior College approached the City of Santa Rosa with a pilot program to provide Santa Rosa Junior College (SRJC) students with an unlimited number of transit rides for the fall 2017 semester, with the SRJC paying a minimum of \$50,000 to the City of Santa Rosa in return. Following Council approval, this program was initiated on September 20, 2017.

The Transportation and Public Works Department is returning to Council to report on the fall 2017 pilot program. With the Tubbs/Nuns Fire, ridership and promotion of the program has been impeded. The slow start to the program will allow the City to utilize the remainder of the \$50,000 dollars (or \$.77/ride) available for the fall 2017 semester, as well as spring 2018 SRJC Student Transportation Fee revenues, to extend the unlimited access pass to students through the end of FY 2017-18. The extended program will also allow City and SRJC staff to collect more information to gauge the costs and benefits of the program.

The Transportation and Public Works Department will return to Council during the budget process to report on the pilot program and bring to Council any extension of the program beyond FY 2017-18.

BACKGROUND

The City of Santa Rosa has heard from the community about the benefits of providing “free fares” to college students. The students of the Sonoma County Junior College District (SCJCD), recognizing the importance of transit services, elected to use revenue generated from the Student Transportation Fee (STF) passed in spring 2017 to seek agreements with the transit providers within Sonoma County (Sonoma County Transit, Petaluma and Santa Rosa CityBus) to provide an unlimited transit ridership program. The Santa Rosa City Council approved a pilot program on September 19, 2017. The program allows SRJC students to ride CityBus an unlimited number of times during the fall 2017 semester.

With the Tubbs/Nuns Fire, ridership and promotion of the program were impeded with the closure of the SRJC for almost two weeks while CityBus operated fare-free at a Saturday level of service in order to support emergency operations. At the time of this staff report, SRJC student ridership is just above 2,500 rides per week. Prior to the implementation of this program CityBus staff estimated weekly ridership at over 4,000 riders per week. City staff expect the maturation of the program to take up to two years; this is consistent with similar college/transit programs.

The original concern with this unlimited ridership program was that the costs of the program (in terms of lost fare revenue) would exceed the SRJC’s funding to pay for the program. At the current ridership level, the SRJC Student Transportation Fee is expected to generate enough funding to cover the costs of providing unlimited ridership on CityBus through the end of FY 2017-18.

PRIOR CITY COUNCIL REVIEW

On September 19, 2017 Council reviewed and authorized the launch of the Unlimited Access Pass pilot program for the fall 2017 semester.

ANALYSIS

Transit Division staff had initially estimated that SRJC ridership would be 95,000-115,000 rides per semester or 5,000 riders per week (based on SRJC’s survey of the student population and percentage of students that take the “bus” to and from classes). Based on CityBus’ average fare of \$0.77 per ride, the Transit Division estimated that providing the Unlimited Access Pass program to the SRJC student body for the fall 2017 semester would cost \$60,000 - \$75,000, of which a minimum \$50,000 would be paid for by the SRJC Student Transportation Fee.

Based on the initial performance of the program (approximately 2,500 rides per week), City staff expect the maturation of the program to take up to two years. In accordance with the stipulation in the original agreement, in the event of lower than expected ridership, the remainder of the \$50,000 available to CityBus for the fall 2017 semester

will be credited to extension of the pilot program beyond the fall semester. Per the original agreement, CityBus may be awarded additional funding from the Student Transportation Fee if CityBus ridership exceeds the available funds of \$100,000 at a rate of \$.77 per ride. The SRJC will have additional funds generated by the Student Registration Fee available for the spring 2018. These funds, when added to the original \$50,000 available for the fall 2017 semester, bring the total available funding for the program to \$100,000. The term of the proposed amendment to the original agreement will expire on June 30, 2018 or be amended prior to this date.

The SRJC and the Transit Division will continue to analyze this pilot program and evaluate its outcomes. Once the STF funding and CityBus ridership is better understood it is the intention of CityBus and the SRJC to develop a multi-year agreement that details funding participation by both parties.

FISCAL IMPACT

Based on the slow start of the pilot program and SRJC estimates for availability of STF funds for the spring 2018 semesters, Transit Division staff expect that STF funds will be sufficient to cover lost fare revenue through the end of FY 2017-18.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

This action is exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) because it is not a project which has a potential for resulting in either a direct physical change in the environment, or a reasonably foreseeable indirect physical change in the environment, pursuant to CEQA Guideline section 15378.

BOARD/COMMISSION/COMMITTEE REVIEW AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Not applicable.

NOTIFICATION

Not applicable.

ATTACHMENTS

- Resolution/Amendment No. 1 to MOU

CONTACT

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