

Committee Report

Transportation Committee



Committee meeting date: July 14, 2025

For the Metropolitan Council: July 23, 2025

Business Item: 2025-171

Free Regular Route Rides for Certified Metro Mobility Customers

Proposed action

That the Metropolitan Council establish free (\$0.00) fares on regional regular route services for certified Metro Mobility customers retroactive to June 14, 2025, as directed by the legislature.

Summary of Transportation Committee discussion/questions

Metropolitan Transportation Services Contracted Transit Service Manager John Harper presented this item and considerable discussion followed.

Councilmember Tyrone Carter asked about how people become certified for Metro Mobility. Harper shared the high-level requirements of process for becoming certified. People are generally eligible for certification if they have a disability, either physical or cognitive, that prevents them from using regular transit service at least some of the time. He stressed that Metro Mobility adheres to specific requirements and process defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Councilmember Osman asked how many people use Metro Mobility services. Harper responded that Metro Mobility delivers approximately 2.2 million trips per year. Harper and MTS Executive Director Carlson shared that the free ride initiative accomplishes goals of increasing customers' spontaneity and freedom of travel because they are not required to schedule regular route trips in advance and improving Metro Mobility as a whole by freeing up limited vehicle and driver resources and reducing the overall program cost.

Councilmember Cameron asked about how many Metro Mobility customers used regular route service during the \$0 fare pilot and the impact on the ADA and non-ADA Metro Mobility service areas. Harper stated in 2024, there were 70k trips and 2025 is projected to yield 90k trips. He went on to say that capacity limitations are felt most acutely in the non-ADA area so that area should reap the greatest service quality and availability improvements harvested by this initiative.

Cameron asked about the funding and Carlson explained there is no specific funding source to cover the fare that would have been paid by riders included in this change, so the financial impact is absorbed by regular route service providers.

Motion by Carter, Toni, seconded by Obisakin. Motion carried, consent to Council.

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District(s), member(s):	All
Policy/legal reference:	FM 12-2 Transit Fare Policy Changes Policy and FM 12-2a Transportation Service Fare Policy Changes Procedure, FTA Circular 4702.1B, Minnesota Statutes section 473.408
Staff prepared/presented:	Gerri Sutton, Director Contracted Transit Services, MTS (651) 602-1672 Charles Carlson, Executive Director MTS (651) 602-1761
Division/department:	Metropolitan Transportation Services

Proposed action

That the Metropolitan Council establish free (\$0.00) fares on regional regular route services for certified Metro Mobility customers retroactive to June 14, 2025, as directed by the legislature.

Background

Minnesota Statutes section 473.408 requires the Metropolitan Council to establish and enforce transit fare policy, including a requirement to charge a base transit fare.

The 2023 Transportation Omnibus Bill established a free fare pilot program in 2023 and 2024 that included a requirement for free rides on regular route buses and trains for certified customers with a disability or health condition that qualifies them for Metro Mobility services. The pilot program ended on December 31, 2024, with nearly 75,000 rides by certified Metro Mobility riders.

On November 14, 2024, the Council approved business item 2024-304 implementing a pilot program establishing a nominal one-cent fare on regular route services for Metro Mobility certified customers from January 1, 2025, through June 30, 2025. The reduced pilot fare enabled time for the legislature to receive fare pilot reporting and to determine any statutory fare system direction.

The Governor's 2025 state budget proposal included a Metropolitan Council initiative to require free rides on regular route services for certified Metro Mobility customers. The 2025 Transportation Omnibus Bill included this provision. On June 13, 2025, the governor signed the bill into law; the provision became effective on June 14, 2025. Fare systems were immediately updated to reflect the new fare.

Council action is required to approve this fare policy change to be consistent with state law.

Rationale

Council approval is required for permanent fare changes. Because the change is a fare reduction and is required by state law, a public hearing process is not recommended.

Thrive lens analysis

On Feb. 12, 2025, the Council adopted Imagine 2050, which builds on policy direction in Thrive MSP 2040. Under the Thrive lens, this action promotes equity and stewardship by providing reduced cost transportation for riders who have a certified disability or health condition.

Funding

The recommendation proposes fare adjustments for services operated by all regional transit providers.

Small business inclusion

This request is for Council Approval of fare policy and fare changes and does not directly impact small businesses.

