

STAFF REPORT

SUBJECT: Alameda County Affordable Student Pass Pilot

FROM: Christy Wegener, Executive Director

DATE: September 11, 2023

Action Requested

This is an informational update; no action is requested at this time.

Background

The Alameda County Affordable Student Transit Pass Program (STPP) was envisioned in 2014 as a part of the Measure BB Transportation Expenditure Plan (TEP) to provide low-income students with transit passes. The TEP included \$15M allocated to the STPP pilot in order to test different models over a three-year horizon.

In 2016, the Alameda County Transportation Commission (Commission) approved the STPP pilot framework which specified criteria for school site selection to include school need and availability of transit service. The Commission also identified evaluation criteria, as well as the various pass models to test throughout the County. Year one of the pilot included testing four different pass models at nine schools in Alameda County: 1) free/universal passes for all students; 2) free/universal passes for certain grades; 3) discounted passes for certain grades; and 4) discounted passes and means-based passes. In East County, Livermore High and East Avenue Middle School were selected for year one of the pilot; both schools were selected to offer discounted passes and a means-based transit pass to students. The first year of the pilot launched in the 2016-2017 school year.

After a successful first year of the pilot, in 2017 the Commission approved the framework for the second year and narrowed down the pass models from four to two: means-based (low income) and a free/universal pass. The Commission selected 11 schools for participation in year two; an additional two schools in Livermore were selected for the second year: Christensen Middle and Del Valle High. Additionally, the Commission approved changing the pass model from means-based to a free/universal pass for the Livermore schools in the second year of the pilot.

In early 2018, Alameda CTC developed the parameters for the third year of the pilot. Building on the site selection criteria approved by the Commission, staff made recommendations to expand the program to additional schools in Alameda County. However, no changes were made for the East County schools and year three of the pilot maintained the free/universal pass at four Livermore schools.

In late 2018, after the third year of the pilot was successfully underway, the Commission approved a phased expansion of the program for the 2019-2020 school year to include up to 62

schools in 11 school districts. For the expanded program, the Commission approved criteria to identify which of the two pass models would be offered in each school district. In school districts with 75% or more of students enrolled in the Free and Reduced Price Meals (FRPM) program, the free/universal pass would be offered to all students. For the remaining school districts, means-based eligibility would apply with FRPM enrollment determining eligibility for the pass. An additional 27 schools were selected for enrollment in the 2019-2020 program for a total of 62 schools across 11 school districts. In East County, the Pleasanton Unified School District (PUSD) was added to the program and the pass was available at six schools using a means-based approach for eligibility. For Livermore, an additional five schools were selected for a total of nine schools participating in the program. It is important to note that, while the Livermore Valley Joint Unified School District (LVJUSD) does not have over 75% enrollment in FRPM, the Commission approved maintaining access to the free/universal pass for all students because LVJUSD is the lowest income district in East County.

For the 2020-2021 school year, the program was expanded to a total of 84 schools across 14 school districts in Alameda County. The Dublin Unified School District (DUSD) was approved to join the program in the 2020-2021 school year, however, the launch was delayed for one year due to COVID-19. At the start of the 2021-2022 school year, DUSD students who were eligible using a means-based approach began receiving transit passes.

Discussion

Currently, all three school districts in East County are included in the STPP but with two different pass models. Per Commission criteria, LVJUSD students are eligible for a free/universal pass; in Pleasanton and Dublin, the pass is available to students using a means-based approach. Utilizing the FRMP enrollment to determine eligibility is no longer appropriate as post-COVID, all students receive free meals. Therefore, PUSD and DUSD schools are responsible for verifying means-based eligibility and approving enrollment in the program. Once schools approve the applications, LAVTA staff process the applications and distribute the passes (on Clipper cards).

In developing this staff report, LAVTA staff worked with Alameda CTC staff to better understand the road ahead for this program, as well as budgetary constraints or other administrative barriers that may limit program expansion. Per Alameda CTC staff, there are several schools approved to join STPP that are being added to the program this current year and the following. After all approved schools are actively participating in the program, a robust evaluation will occur and potential modifications to the program may be considered based on lessons learned from the full expansion.

Fiscal Impact

There is no fiscal impact associated with this item.

Recommendation

This is an informational item only.

Approved: _____