

Fare Policy, Program Eligibility, and Low-Income Fare Assistance

Background

The Marin Transit 2016 and 2018 Short Range Transit Plans took an in-depth look at Marin Transit's fare policy, and proposed changes to the structure and fare prices in response to the following policy goals:

- Maintain cost effectiveness targets by service typology;
- Offer fare media that encourages ridership and simplifies payment;
- Keep Marin Transit fares in line with peer agencies;
- Provide non-cash options to support operational efficiency; and
- Maximize social equity by providing mobility for all within the county

In 2016, the District released the Marin Access Strategic Analysis and Recommendations report which provides an in-depth overview of Marin Access programs and riders and the market forces that influence current and future demand. The study examined how Marin Access services are being utilized, what aspects of the programs are well-performing, and what changes in policy or programs will improve the rider experience and enhance mobility management in the county. This study identified opportunities and constraints to improve Marin Access fare and eligibility policies and recommended the following strategies:

- Reevaluate fare policies to optimize public subsidy, achieve sustainable programs, ensure fares are equitable and maintain a safety net for low-income individuals, and create pricing that manages consumer demand for services
- Reassess eligibility thresholds to achieve consistency and equity across all Marin Access and Marin Transit programs

Staff revisited previous recommendations on fares and eligibility criteria for Marin Access program and the Low-Income Fare Assistance (LIFA) that is offered to seniors and those with disabilities.

A comprehensive review of fares and eligibility thresholds together has not been completed to date. With the addition of new programs such as Connect, upgraded technology expected to come online in 2020 such as the ability to pay fares via an online "wallet," and growing needs in the community, revisiting the fares and eligibility policies were deemed necessary.

As part of the SRTP 2020-2029, staff conducted a comprehensive evaluation of fare pricing, policies, and program eligibility standards to develop updates to fare policy that will benefit riders and increase the financial sustainability of Marin Transit programs. Staff also conducted a survey of riders in November and December 2018 to inform these efforts, better understand why riders use certain payment methods, and identify possible incentives to achieve fare proposal goals.

The following Appendix reflects these updates and changes.

Guidelines for Setting Fares and Eligibility Standards

As a result of evaluating fare pricing, policies, and program eligibility standards, staff identified the following challenges and established fare policy and eligibility goals that guided the recommended policy changes.

Key Considerations and Challenges

- Marin Transit has not increased its Fixed Route and Paratransit fares since 2004.
- Fare revenues in Demand Response programs do not keep pace with increasing operations costs and do not meet current financial performance targets.
- Marin Transit's ADA Paratransit fare is the second lowest among peer agencies in the Bay Area.
- Some fares do not reflect the premium features offered across various services and programs. For example, the fare for some curb to curb, non-ADA demand response services is lower than the Fixed Route fare.
- Marin Transit cannot independently change its fares within the Clipper system as its fare table in Clipper is shared with Golden Gate Transit. Until Clipper independence is reached, all changes to local fares must be agreed upon by both agencies.
- Even though the fare for local trips is \$2, Clipper users on local routes are required to tag-on/tag-off. This continues to be an obstacle for attracting local passengers to use Clipper. When a passenger forgets to tag off on exiting a Marin Transit bus, they are charged a higher regional fare.
- Eligibility criteria to receive low-income fare assistance is inconsistent across services and programs. This has led to rider and community partner confusion.

Rider Survey

In 2018, Marin Transit staff conducted a survey of riders as part of a larger agency effort to simplify its fare structure. The goal of the survey was to better understand why use certain payment methods and identify possible incentives to achieve goals of the fare proposal. The survey also intended to identify level of rider's awareness of different fare media options, determine willingness to shift away from cash to period passes and Clipper, and gauge rider's interest in mobile ticketing.

The fare payment survey was administered online and on-board in both English and Spanish. A total of 535 responses were received with 301 responses coming from onboard riders and 234 responses online. About 17 percent of riders responded in Spanish, and 25 percent of onboard surveys were completed in Spanish. Over 85 percent of all respondents identified themselves as transit riders.

In summary, cash was overwhelmingly perceived as an easy and convenient way to pay. Common theme in survey responses included:

- Lack of knowledge on Clipper and passes,
- Cash being known as the only fare payment method, and
- Financial challenges with affording a prepaid fare payment option

The survey results also confirmed that over a quarter of cash users will be willing to consider using passes if they were less expensive, while more than 60% of cash users were not aware of the 10% Clipper discount. Additionally, over 25% of cash users indicated concerns of being overcharged when paying by Clipper.

Lastly, about 67% of surveyed riders responded they were interested in mobile ticketing. Of those riders, 41% currently pay with cash, 40% percent pay with Clipper, and 19% percent use a pass product.

The results of the survey confirmed that while there are opportunities to shift away from cash to support operational efficiencies, cash may remain as the preferred method of fare payment for about 19% of the riders who indicated that they will not consider using any other fare media.

Staff also concluded that pass and Clipper usage can be incentivized through pricing adjustments, and considering the limited level of riders knowledge on some of the fare products, a focused marketing and education on fares is recommended to reinforce the impact of the policy updates and lead to riders behavioral changes in fare payment.

Fare and Eligibility Policy Goals

The 2020-2029 SRTP recommendations for fare policy and eligibility standards are targeted at the following goals:

- Simplify senior/ADA program eligibility;
- Encourage pass and Clipper usage over cash payment to streamline and improve operations;
- Offer fare media that incentivizes ridership and simplifies payment;
- Keep fares and subsidy levels commensurate with the services offered across programs;
- Adjust fare assistance programs to maximize social equity and provide mobility options for all Marin residents;
- Maintain cost effectiveness targets by service typology; and
- Keep Marin Transit fare policies consistent with regional efforts to coordinate and integrate transit agencies fares.

The proposed policy changes fall into the following three categories:

- Fare policies;
- Low-income fare assistance (LIFA) for older adults and those with disabilities; and
- Program eligibility for demand response programs.

Due to the interrelationship between these policies, staff considered changes to these three areas concurrently.

Fare Policy

The 2018 Short Range Transit Plan described recommendations for system-wide changes to fare pricing and structure. Staff are using the 2018 SRTP update as a guide for the updated fare policy changes. Staff continue to carefully weigh potential recommendations and guidelines to ensure they are consistent with regional goals and facilitate transfers with our partner transit agencies.

The 2018 SRTP recommended fixed route changes to Clipper pricing and youth fares. Staff did not recommend any major changes to fixed route fares due to the following factors:

- Marin Transit and Golden Gate Transit are embedded within the Clipper regional fare system, and changes related to fare structure cannot be achieved independently within the Clipper environment. Golden Gate Transit declined to support proposed changes to youth fares.
- Regional efforts are underway by MTC and San Francisco Planning and Urban Research (SPUR) to simplify fares and improve coordination within the region. Recommendations for significant changes to fixed routes fares should follow guidance from the region and additional coordination with our partner transit agencies.

Marin Transit will be designated as an independent operator under Clipper 2.0, which is expected to occur by 2023. Staff recommends postponing fixed route fare changes to when the District has control over its fare pricing, while remaining consistent with any future regional guidance.

The proposed eligibility and fare policy changes fall into two main categories are shown in Table B-1:

- Adjust pricing and structure of Fixed Route Fare Media (passes)
- Implement a phased update for fare structure and pricing of Marin Access/ Paratransit programs

Fixed Route Fare Media Changes

7-day Passes:

Proposed Change:

- Eliminate the 7-day Pass for all fare categories, including Adult/Senior/Youth

The following are expected impacts of these changes:

- Eliminate the administrative burden associated with providing weekly passes that are currently underutilized.
- Minimal impact on current pass users. This is due to very low usage of this pass (below one percent). Lowering monthly pass prices will be provide a new cost-effective option.

Monthly Passes:

Proposed Changes:

- Reduce Adults Monthly Pass prices to \$40 (-50% compared to current \$80 pass price)
- Reduce Senior Monthly Pass price to \$20 (-25% compared to current \$25 pass price)

The following are expected impacts of these changes:

- Make monthly passes a more attractive option to encourage pass usage over cash fare payments.
- Provide additional discount for regular riders who rely on public transit.
- Encourage additional usage of the services.

Demand Response Program Fares and Fare Policy

Dial-a-Ride (DAR) Fares

Proposed Changes:

- Increase DAR fare to \$4.00 for the general public (from \$2.00 to \$4.00 for the Novato DAR and from \$2.50 to \$4.00 for Rural DAR).
- Increase Senior/ADA DAR fare from \$1.00 to \$2.00.

The following are expected impacts of these changes:

- Fare pricing to align with the premium aspects of DAR services compared to Fixed-Route (i.e. on-demand curb-to-curb pick-up and drop-off services).

- DAR pricing to support operational efficiencies and cost performance targets.
- Higher DAR fares will be an incentive for the general public to use Fixed Route services over DAR where possible. This will free up additional capacity for Senior/ADA riders and alleviate current capacity issues.

ADA Paratransit Fares

Proposed Changes:

- Increase all paratransit program fares to \$3.00 in Phase 1, effective July 1, 2020. This equates to a 50% increase in the fare for current mandated paratransit and a 20% increase compared to the current extended, or non-mandated, service area for paratransit services.
- Increase all paratransit fares to \$4.00 in Phase 2, effective July 1, 2023.

The following are expected impacts of these changes:

- A competitive pricing structure will encourage riders to use Fixed Route services or other Marin Access programs over ADA Paratransit services, where possible.
- Fare pricing will keep pace with growing paratransit operations costs and help meet District's performance targets.
- Staff proposes increased eligibility thresholds and additional fare assistance subsidy levels for the Low-Income Fare Assistance Program to alleviate or eliminate the impact of fare increase on low-income riders.

Catch-A-Ride (CAR) Fare Structure

Proposed Changes:

- Adjust CAR fare structure to require an initial \$4.00 fare from rider to activate the subsidy of \$14 per trip, effective July 1, 2020. The rider will pay 100 percent of the trip cost beyond \$18. The subsidy per trip level will remain the same as currently provided for CAR riders that are not income eligible. Increase the limit of allowable subsidized trips from eight to ten trips per month. This is 25 percent more trips compared to the current program.
- Adjust CAR base fare from \$4.00 to \$5.00, effective July 1, 2023. All other fare rules stay the same. The rider will pay 100 percent of the trip cost beyond \$19.

The following are expected impacts of these changes:

- The initial \$4 contribution encourages use of Fixed Route services over CAR where possible
- Increased fare revenue will allow program to continue to meet District's performance targets
- Riders will have an additional two CAR trips per month to support increased trip making

Volunteer Driver Reimbursement Subsidy

Proposed Changes:

- Increase volunteer driver mileage reimbursement to \$0.60/mile. This will be a 70% mileage reimbursement increase for STAR and 50% mileage reimbursement increase for TRIP compared to current rates.

The following are expected impacts of these changes:

- Higher mileage reimbursements will increase the incentives for volunteer drivers to participate in the program
- Increased incentives will encourage riders take more trips using the Volunteer Driver Programs, which are more cost-effective than paratransit or other Marin Access services
- Provides additional support for Senior/ADA riders to ask for and receive ride assistance

Table B-1: Proposed Fare Changes

Program	Current	Proposed Phase 1 (July 1, 2020)	Proposed Phase 2 (July 1, 2023)
Adult			
Adult Cash Fare	\$2.00	No change	No change
Adult Clipper Single Ride	\$1.80	No change	No change
Adult 1-Day Pass	\$5.00	No change	No change
Adult 7-Day Pass	\$20.00	Eliminate	No change
Adult 31-Day Pass	\$80.00	\$40.00	No change
Seniors 65+ / Persons with Disabilities			
S/D Cash Fare	\$1.00	No change	No change
S/D Clipper Single Ride	\$1.00	No change	No change
S/D 1-Day Pass	\$2.50	No change	No change
S/D 7-Day Pass	\$10.00	Eliminate	No change
S/D 31-Day Pass	\$25.00	\$20.00	No change
Youth Ages 5 - 18			
Youth Cash Fare	\$1.00	No change	No change
Youth Clipper Single Ride	\$1.00	No change	No change
Youth 1-Day Pass	\$2.50	No change	No change
Youth 7-Day Pass	\$10.00	Eliminate	No change
Youth 31-Day Pass	\$40.00	Eliminate	No change
6 Month Youth Pass	\$175.00	Eliminate	No change
Annual Youth Pass	\$325.00	No change	No change
Annual Youth Pass - low income	Free	No change	No change
Marin Access			
Novato Dial-A-Ride	\$2.00/\$1.00	\$4.00/\$2.00	No change
Rural Dial-A-Ride	\$2.50	\$4.00/\$2.00	No change
Paratransit - Mandated	\$2.00	\$3.00	\$4.00
Paratransit - Extended	\$2.50	\$3.00	\$4.00
Catch A Ride	Free up to \$14.00/\$18.00 ⁽¹⁾ Limit of 8 trips/month	\$4.00 + 100% of fare above \$18.00 Limit of 10 trips/month	\$5.00 + 100% of fare above \$19.00 Limit of 10 trips/ month
Volunteer Driver	No Fare - Driver reimbursement \$.35/mile or \$.40/mile West Marin	No Fare - increase driver reimbursement to \$0.60/mile	No change

Note: (1) Qualified low-income riders get an additional \$4.00 in subsidy per ride or free rides up to \$18.00.

Low-Income Fare Assistance

Low-Income Fare Scholarship program provides fare assistance to Paratransit and Catch-A-Ride passengers who qualify as low income. Income qualified paratransit riders receive up to \$40 per quarter to use for local paratransit rides or 80 rides per year. In terms of eligibility, all ADA eligible clients who are recipients of Supplemental Security Income (SSI) will be eligible to receive Paratransit low-income scholarship. Income eligibility for Catch-A-Ride service is determined based on Elder Economic Index and is self-reported. Eligible low-income riders receive an additional \$4 subsidy per trip on Catch-A-Ride.

Under current policy, fare assistance eligibility varies across these programs, and the scholarship is limited to Catch-A-Ride and Paratransit services. Additionally, the documentation required to demonstrate eligibility is inconsistent and varies across transportation services. Income disclosure in multiple instances has been a burden for many applicants, and staff believe that this requirement has prevented access to fare assistance. Staff proposes to consolidate eligibility for both programs to simplify the application process and provide a higher financial safety net for older adults and those with disabilities in financial need.

The proposed changes to low-income fare assistance program fall into two categories: eligibility and application process, and financial assistance, as listed in the following sections. Table B-2 presents a summary of current and proposed changes to the fare assistance program.

Eligibility and Application Process

- Consolidate eligibility criteria for fare assistance and make it applicable to all programs. Consistent eligibility standard improves operations, and District's ability to serve those with financial need.
- Registered Medi-Cal participants or riders with income at or below the current Elder Economic Index that correlates with their living situation will be eligible.
- Medi-Cal eligibility will be verified by the Travel Navigator team via County of Marin. Income-based eligibility for non-Medi-Cal participants will be assessed based on the applicant's income documentation.
- LIFA will be offered to all eligible applicants across Marin Access programs during the program eligibility determination process. The LIFA application and determination process can be consolidated with program eligibility, while one will not hold up the process for the other.
- LIFA eligibility will require annual renewal at the start of each calendar year. Those that qualify based on Medi-Cal eligibility will be renewed through coordination between the Travel Navigator department and the County of Marin. Those that qualify based on income will be required to provide updated income documentation each calendar year. Clients will communicate with the Travel Navigator to renew their eligibility.

Financial Assistance

Fare Assistance Credit:

- All low-income riders eligible for LIFA will receive \$20 in credit each month in phase 1 (effective July 1, 2020), and \$25 in phase 2 (effective July 1, 2023). The LIFA credit can be used toward the

base fare of all Marin Access program including Paratransit, Catch-A-Ride, Dial-A-Ride and Connect. LIFA credit cannot be applied to the balance of trip over \$18 in Catch-A-Ride service.

- LIFA credit is applied for all eligible clients on a monthly basis, to a maximum of \$240 in credit per year. The LIFA credit will not roll over annually and is reset at the start of each calendar year. The unused credit will expire at the end of each calendar year and has no cash value.
- LIFA credit cannot be applied to trips for companions and will not be reimbursed in the event of no-shows of same day cancellations. Incidents out of the rider's control will be reviewed on a case by case basis.

Fixed Route Pass:

- All LIFA eligible riders will be eligible to receive free access to Fixed Route services. Eligible clients will have to opt in to receiving the fixed route pass. Opting in includes completing a fixed route pass request form, review of a short video designed to orient the applicant on to how to use the pass and more generally how to use fixed route service, review and signature of a certification form stating that they understand the policies for use, and a usable photo that will be affixed to their Marin Access badge. Transportation to and from Marin Access orientation sessions is the responsibility of the applicant. Alternatively, applicants can use the Marin Transit website to complete the opt in process or attend a Marin Access orientation session offered on a bi-weekly basis.
- All eligible clients will receive a Marin Access badge that includes their name, Marin Access ID number, and photos that comply with the following requirements:
 - Must be current and show the applicants face in a clearly visible fashion;
 - Travel Navigators will assess the usability of photos provided; and
 - Photos will also be uploaded to the platform used for scheduling and routing to improve ability to detect fraudulent use of services.
- The fixed route pass will be renewed annually with the period of validity signified by a sticker that will be attached to the badge indicating the current year
- Clients can replace a lost Marin Access Badge only once annually at a cost of \$20. Clients who lose their badge must fill out a lost badge form and return it to the Travel Navigators. The client will need to pick up all replacement badges to verify their identity and can make alternative arrangements on a case by case basis with approval from Marin Transit staff.

The following are expected impacts of these changes:

- The new low-income eligibility threshold will significantly increase the number of riders eligible to receive LIFA fare assistance and offset any proposed increases in fares;
- A streamlined application process for Medi-Cal participants and options for documenting income will remove the burden of duplicated paperwork for riders to obtain and/or demonstrate to demonstrate LIFA eligibility;
- Replacing ticket booklets with ride credits in riders' accounts will eliminate administrative work and reduce management costs; and
- All potential LIFA eligible riders will be able to opt into multiple programs without the need for separate applications.

Table B-2: Overview of Current and Proposed Low-Income Fare Assistance Programs for Marin Access Clients

	Current Programs		Proposed LIFA
	Paratransit Fare Assistance	Catch A Ride Fare Assistance	
Program Eligibility⁽¹⁾	Marin County resident or visitor and approved for ADA service based on ability-based evaluation	Marin County resident, age 80+, or 60-79 and no longer driving -or- ADA approved	Marin County Resident, age 65+ -or- ADA approved
LIFA Eligibility Threshold	SSI Eligibility ⁽²⁾	Income Tied to Elder Economic Index ⁽³⁾	Income Tied to Elder Economic Index ⁽³⁾ or Medi-Cal Qualified
Financial Assistance	Ticket booklets valued at total of \$40 per quarter	Additional \$4 subsidy per ride (up to \$32 per month)	- \$20.00 in credit each month for use on all Demand Response programs. ⁽⁴⁾ - Monthly Pass for free access to Fixed Route.
Documentation Required to Demonstrate Eligibility	SSI Eligibility Letter	Self-Reported	- Medi-Cal status can be confirmed with County of Marin - Proof of age/address/income required (documentation can include SSI letter, AGI from federal income tax forms, recent paystubs, Marin County General Assistance Letter, etc.)
Program Applicability	Paratransit Only	Catch-A-Ride Only	Paratransit, Catch-A-Ride, and Dial-A-Ride
Process	Two 10-ticket/ride booklets mailed to participant on a quarterly basis by Travel Navigators	Additional subsidy applied at booking beyond CAR subsidy	Credit added into e-wallet account to scheduling software and applied at time of booking; Fixed Route monthly pass distribution TBD
Delivery	Paper, manual process	None - managed through Access database	None - managed through scheduling software
Eligibility Renewal	N/A	N/A	Annual

Notes:

1. Recipient of LIFA must apply and be approved for one of the Marin Access programs including ADA paratransit, Volunteer Driver, or Catch-A-Ride.
2. The income limit for SSI is the federal benefit rate (FBR), which is \$771 per month/\$9,252 annually for an individual and \$1,157 per month/\$13,884 for a couple in 2019.
3. Based on annual household income: \$22,272 / 1-person household, Owner w/o Mortgage
4. Demand Response programs include Paratransit, Catch-A-Ride, Connect, Novato Dial-A-Ride, Pt Reyes Dial-A-Ride, and Dillon Beach Dial-A-Ride.

Program Eligibility (Demand Response Programs)

To simplify and coordinate eligibility for programs targeted at older adults and persons with disabilities, staff proposes changes to the Catch-A-Ride and the Volunteer Driver programs. Table B-3 shows a summary of current and proposed changes to the fare assistance program. The proposed changes include.

- Standardize eligibility criteria across Volunteer Driver and Catch-A-Ride programs to include Marin County residents who are either 65+ or ADA eligible; and
- Proposed eligibility criteria will apply to all new applicants only, and current clients will be grandfathered into programs.

Staff expects the following results:

- Consistent and simplified eligibility criteria will make the program easier for applicants to understand and for community partners to share;
- The number of eligible riders will increase due to removing the 80+ age limit and the “no longer driving” criteria from Catch-A-Ride eligibility; and
- New streamlined eligibility criteria will encourage seniors to consider "giving up the keys" earlier by educating them about their transportation options before they lose their ability to drive.

Table B-3: Overview of Demand Response Program Current and Proposed Eligibility

Demand Response Program Eligibility	Existing Eligibility Criteria	Proposed Eligibility Criteria
Local Paratransit (mandated and extended)	Marin County resident or visitor and approved for ADA service based on ability-based evaluation	No Change
Volunteer Driver Reimbursement Programs (STAR & TRIP)	Marin County resident, age 60+ -or- ADA approved	Marin County Resident, age 65+ ⁽¹⁾ -or- ADA approved
Catch A Ride	Marin County resident, age 80+, or 60-79 and no longer driving -or- ADA approved	Marin County Resident, age 65+ -or- ADA approved
Marin Transit Connect Dial-A-Ride	None (General Public Services)	No Change

Notes:

1. Existing clients are grandfathered into program. New eligibility criteria apply to all new applicants.

The process for adoption of the fare and eligibility policy changes includes the public comment period. Staff will also prepare a Title VI fare equity analysis for the Board of Directors to review.