



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

TO: Honorable Board of Supervisors **DATE:** August 9, 2022
FROM: Ken Grehm, Director of Public Works
BY: Will Garner, Deputy Director
SUBJECT: Authorize an Agreement with Sierra Joint Community College District to fund Free Fares for Students

ACTION REQUESTED

Approve and authorize the Director of Public Works, or designee, to execute an agreement with the Sierra Joint Community College District for the County to receive partial reimbursement for providing fareless transit service to Sierra College students for three years through June 30, 2025.

BACKGROUND

In 2019, Placer County coordinated with the Placer County Transportation Planning Agency (PCTPA) and Sierra College to develop a free fare program for Sierra College students that was planned to be voted on by the student body in March of 2020. Because of the Covid-19 pandemic, the vote was cancelled, and the plans were put on hold. Late in 2021, staff began discussions again with PCTPA and Sierra College to establish a pilot program with funding participation from Sierra College.

A plan was developed to begin the fareless transit program for Sierra College students beginning in the Fall semester of 2022. If approved, Sierra College will reimburse Placer County Transit (PCT), Roseville Transit and Auburn Transit 50% of the cost of lost fare revenue for providing free boardings to Sierra College students. In addition, Sierra College is considering a partnership with well-known ride hailing companies to provide reduced fares for hours after public transit goes out of service. Instead of the funding coming from student fees as proposed in 2019, the college would use their own operational funding to support the program. For all of the programs, Sierra College is budgeting approximately \$200,000 per year and the Western Placer Consolidated Transportation Services Agency is budgeting \$200,000 to support the ride hailing program.

Ridership on PCT fixed route service is down 47% from pre-pandemic ridership. Prior to the pandemic, Sierra College students represented 26% of ridership on PCT fixed route service. While ridership continues to recover, it is expected to take two or three years to reach previous levels. With Sierra College beginning to bring more students back to campus in the upcoming year, and in a time of unprecedented gas prices, this program provides a good opportunity to recover ridership on our public transit services. The goal is to increase ridership and provide a useful service to Sierra College students and potentially present a measure to the student body to consider funding the program for a longer period of time.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

The proposed action is administrative activities for funding and are therefore not projects

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pursuant to California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines section 15378 and are exempt under section 15061(b)(3). The proposed actions are also statutorily exempt from CEQA pursuant to Public Resources Code section 21080(b)(10).

FISCAL IMPACT

Under the assumption that ridership returns to pre-pandemic levels, plus additional ridership induced by free fares for students, the lost fare revenue to Placer County Transit is estimated to average \$126,800 per year. Under the proposed agreement, Sierra College would pay the County 50% of the fare revenue, which is \$63,400 per year. Under existing funding formulas, our partner cities would fund approximately 21% at \$26,300 per year. The remaining 29%, or \$37,100 would be absorbed by the Placer County Transit Fund. Placer County Transit is receiving an enhanced amount of Federal Transit Administration funding from three different Coronavirus relief packages that will provide enough to cover the loss in fare revenue. In the long term, if the student free fare program is successful and continues, a measure would be placed in front of the Sierra College student body to fund the program through an additional fee placed on the students. This proposed action will not impact the FY 2022-23 Placer County Transit Budget and does not require PCT to provide additional hours of service. There is no impact to the General Fund.

ATTACHMENTS

None

On File with Clerk of the Board: Agreement with Sierra Joint Community College District