

MEMORANDUM

January 21, 2020

TO: Transportation and Environment Committee
Education and Culture Committee

FROM: Glenn Orlin, ^{Go} Senior Analyst

SUBJECT: Kids Ride Free Program

PURPOSE: Update¹

Those expected to attend this worksession include:

Christopher Conklin, Director, Department of Transportation (DOT)
Dan Hibbert, Chief, Division of Transit Services, DOT
Phil McLaughlin, Chief of Planning and Implementation, Division of Transit Services, DOT
Todd Watkins, Director of Transportation, Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS)

Elementary and secondary school students who are Montgomery County residents may ride any Ride On bus and most Metrobus routes² within the county without paying a fare. The student must show the bus operator either a Youth Cruiser SmarTrip card or a valid school ID. When the program was established in FY07 the “free” hours were 2:00-7:00pm weekdays; they were extended to 8:00pm weekdays starting in FY15. There are two elements to the cost of Kids Ride Free. One is the foregone revenue to Ride On due to students who are using Ride On already but under the program are riding for free. The other is a reimbursement to WMATA for its foregone revenue on Metrobuses.

Early last year Councilmember Glass recommended expanding the program to all bus service hours. DOT estimated the added net cost of expanding the program to all hours (effective July 2019) was \$1,010,770. Ultimately the Council incorporated the cost (and foregone revenue) of this program expansion in the Approved FY20 Operating Budget, effective July 2019.

Councilmember Glass has requested a status report on this program expansion. DOT has reported the following findings based on the experience during the first six months of FY20, compared to the first six months of FY19. DOT staff will also have a PowerPoint presentation for the worksession.

¹ Key words: #KidsRideFree, plus search terms Ride On, Metrobus, transit.

² Metrobus Routes C2, C4, C8, D5, F4, J1, J2, J3, J4, K6, K9, L8, Q2, Q4, Q6, T2, Y2, Y7, Y8, Z2, Z6, Z7, Z8, and Z11.

1. **Kids riding free before July 1, 2019 and after July 1, 2019 to December 30, 2019**
 - Before the program expansion, 657,543 kids rode free for the first six months of FY19 (July-December 2018), or about 110,000 per month. 1,029,735 kids rode free during the same six-month period a year later (July-December 2019) or about 172,000 per month. This represents a 57% increase in this fare category.
 - Kids represented 6.2% of all Ride On customers for the first six months of FY19. They represent 9.6% of all customers for the first six months of FY20.
 - Assuming all else equal, Ride On ridership would be down 2.2% through the first six months of the fiscal year if not for the Kids Ride Free expansion.

2. **WMATA kids riding free before July 1, 2019 and after to December 30, 2019**
 - 236,469 kids rode free during the first six months of FY19, or about 39,000 per month. 356,180 kids rode free during the first six months of FY20, or about 59,000 per month. This represents a 51% increase in this fare category.
 - This is just about what was projected for the expanded Kids Ride Free program for WMATA in Montgomery County.

3. **Time of day riding before and after on Ride On and Metrobus**
 - Ride On: For the first half of FY19 about two-thirds of the riders in the Kids Ride Free category rode between 2:00-8:00pm. 48% of the kids during the Kids Ride Free window rode between 2:00-4:00pm, representing school commute trips. 33% rode between 4:00-6:00pm, representing extracurricular activity trips. 19% rode between 6:00-8:00pm, representing discretionary trips. One-third of the riders recorded as Kids Ride Free rode at other times with 18% of those riders riding between 9:00am-2:00pm.
 - Ride On: For the first half of FY20 nearly 60% of the riders used the program between 2:00-8:00pm with a very similar ratio of riders using the service for commute trips, extracurricular trips and discretionary trips. 23% of those recorded as Kids Ride Free rode between 9:00am-2:00pm.
 - Ride On: There has been a 37% increase in Kids Ride Free between the hours of 2:00-8:00pm and a 94% increase at all other times. This could suggest that many of the kids that were riding after school formerly are now riding in the morning. Additionally, with a 37% increase in after-school usage, this program has attracted new kids riding the bus.
 - WMATA does not report Metrobus data by time of day.

4. **Day of week riding before and after Ride On and Metrobus**
 - Kids riding free on weekdays in FY19 averaged 4,706 per day. In FY20 kids riding free averaged 6,933 per day, and increase of 2,227 per day, nearly a 50% increase.
 - In FY19 Fridays tended to have slightly more riders than the other days of the week. On average, Mondays were generally the lowest ridership day.
 - In FY20 there is a very similar ridership trend by day of the week as FY19.
 - In FY19 an average of 1,275 kids were recorded per day. In FY20 the average kids ride free ridership was 2,652 per day. This was a 1,378 (+108%) increase.
 - WMATA does not report Metrobus data by day of week.

5. **Cost implications**
 - The total payment to WMATA was projected to be \$951,083 for FY20 which represents about a \$400,000 increase over FY19. With six months of Metrobus ridership and reimbursement data

available, the updated projected FY20 WMATA payment will be \$961,686. The ridership is slightly under what was projected but the average cost per rider is slightly higher.

- The foregone revenue for Ride On was projected to be about \$600,000 higher in FY20 compared to FY19. Kids Ride Free ridership for Ride On is higher than projected—it was projected to increase by about 600,000 over FY19, but the actual ridership increase is tracking closer to 725,000 for FY20. However due to the multiple revenue sources within the Ride On budget (including WMATA SmartTrip card reconciliation which tends to lag), it is not possible to confidently state how much the revenue is down as a result of Kids Ride Free’s expanded hours. Higher confidence data will be available after the third quarter of FY20.
- Thus far, there have not been any significant overcrowding issues that have required the allocation of additional service resources as a result of the expanded Kids Ride Free program.

6. Operational issues

- There have been no major operational issues through the first six months of the expanded Kids Ride Free program.

7. Outreach

Outreach since July 1

- MC Agricultural Fair all nine days
- MCPS Back-To-School Fair at Westfield Wheaton Mall
- Clarksburg Outlet’s Touch-A-Truck Event
- Glenmont Forest Neighbors Civic Association Block Party
- Forest Glen Metro Station Customer Appreciation Day
- Captain James Daly Elementary School Backpack Event
- Richard Montgomery High School
- Thomas Edison High School
- Wheaton High School
- Wheaton Metro Station Customer Appreciation Day
- Grand Opening for the Wheaton Library & Recreation Center
- Montgomery County Council of PTAs Training Day
- Wheaton Arts Parade & Festival

Currently there are 70 schools signed up as distribution points for the cards:

- 25 of the 25 MCPS high schools
- 27 of the 40 MCPS middle schools
- 11 private high schools
- 4 private middle schools
- 3 elementary schools

Most of the Kids Ride Free outreach is done electronically to reach the highest number of persons possible:

- A Posting “today” in the MCPS Bulletin to all parents.
- Sent poster to MCPS for distribution and installation at all schools.

- Emailed the new flyer and poster to all private schools and MCPS high schools for which there are email addresses.
- Emailed a Public Service Announcement to all MCPS high school newspapers.
- Postings on:
 - NextDoor.com
 - GovDelivery
 - Twitter, Facebook, Instagram.
- An animated video that aired on Comcast, Verizon FIOS and PEG channels in October/November.

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