

SMART Board of Directors Meeting

Agenda Item 10: Youth and Seniors Free Fare Program



Youth & Senior Free Fare Program

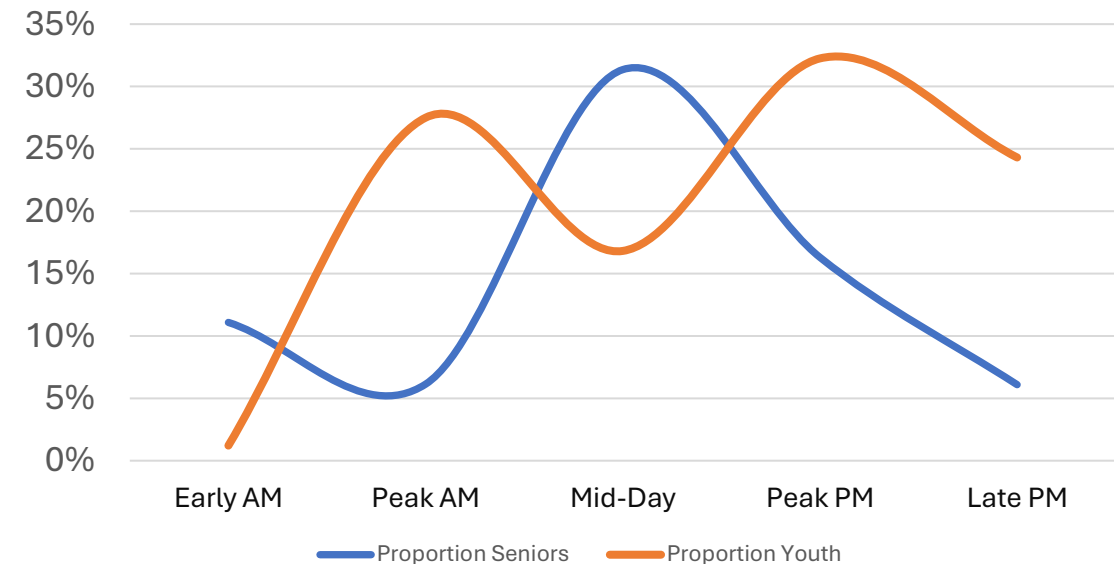
- Fare free program approved by Board in Dec 2023; 15-month pilot from April 2024 to June 2025
- Youth (ages 0-18) and seniors (over 65) have been fare-free for 1 year
- To evaluate the effectiveness of the program, boardings by youth and seniors in March 2025 were compared to March 2024
- Staff conducted manual counts on 57 weekday and 27 weekend trips



Youth & Senior Ridership

- In March 2025, seniors made up 17% and youth made up 26% of total SMART riders, a 103% increase over March 2024
 - Weekday: 16% Seniors, 25% Youth
 - Weekend: 20% Seniors, 28% Youth
- Overall ridership up 43% (March '24 to March '25)
 - Seniors +71%
 - Youth +130%
 - Adults +11%
- The program has increased the share of youth and seniors onboard SMART from 21% to 42%, which mirrors the population share of youth and seniors in Marin and Sonoma Counties (42%)

Proportions of Senior and Youth by Time Period



Fiscal Impact

- The estimated FY25 financial impact of the program is \$365,000 in lost fare revenues
 - Estimate assumes no free fare program & discounted fare received from all youth and senior riders
 - SMART is currently on track to meet farebox revenue projections for FY25
- Investment per Passenger Mile (IPPM), reflects the value of the longer distances traveled on a regional service like SMART; the average passenger trip length is 21 miles
 - IPPM divides operating cost, less any fare revenue, by passenger miles traveled
- In FY24, the IPPM was \$1.81, the lowest for any transit agency in Sonoma or Marin Counties
- In FY25, the increase in passenger miles traveled outweighs the reduction in fare revenue and decreases the estimated IPPM from \$1.90 to \$1.60 per passenger mile.

Scenario	FY25 Operating	Ridership	Avg Fare	Fare Revenue	PMT	IPPM	Farebox
10% Increase	\$38,000,000	880,000	\$2.81	\$2,472,800	18,744,000	\$1.90	6.5%
FY25 Estimate	\$38,000,000	1,050,000	\$2.10	\$2,205,000	22,365,000	\$1.60	5.8%

Recommendation

- Based on the doubling of youth and senior ridership on SMART since program initiation, and the return on investment per passenger mile traveled, staff recommend the renewal of the fare-free program for youth and seniors for FY25-FY26.
- If renewed, continuation of the program will take effect on July 1, with approval of the FY25-FY26 Budget.





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