

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 BETWEEN THE CITY OF  
SANTA ROSA AND COUNTY OF SONOMA FOR AN UNLIMITED  
RIDES PILOT PROGRAM FOR EMPLOYEES

AGENDA ACTION: RESOLUTION

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RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended by the Transportation and Public Works Department that the Council, by resolution: 1) approve a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the City of Santa Rosa and the County of Sonoma for a reciprocal unlimited rides pilot program for employees on Santa Rosa CityBus and Sonoma County Transit; and 2) authorize the City Manager or designee to execute the MOU and any future amendments, subject to approval as to form by the City Attorney.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Transportation and Public Works Department seeks approval for the City to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the County of Sonoma to provide unlimited rides for County of Sonoma employees on Santa Rosa CityBus, and unlimited rides for City of Santa Rosa employees on Sonoma County Transit. This new reciprocal pilot program will allow employees to ride both bus systems fare-free for a one-year period beginning January 1, 2024 by showing their employee ID badge.

BACKGROUND

The City of Santa Rosa has developed multiple fare-free transit pass programs for various groups riding Santa Rosa CityBus, including City employees, Santa Rosa Junior College students, paratransit registrants, and most recently, TK-12<sup>th</sup> grade youth. In June 2021, Council approved the establishment of an Unlimited Pass Program providing a mechanism for staff to seek new partnerships with employers, housing developers, educational institutions, and other entities to provide expanded fare-free transit access. Transit Division staff identified the County of Sonoma and other large employers within Santa Rosa as good candidates for the program.

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During discussions with County of Sonoma staff about an Unlimited Pass Program partnership, the Transit Division and County staff identified the opportunity to enter into a reciprocal partnership that would provide unlimited access for City of Santa Rosa employees on the Sonoma County Transit System, and unlimited access for County of Sonoma employees on the Santa Rosa CityBus system.

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 SRJC students.

On October 13, 2020, at a City Council Study Session on Santa Rosa CityBus' COVID-19 Recovery Strategy, Council directed staff to return with implementation options including unlimited access pass (fare-free) and discount programs.

On June 8, 2021, Council approved the establishment of an Unlimited Pass Program for institutions and a pilot to provided fare-free access to TK-12th grade youth.

On October 12, 2021, at a City Council Study Session on Santa Rosa CityBus' effort to coordinate Sonoma County transit operators, Council directed staff to continue work to integrate services with Sonoma County Transit and Petaluma Transit.

On June 6, 2023, the City Council approved an MOU with the Sonoma County Junior College District (SCJCD) and the SCJCD Associated Students for unlimited rides program for students through June 30, 2028.

ANALYSIS

Transit Division staff have continued to work to identify new Unlimited Pass Program partnerships since adoption of the program in 2021. Related discussions with County of Sonoma staff resulted in the proposed MOU. The MOU establishes a reciprocal pilot program enabling City of Santa Rosa employees to ride free on Sonoma County Transit (SCT) and County of Sonoma employees to ride free on Santa Rosa CityBus beginning on January 1, 2024. City and County employees in possession of a valid City or County-issued ID badge would have unlimited access to the Sonoma County Transit and Santa Rosa CityBus systems. The MOU includes a one-year pilot period with two one-year options to extend the program. While no funds are proposed to be exchanged, program usage will be closely tracked to understand the fiscal impact on each agency and determine whether compensation should be considered as part of any program extensions.

Under the MOU, both parties will track ridership and provide periodic reports to partner agency staff to keep them informed of the program's usage. Staff from both SCT and CityBus will participate in periodic meetings to review ridership data, stay informed on

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any new transit developments, share other statistics that provide a better understanding of the impacts of the pilot program, and strategize on marketing and outreach.

This pilot program supports Santa Rosa City Council goals to 1) Build and maintain sustainable infrastructure by investing in multi-modal transportation options, 2) Achieve organizational excellence by providing employees with fiscally sound, diverse and equitable transportation choices, and 3) Address Climate Change by expanding transit access for City and County employees. The proposed pilot program provides an opportunity for the City of Santa Rosa and County of Sonoma to lead by example by implementing a joint program that promotes greater use of public transit and forwards City and County climate action goals.

The Sonoma County Board of Supervisors approved the program at the October 17, 2023 as a component of the County's Clean Commute Employee Benefit Program.

FISCAL IMPACT

This action has no impact on the General Fund. Staff do not expect any additional operating costs to be incurred by the Transit Enterprise as a result of this program. Lost fare revenue from County employees currently paying fares on CityBus is estimated to be less than \$20,000 annually. The City's Unlimited Pass Program is currently supported by a grant from the Bay Area Air Quality Management District's Transportation Fund for Clean Air (TFCA). While revenues in the Transit Fund are currently sufficient to absorb the expected lost fare revenue, Transit Division staff are exploring the use of a portion of CityBus' TFCA funds to partially offset lost fare revenue resulting from the program.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

This action is exempt from the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) under CEQA Guidelines 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.

BOARD/COMMISSION/COMMITTEE REVIEW AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Not applicable.

NOTIFICATION

Not applicable.

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ATTACHMENTS

- Resolution / Exhibit A – Memorandum of Understanding

PRESENTER

Yuri Koslen, Transit Planner