



MONTGOMERY COUNTY COUNCIL
ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND

EVAN GLASS
COUNCILMEMBER
AT-LARGE

TRANSPORTATION & ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE
HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE

MEMORANDUM

TO: Chair Tom Hucker, Transportation & Environment Committee

FROM: Councilmember Evan Glass

DATE: April 12, 2021

SUBJECT: Ride On Fares

In response to a unanimous request from the Council, the Montgomery County Department of Transportation (MCDOT) recently agreed to suspend Ride On fares through the end of the current fiscal year. Building on this extension of fare-free service, I would like to identify ways to reduce or eliminate Ride On fares in the upcoming fiscal year and beyond.

Transit is a public good and we have seen how invaluable it has been to our residents during the pandemic and in the ongoing recovery, especially for lower-income residents and those working essential jobs. Ride On has been fare-free for 13 months and will be so through at least June 30, 2021. With many people expressing hesitation to return to transit even as more become vaccinated, the lack of fares removes a barrier and makes Ride On a more appealing travel option for commuters.

Cities across the country and the world have seen immediate benefits when fares are removed from their bus systems. In Montgomery County, our recent expansion of Kids Ride Free demonstrated these positive community outcomes. Less than a year after fare-free service was extended to students all day, our Ride On system experienced a 57% increase in ridership among our youth and Metrobus experienced a 51% increase.

I believe that we should build on the success of the Kids Ride Free program and the current fare-free service to make public transportation free for all users.

In anticipation of the Transportation & Environment Committee work session on April 30, at which we are scheduled to review the resolution on transportation fees, charges and fares, I request that Council staff coordinate with MCDOT to determine the FY22 costs and expected benefits of the following three fare-related scenarios:

1. Fare-free every day
2. Fare-free on weekends
3. Reduce the fare from \$2 to \$1

These three options offer real benefits to riders with varying budgetary impacts. Prior to the pandemic, Ride On recouped approximately 20-25% of its operating costs through fare collection. As a result of the current situation and reduced ridership among some segments of our community, fare revenue in the near-future will likely comprise an even smaller percentage of operating costs. I would like the committee to identify a solution that will benefit the most people while considering the immediate fiscal reality.

Nearly half of Ride On's users report a household income of less than \$30,000 a year, many of whom are also essential workers. 78% of riders are people of color and 42% speak a language other than English at home. The cost savings of free service would make a real difference, allowing bus riders to spend this money on groceries or other household bills. Making Ride On free would go a long way in saving bus riders money as well as connecting residents with jobs and other essential services.

We have a unique opportunity to position Ride On as a growing transit provider that attracts residents and promotes a more sustainable way of traveling around Montgomery County. We should seize this opportunity to rethink our fare practices to encourage a long-term culture of ridership that also advances our environmental and racial equity goals.

CC: Councilmembers
Chiefs of Staff
Marlene Michaelson, Executive Director, County Council
Glenn Orlin, Legislative Analyst, County Council
Carlos Camacho, Legislative Analyst, County Council
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