



**MEMORANDUM
PUBLIC WORKS
TRANSIT DIVISION**
County of Placer

TO: Honorable Board of Supervisors **DATE:** October 26, 2021
FROM: Ken Grehm, Director of Public Works
BY: Jaime Wright, Public Works Manager
SUBJECT: Tahoe Truckee Area Regional Transit / Approval of Extended Free to the Rider Bus Service Pilot

ACTION REQUESTED

Approve the continued implementation of free to the rider bus service on Placer County's Tahoe Truckee Area Regional Transit public bus system for a second two-year period beginning December 12, 2021.

BACKGROUND

On November 19, 2019, your Board approved the implementation of a free to the rider bus service beginning December 12, 2019, on Tahoe Truckee Area Regional Transit (TART). Placer County Transient Occupancy Tax (TOT) funds in the amount up to \$500,000 were allocated to cover the free fares on Placer County TART service for two-years.

Prior to the approval of free to the rider pilot service, TART had averaged \$416,500 in fare collections per year over the previous five years. About 30% or approximately \$125,000 of that annual fare revenue has come from the large resorts in the area that paid the fares for their employees. The proposal for free to the rider bus service included a commitment from the resorts to maintain that same level of funding. This arrangement has proven to be successful and resort partners have committed to continue funding free to the rider transit service in lieu of purchasing employee fares/passes.

Resort partners contributing throughout the initial pilot period include Northstar California in the amount of \$63,696, Palisades Tahoe/Alpine Meadows in the amount of \$73,637, Homewood Mountain Resort in the amount of \$14,201 and the Squaw Village Neighborhood Co. in the amount of \$13,249.

In addition to large resort partners, Placer County was successful in partnering with Washoe County Regional Transportation Commission who contributed approximately \$96,000 with the elimination of fare recovery within Incline Village and Crystal Bay, Nevada. Placer County was also successful in partnering with the Truckee Tahoe Airport District (TTAD) who contributed \$243,850 and the Town of Truckee who contributed \$35,420 throughout the initial pilot period.

With the success of these funding partnerships coupled with the impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic, the cost allocated to TOT for the initial two-year pilot period will be approximately \$387,007.

Honorable Board of Supervisors

October 26, 2021

Tahoe Truckee Area Regional Transit / Approval of Extended Free to the Rider Bus Service Pilot

Page 2

Free to the rider bus was extremely successful with a 20% ridership increase in January 2020 and a 48% ridership increase in February 2020 compared to the prior year. Unfortunately, the unforeseen impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic did not allow the free to rider pilot program to fully demonstrate its potential.

The TART Systems Plan, adopted by the Board of Supervisors in April 2016, included implementation of free to the rider bus service in the Financially Unconstrained Service Plan and it was envisioned that this would be funded using Placer County TOT funds to replace fares collected from passengers. Free to the rider bus service is also part of the Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) reduction strategies in the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency Regional Transportation Plan and Tahoe Basin Area Plan. Continued pilot program success would be measured by increased ridership, which translates to VMT reduction and air quality improvement.

The TART Systems Plan, among other studies, have shown that the North Lake Tahoe region falls far behind competitor mountain resort areas in transit level of service provided to transport its employees and visitors. This and the related regional traffic challenges are perceived as a competitive disadvantage by local businesses. Transit remains a key factor to the success of the region's major ski resorts who have taken steps to fund free shuttles for employees and visitors and are committed to continuing to assist in offsetting a portion of TART fares.

Other benefits to free fares include the simplification and speeding of the passenger boarding process. This has resulted in less dwell time at bus stops and better schedule adherence for TART.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

The proposed action is not a project as defined by Public Resources Code Section 21065, CEQA guideline 15378(b) and is therefore not subject to CEQA.

FISCAL IMPACT

Continuing the implementation of free to the rider bus service for a second two-year term would require a maximum of \$460,000 over two years when accounting for the likely growth in ridership resulting from free fares. FY 2021-22 funding for free to the rider bus service has been budgeted within the Lake Tahoe Tourism and Promotions budget, pending Board approval of the continued implementation of free to the rider bus service. TART will continue to see a savings of approximately \$12,000 per year by not having to manage fare collection, banking and farebox maintenance.

ATTACHMENTS

None