



REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

Metropolitan Planning • Public Transportation & Operations • Engineering & Construction

Metropolitan Planning Organization of Washoe County, Nevada

January 15, 2021

AGENDA ITEM 3.4

TO: Regional Transportation Commission

FROM: James Gee
Manager of Service Planning
and Innovation

Bill Thomas, AICP
Executive Director

SUBJECT: Guidelines for Free Transit Fares

RECOMMENDATION

Approve staff recommendation outlining guidelines for providing free fares on RTC’s transit services.

SUMMARY

RTC’s fare policies and guidelines are addressed in a number of documents, including RTC Management Policy P-12, Public Transportation Fares. Along with the regular fare schedule, the RTC has historically allowed free fares either on specific routes or system-wide for promotional purposes. This document sets forth guidance to provide consistency for the usage of free fares.

FISCAL IMPACT

The fiscal impact for providing one day of free fares system-wide (pre-COVID-19) is approximately \$8,000 – \$10,000. This impact is offset indirectly by the value of earned media associated with the promotion of the free fare program. The fiscal impact for providing free fares on a single route or group of routes is dependent on the ridership for the specific routes.

PREVIOUS ACTIONS BY BOARD

May 21, 2018 Approval of RTC Management Policy P-12 – Public Transportation Fares

ADDITIONAL BACKGROUND

RTC’s fare policies and guidelines are addressed in a number of documents including the Short Range Transit Program (SRTP), the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) and RTC Management Policy P-12, Public Transportation Fares. In developing fare policy, the RTC Board and staff follow the four objectives contained in RTC Management Policy P-12: (1) ensure the availability of affordable public transportation; (2) provide for equity among public transportation services and

passenger categories; (3) provide a strong incentive for transit use to combat region-wide congestion, air pollution and fuel consumption; and (4) achieve RTC performance standards for farebox recovery to offset system operating costs.

As part of its current fare policy, RTC provides free fares to:

- Children under age 6 (when accompanied by an adult when that person pays the appropriate fare);
- RTC Employees, RTC Commissioners, employees of Keolis, and Citizens Multimodal Advisory Committee members; and
- Personal Care Attendants on ACCESS (as required by ADA regulations).

In addition to the regular fare structure, the RTC Commissioners or its Executive Director have the ability to establish special fares or waive fares at their discretion, including free fares for special events. Below are the special events in 2019 and 2020 for which RTC provided free fares or services.

Event	Notes
St. Patrick's Day	Partial Day System-wide
Earth Day	System-wide
Dump the Pump Day	System-wide (APTA event)
Star Spangled Sparks	Shuttle service
Garlic Fest	Shuttle service
Pride Day	System-wide
Hot August Nights	Specific routes
Rib Cook Off	Shuttle service
Reno Air Races	Specific routes
Election Day	System-wide
Veterans Day	System-wide
New Year's Eve	Partial Day System-wide

In addition to the regular fare structure, the RTC Commissioners or its Executive Director have the ability to establish special fares or waive fares at their discretion. This decision must follow the guidelines established by the federal government as a condition for receiving federal dollars. Below are some of the applicable regulations to be considered when establishing a free fare or special service.

1. Charter Regulations

- a. Recipients are prohibited from using FTA-funded equipment and facilities to provide charter service.
- b. The regulations define charter service as follows:
 - i. Transportation provided at the request of a third party for the exclusive use of a bus or van for a negotiated price. The following features may be characteristics of charter service:
 1. A third party pays a negotiated price for the group
 2. Any fares charged to individual members of the group are collected by a third party

3. The service is not part of the regularly scheduled service or is offered for a limited period of time
4. A third party determines the origin and destination of the trip as well as scheduling
- ii. Transportation provided to the public for events or functions that occur on an irregular basis or for a limited duration and:
 1. A premium fare is charged that is greater than the usual or customary fixed-route fare, or
 2. The service is paid for in whole or in part by a third party
- c. The charter regulations include exemptions for specific activities. Exemptions applicable to the RTC are:
 - i. Transportation of employees, contractors, and government officials for the purpose of inspection and oversight functions of transit facilities
 - ii. Emergency preparedness planning and operation
 - iii. Emergency response

2. Americans with Disabilities Act Regulations

- a. Each public entity operating a fixed-route system shall provide paratransit or other special service to individuals with disabilities that is comparable to the level of service provided to individuals without disabilities who use the fixed route system.
- b. The fare for a trip charged to an ADA paratransit eligible rider cannot exceed twice the fare that would be charged to an individual paying full fare (i.e., without regard for discounts) for a similar trip on the agency's fixed route system.
- c. Any reduction in the system-wide fares for RTC RIDE should apply to all of RTC's service offerings (RTC Regional Connector, RTC FlexRIDE, RTC RAPID, and RTC ACCESS).

3. Half Fare Requirements

- a. For fixed-route service, fares charged seniors, persons with disabilities, or an individual presenting a Medicare card during off peak hours will not be more than one half the peak hour fares.
- b. If there are services such as neighborhood circulator and shuttle services with fares that are different from the recipient's fare for its regular local service, separate half fares are needed for each type of service.

4. Title VI Regulations

- a. All promotional or special fares are exempt from Public Participation Policy and Title VI requirements if the duration of the change in fares is less than six months
- b. If the fare change exceeds six months, then RTC will follow its established public participation process including performing a Title VI fare analysis.

Types of Permissible Free Fares

1. Service Changes

- a. Free or reduced fares may be provided in support of service changes either on specific routes or system-wide.

- b. Free or reduced fares may also be provided to promote the availability of specific brands of service.

2. Special Events / Public Relations

- a. For special community events associated with a generally accepted holiday, free or reduced fares may be provided system-wide for a portion of the day or entire day.
- b. For community events at a specific venue, fares should be reduced for only the individual routes serving the venue for a portion of the day or entire day.
- c. Fares may be reduced or eliminated for multi-day events if appropriate.
- d. Fares may be reduced or waived for other promotions such as APTA or RTC sponsored events.

3. Ridership Campaigns

- a. Campaigns to build ridership can include either a system-wide free fare day or be effective on specific routes.
- b. Campaigns may be associated with attracting a specific demographic group to try public transit or to encourage ridership at a specific job or residential site.

4. Community Needs

- a. Fares may be waived due to community disasters or emergencies.

Recommended Free Fare Days

The following free fare events are recommended due to their positive impact on the community. These events demonstrate RTC's willingness to be a good community steward and generate overwhelmingly positive feedback from the community.

1. St. Patrick's Day
2. Election Day
3. Veterans Day
4. New Year's Eve
5. Safety / Vision Zero promotional event

In addition to the days above, as contained in RTC Management Policy P-12, Public Transportation Fares, the RTC Commissioners or its Executive Director have the ability to establish special fares or waive fares at their discretion. This decision must follow the guidelines established by the federal government outlined above.

ADVISORY COMMITTEE(S) REPORT

There are no advisory committee recommendations pertaining to this agenda item.