Santa Rosa CityBus Unlimited Rides for Youth Program Extension

Santa Rosa City Council
May 13, 2025

CityBus Unlimited Rides for Youth Program (UR Free) Background

- **Fare-free program for TK-12th grade youth initiated July 2021** as 18-month pilot to support transit ridership and community recovery from COVID
  - Funded by BAAQMD Transportation Fund for Clean Air grant

- **Council extended pilot to June 2023** to enable the Transit Division to pursue funding to continue the program

- Successful multi-operator application to the **Sonoma County Climate Resilience Fund funded a two-year extension through June 2025** and expansion to include Sonoma County Transit and Petaluma Transit
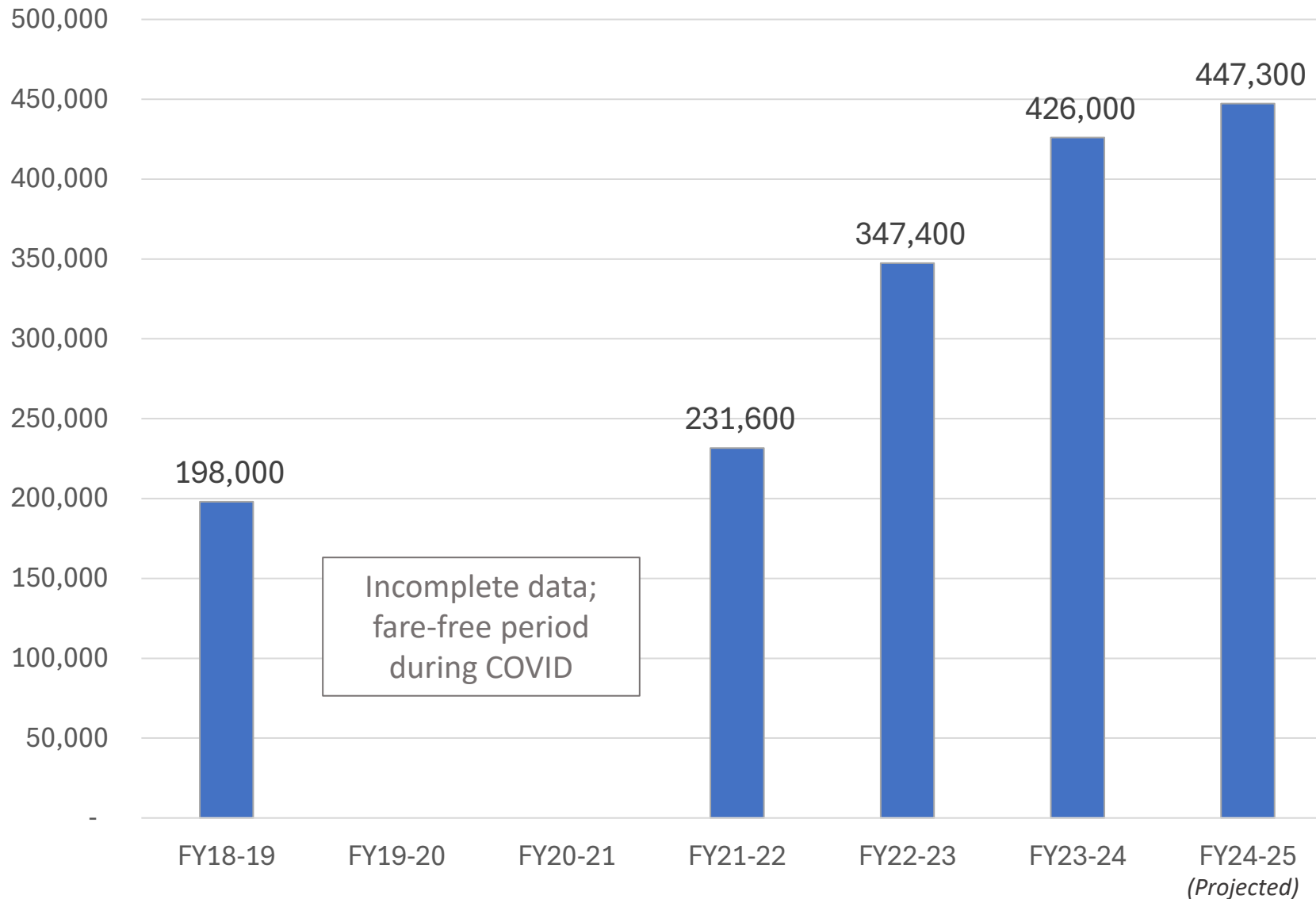
Program Goals:

- ✓ Increase transit ridership
- ✓ Reduce household expenses for families
- ✓ Improve school attendance
- ✓ Increase transit's profile within the community
- ✓ Improve transportation equity

Additional Outcomes:

- ✓ Increased youth access to the community
- ✓ Reduced car trips to school and other destinations
- ✓ New partnership with schools, camps, and youth-serving programs
- ✓ Expansion to additional transit operators

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Annual CityBus Youth Ridership

Chart showing Annual CityBus Youth Ridership by fiscal year:
- FY18-19: 198,000
- FY19-20: Incomplete data; fare-free period during COVID
- FY20-21: (no data shown)
- FY21-22: 231,600
- FY22-23: 347,400
- FY23-24: 426,000
- FY24-25 (Projected): 447,300

125% increase in Youth Ridership since UR Free Program initiated

Proposal

- **Authorize extension of UR Free Program through FY2030**, subject to funding availability to reimburse lost fare revenue attributable to the program
  - UR Free annual cost at current ridership level: $525,000
- FY26 proposed funding program:
  - **$220,000 in Go Sonoma sales tax measure funds** (2% of measure revenue allocated to fare-free transit programs)
  - **$305,000 in state Low Carbon Transit Operations Program (LCTOP) funds**
- Funding strategy likely solid through FY30; can revisit if conditions change or Council seeks to fund additional fare-free programs

Recommendation

It is recommended by the Transportation and Public Works Department that the Council, by resolution, extend the Unlimited Rides for Youth (UR Free) program for TK-12th grade youth through June 30, 2030, subject to ongoing funding availability.

Questions?