



Council Agenda Report

Department: Public Works
Cost Center: 5201
For Agenda of: 9/3/2024
Placement: Consent
Estimated Time: N/A

FROM: Matt Horn, Public Works Director
Prepared By: Alex Fuchs, Mobility Services Business Manager

SUBJECT: ADOPT A RESOLUTION APPROVING SLO TRANSIT TO PROVIDE FARE-FREE TRANSIT DURING RIDESHARE WEEK

RECOMMENDATION

Adopt a Draft Resolution entitled, “A Resolution of the City Council of the City of San Luis Obispo, California, approving San Luis Obispo (SLO) Transit to provide Fare-Free Transit during Rideshare Week.”

POLICY CONTEXT

SLO Regional Rideshare is a division of the San Luis Obispo Council of Governments (SLOCOG) that is dedicated to reducing the number of single occupant vehicles used for commuting by encouraging use of transit, biking, vanpool, and carpooling. The City of San Luis Obispo is a partner agency of SLOCOG and works closely to promote sustainable transportation through a variety of programs and events. This partnership directly supports the City’s Major City Goal of Sustainable Transportation, the Climate Action Plan, and multiple policies and programs of the City’s General Plan Circulation Element¹.

DISCUSSION

Background

SLOCOG holds an annual event during the first full week of October called Rideshare Week aimed at promoting sustainable transportation methods to reduce traffic congestion and to improve air quality. Prior to the pandemic, participating transit agencies, including SLO Transit, offered fare-free transit during Rideshare Week. The costs of providing fare-free services were reimbursed by SLOCOG via grant funding. Fare-free transit has not been part of Rideshare week since 2020 as agencies focused on adjusting operations in response to the pandemic.

¹ Policy 2.1.3 – Work-based Trip Reduction – The City shall encourage employers within the city limits and work with the county to work with employers outside of the city limits to participate in trip reduction programs.
Program 2.2.1 – Agency Cooperation – In coordination with county agencies, the City shall support efforts in establishing county-wide trip reduction programs.
Policy 7.1.1 – Peak Hour and Daily Traffic – The City shall cooperate with County and State government to institute programs that reduce the levels of peak-hour and daily vehicle traffic.

In July 2024, SLOCOG notified City staff that a recommendation would be presented to their board on August 14 seeking approval to pilot a week of fare-free transit during this year's Rideshare Week (October 7-11, 2024) and to coordinate with transit operators on public outreach and promotion. Attachment B is a copy of the SLOCOG staff report. SLOCOG's board approved the recommendation as well as the use of Low Carbon Transit Operations Program (LCTOP) funds to fully offset the cost of offering fare-free transit.

Rideshare Week is a great opportunity for the City to promote use of transit and other forms of sustainable transportation. The recommendation of this report is for Council to adopt a Resolution (Attachment A) approving SLO Transit to provide fare-free transit during Rideshare Week this year and in future years provided SLOCOG has funding allocated to reimburse transit agencies for costs associated with offering fare-free transit. If approved, Mobility Services staff will coordinate with SLOCOG and other participating transit agencies on promotion of the event, report ridership activity, and reimbursement of associated costs after completion of the event.

Previous Council or Advisory Body Action

Even though SLO Transit participated in past Rideshare Week events including offering fare-free transit services, staff did not find record of previous related Council action(s).

Public Engagement

Rideshare Week and fare-free transit promotion will be coordinated between the participating agencies and advertised on social media, radio, print publications, and in Rideshare's newsletter that is distributed to over 16,000 commuters, employers, and residents. Surveys will also be distributed to passengers and ridership data will be collected from transit operators at the conclusion of the campaign to evaluate the impact on ridership.

CONCURRENCE

SLOCOG staff concurs with the recommended action of this report.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) does not apply to the recommended action in this report, because the action does not constitute a "Project" under CEQA Guidelines Sec. 15378.

FISCAL IMPACT

Budgeted: N/A
Funding Identified: Yes

Budget Year: N/A

Fiscal Analysis:

Funding Sources	Total Budget Available	Current Funding Request	Remaining Balance	Annual Ongoing Cost
Transit Fund	\$ 0	\$ 0	\$ 0	\$ 0
State				
Federal				
Fees				
Other:				
Total	\$ 0	\$ 0	\$ 0	\$ 0

There is no fiscal impact to the Transit Fund. SLOCOG will reimburse the City to fully offset costs associated with offering fare-free transit during Rideshare Week.

ALTERNATIVES

Council could decide not to approve SLO Transit providing fare-free transit during Rideshare Week. This action is not recommended by staff because Rideshare Week is a great opportunity to promote use of transit and other forms of sustainable transportation. Participating in Rideshare Week also aligns with multiple City policies and programs.

ATTACHMENTS

- A - Draft Resolution approving SLO Transit to provide fare-free transit during Rideshare Week
- B - August 14, 2024 - B-5 Rideshare Week Fare-Free Transit Pilot staff report

RESOLUTION NO. _____ (2024 SERIES)

A RESOLUTION OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF SAN LUIS OBISPO, CALIFORNIA, APPROVING SAN LUIS OBISPO (SLO) TRANSIT TO PROVIDE FARE-FREE TRANSIT DURING RIDESHARE WEEK

WHEREAS, Climate Action, Open Space and Sustainable Transportation is a Major City Goal; and

WHEREAS, SLO Regional Rideshare, a division of the San Luis Obispo Council of Governments (SLOCOG), operates programs to promote use of sustainable transportation modes, to reduce fuel consumption, and to improve air quality; and

WHEREAS, one of the programs managed by SLOCOG is Rideshare Week which takes place the first full week of each October and encourages people to commute using transit, biking, carpool, and vanpool instead of driving alone; and

WHEREAS, the City of San Luis Obispo and San Luis Obispo (SLO) Transit are partner agencies of SLOCOG and participate in their programs and events including Rideshare Week; and

WHEREAS, prior to 2020, SLO Transit offered fare-free transit during Rideshare Week and costs associated with providing fare-free transit was fully offset by SLOCOG via grant funding; and

WHEREAS, SLOCOG is interested in offering fare-free transit during Rideshare Week taking place October 7-11, 2024; and

WHEREAS, on August 14, 2024, SLOCOG's board approved a pilot week of fare-free transit during Rideshare Week and use of Low Carbon Transportation Operations Program (LCTOP) funds to offset cost of participating transit agencies that offer fare-free transit; and

WHEREAS, SLO Transit's participation in Rideshare Week and providing fare-free transit during the event is a great opportunity to encourage use of transit by commuters as a sustainable transportation mode; and

WHEREAS, SLO Transit wishes to provide fare-free transit during the Rideshare Week event this year and in future years provided SLOCOG has funding allocated to reimburse the City for costs associated with offering fare-free transit.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Council of the City of San Luis Obispo does hereby approve SLO Transit to provide fare-free transit during Rideshare Week as follows:

R _____

SECTION 1. Approval. The City Council of the City of San Luis Obispo does hereby:

1. Approve SLO Transit to provide fare-free transit during Rideshare Week this year and in future years so long as SLOCOG has funding allocated to reimburse the City for costs associated with offering fare-free transit; and
2. Authorize staff to coordinate marketing, outreach, and promotion of Rideshare Week with SLOCOG and other participating transit agencies; and
3. Authorize staff to seek reimbursement from SLOCOG to offset costs associated with providing fare-free transit during Rideshare Week.

Upon motion of Council Member _____, seconded by Council Member _____, and on the following roll call vote:

AYES:
 NOES:
 ABSENT:

The foregoing resolution was adopted this _____ day of _____ 2024.

 Mayor Erica A. Stewart

ATTEST:

 Teresa Purrington
 City Clerk

APPROVED AS TO FORM:

 J. Christine Dietrick
 City Attorney

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and affixed the official seal of the City of San Luis Obispo, California, on _____.

 Teresa Purrington
 City Clerk

R _____

SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS

STAFF REPORT

MEETING DATE: AUGUST 14, 2024

ITEM B-5

SUBJECT: Rideshare Week Fare-Free Transit Pilot

STAFF CONTACT: Mallory Jenkins

SUMMARY

This report seeks approval from the SLOCOG Board to pilot a week of fare-free transit during Rideshare Week (October 7-11, 2024) and coordinate with transit operators on public outreach and promotion.

Currently, over \$1M of Low Carbon Transit Operations Program (LCTOP) funds are programmed to provide free public transit during construction of the U.S. 101 South County managed lane project. If approved by the SLOCOG Board, up to \$30k of these funds will be used for early implementation of the pilot during Rideshare Week, to offset the loss of farebox revenue otherwise collected from paying riders (excluding students and riders over 80). The Rideshare Week promotion will allow staff to evaluate the impact of free transit on ridership and public perception while identifying challenges prior to starting construction of the managed lane project.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff: Approve Rideshare Week Fare-Free Transit pilot using up to \$30k of budgeted Low Carbon Transit Operations Program (LCTOP) funds and direct staff to coordinate with transit operators on outreach and promotions

SSTAC: Support staff recommendation

TTAC: Support staff recommendation

CTAC: Support staff recommendation

DISCUSSION

In April 2024, the SLOCOG Board approved the current Low Carbon Transit Operations Program (LCTOP) program of projects, which included funding for free public transit during construction of the U.S. 101 South County managed lane project, to help alleviate congestion during the construction. This report seeks approval to implement the pilot during Rideshare Week (October 7-11, 2024) and coordinate with fixed-route transit operators (RTA, SLO Transit, and Morro Bay Transit) on public outreach and promotion of the pilot project.

Rideshare Week is an annual event aimed at promoting alternative transportation methods to reduce traffic congestion and improve air quality across the state. The campaign is promoted regionally by SLOCOG's Rideshare division. Held in early October, the initiative encourages commuters to try carpooling, taking public transit, biking, walking, or telecommuting instead of driving alone. Participants can join various activities, contests, and incentives organized by local agencies and employers to raise awareness about the benefits of ridesharing. By highlighting the convenience and sustainability of shared transportation options, California Rideshare Week strives to foster long-term behavioral changes that contribute to a greener and more efficient transportation system.

Staff are proposing to pilot free transit on fixed routes during Rideshare Week. Regular fares would still apply on all dial-a-rides and Runabout services. The pilot will allow staff to evaluate the impact on transit ridership and public perception while identifying challenges early, prior to starting construction of the managed lane project. The fare-free week will be advertised on social media, radio, print publications/newspapers, and in the Rideshare newsletter that is distributed to over 16,000 commuters, employers, and residents. Surveys will also be distributed to passengers and ridership data will be collected from transit operators at the conclusion of the campaign to evaluate the impact on ridership.

Public transit is an extremely efficient way to get people around and access to transit services is a critical component to ensuring mobility for all. Fare-free transit reduces barriers by not requiring advance purchase of a pass or needing an exact cash fare. Fare-free transit was previously included as part of the 2019 (and prior) Rideshare Week campaign(s) but was paused during pandemic years. The current availability of LCTOP funding fully offsets the loss of passenger fares associated with free service and provides a new opportunity to pilot fare-free transit promotion post-pandemic while collecting data on its impact.

Staff recommends using budgeted LCTOP funds to offer fare-free transit during Rideshare Week through coordination with transit operators on marketing and outreach. Additionally, staff will draft a policy and work with operators to mitigate potential negative impacts to the rider experience such as those who board without a destination, carry excess personal belongings, etc. All three of the fixed-route transit operators including SLO RTA, SLO Transit, and Morro Bay Transit have expressed their interest and support for the promotion, so long as funding is available to offset the cost of providing free service. SLO Transit's (City of San Luis Obispo Transit) participation is tentative, pending City Council's approval at their September 3rd meeting.

Examples of fare-free transit promotions:

FREE FARE DAYS
AUG 10-19

Hop on. Ride free to The Fair and everywhere.*

**Well, almost everywhere. The only exception is Route 80X to Mount Vernon.*

WTA
RideWTA.com

TURLOCK TRANSIT

Ride FREE

July 2019:
No fares,
no cost, no hassle.
Just hop on the
bus and ride!

WHY DRIVE RIDE for FREE!

When you can

Fare-free rides & 7-day service make it easy to leave the car behind! Skip the parking hassles, save money & the environment with ACC Transit.

For your safety, buses are sanitized frequently, masks are required and you can see how many people are on each bus in real-time through the myStop app.

myStop® for live bus tracking

Visit accgov.com/transit for information