

CITY OF SANTA ROSA
CITY COUNCIL

TO: MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL
FROM: RACHEL EDE, DEPUTY DIRECTOR – TRANSIT
TRANSPORTATION AND PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT
SUBJECT: MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING WITH THE SONOMA
COUNTY JUNIOR COLLEGE DISTRICT AND SCJCD
ASSOCIATED STUDENTS FOR CITYBUS UNLIMITED RIDES
PROGRAM FOR COLLEGE STUDENTS

AGENDA ACTION: RESOLUTION

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended by the Transportation and Public Works Department that the Council, by resolution, 1) approve a new Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Sonoma County Junior College District (SCJCD) and the SCJCD Associated Students, for CityBus unlimited rides program for College students through June 30, 2028 with the option to renew the MOU through 2033, and 2) delegate authority to the City Manager or designee to execute the MOU, any amendments thereto, and/or any other documents necessary to facilitate the CityBus unlimited rides program for college students.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The CityBus unlimited rides program for Santa Rosa Junior College students began as a pilot program during the fall 2017 semester as approved by Council. The success of the pilot led to the establishment of an 18-month MOU with four-one-year options to renew. To continue the program, Council approval is need to establish a new MOU through June 30, 2028 with options to renew through 2033. Implementation of this program is an action recommended in the Community Climate Action Plan.

BACKGROUND

The City of Santa Rosa has heard from the community about the benefits of providing fare-free access to college students. The students of the SCJCD recognized the importance of transit services and elected to use revenue generated from the Student Transportation Fee (STF), which 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 pilot program

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allowed SRJC students to use CityBus by showing a SRJC through the end of December 2018.

Then building on the success of the pilot, in 2019 Council approved an 18-month MOU formalizing the unlimited access to CityBus for SRJC students. City staff expected the maturation of the program to take up to two years, consistent with similar college/transit programs but with the pandemic transportation patterns were disrupted. But the value of the program for the SCJCD has been consistent as can be seen in the ridership.

The SCJCD Student Transportation Fee has covered the full costs of the program to date.

SRJC staff continue to convene the three Sonoma County fixed-route bus transit providers (CityBus, Sonoma County Transit and Petaluma Transit) each year to evaluate the transit services provided. SCJCD has an agreement with all three operators and has managed the campus marketing of the unlimited transit access.

PRIOR CITY COUNCIL REVIEW

On September 19, 2017, the City Council, by Resolution No. RES-2017-189 authorized the launch of the Unlimited Access Pass pilot program for the fall 2017.

On December 19, 2017, the City Council, by Resolution No. RES-2017-251 authorized the extension of the Unlimited Access Pass pilot program through June 30, 2018.

On June 19, 2018, the City Council, by Resolution No. RES-2018-101, authorized the extension of the Unlimited Access Pass pilot program through December 31, 2018.

On November 27, 2018, the City Council, by Resolution No. RES-2018-210 approved the MOU with the Sonoma County Junior College District (SCJCD) and the SCJCD Associated Students, establishing the CityBus Unlimited Pass Program for students through June 30, 2020, with four-one-year options to renew the program.

ANALYSIS

Transit Division staff initially estimated that the pilot unlimited pass program would generate between \$120,000 - \$150,000 in fare revenue per year. The program's ridership met this expectation for two years from 2018-2020.

	17/18	18/19	19/20*	20/21*	21/22	22/23
CityBus Revenue	\$85,784	\$157,351	\$123,110	\$4,134	\$30,214	\$50,792
Total Ridership	102,124	187,323	146,560	4,921	35,969	60,466
Average/month	11,347	15,610	12,213	410	2,997	5,039

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Max/month	16,750	21,745	21,546	1,094	3,977	8,766
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*Due to the pandemic CityBus did not collect fares for 10 months

With the onset of the pandemic there were a number of factors that contributed to the reduction in ridership by SRJC students (e.g. social distancing requirements, canceling in person classes, CityBus not collecting fares nor tracking SRJC ridership). Currently the SRJC continues to offer on-line courses to a greater extent than they did pre-pandemic and CityBus hasn't fully restored pre-pandemic service due to the difficulty in hiring drivers.

Despite the lower ridership, students throughout the pandemic and into the recovery have relied on CityBus. As can be seen, ridership in FY2022-2023 has almost doubled compared with the ridership in the previous year.

The proposed new MOU would allow SRJC students to continue to use unlimited rides on CityBus through June 2028 with options to renew through 2033. The proposed MOU states that the SCJCD would continue to pay \$.84 per ride as was stipulated in the original MOU. Based on existing ridership, it is estimated that SCJCD students will take approximately 85,000 rides per year, which would mean the SCJCD would pay up to \$71,400 per year at \$.84 per ride. Additionally, if ridership exceeds the expected 85,000 trips annually and funds are available in the Student Transportation Fee Fund, the SCJCD will pay for those additional riders at the same \$.84 per ride rate.

The SCJCD and the Transit Division will continue to analyze this program and evaluate its outcomes.

FISCAL IMPACT

This MOU will provide up to \$357,000 in revenue to the Transit Division or \$71,400 annually. Based on the success of the past agreement, Transit Division staff expect that STF funds will be sufficient to cover the cost of the program. If transit ridership exceeds the expected 85,000 rides per year additional funds may be awarded to CityBus, if funds are available in the SCJCD Student Transportation Fee. The SCJCD and the Transit Division will work in good faith to pursue a remedy for any lost revenue. This MOU will have no impact on the General Fund.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

This action is exempt from the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) under CEQA Section 15061(b)(3) and 15378 in that there is no possibility that the implementation of this action may have significant effects on the environment, and no further environmental review is required.

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BOARD/COMMISSION/COMMITTEE REVIEW AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Not applicable.

NOTIFICATION

Not applicable.

ATTACHMENTS

- Resolution/Exhibit A (Memorandum of Understanding with Sonoma County Junior College District)

PRESENTER

Yuri Koslen, Transit Planner