

City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: APRIL 6, 2009

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: JAMES K. HARTMANN, CITY MANAGER

SUBJECT: BUDGET MEMO # 79: DASH STUDENT FREE RIDE PROGRAM

This memorandum is in response to the City Council request for information on the possibility of the Alexandria Transit Company Board of Directors developing a program similar to the existing Kids Ride Free transit program in Montgomery County, Maryland. It should be noted that Montgomery County is considering suspending the Kids Ride Free program for budgetary reasons, although a decision has not yet been reached.

The Montgomery County program provides free rides home for students participating in after-school activities from 2:00 pm to 7:00 pm, Monday through Friday, on all Ride-On buses and Metrobus routes that originate in Montgomery County. Montgomery County has not measured the amount of increased student ridership the program may have generated. A description of the Kids Ride Free program from the Montgomery County Department of Public Works and Transportation website is attached.

A similar program using only the Alexandria DASH bus system would provide an estimated 156,000 to 286,000 free rides annually (current ridership estimates) at a cost of \$1.25 per ride in lost revenue. Using a ridership figure halfway between these two estimated numbers, the cost is estimated at \$276,000 per year. It is reasonable to expect that number of free rides provided would increase over time as the program becomes more publicized. The assumptions used to derive this estimate are outlined below.

1. The program would be applicable to the DASH system only and provide free rides for eligible youth on Monday through Friday including holidays from 2:00 pm to 7:00 for 12 months per year. The program does not include Metrobus service.
2. DASH serves approximately 5,500 riders of all ages on an average weekday between the hours of 2:00 pm and 7:00 pm.
3. Student ridership, which is likely less than 11 percent during the school day and late in the evening and higher than 11 percent after school, could be as much as 15 to 20 percent between the hours of 2:00 pm and 7:00 pm. This would equate to 600 to 1,000 free rides per day. Given there are 260 weekdays, including holidays, during the year (the Montgomery County program is year-round), this creates a fiscal impact of existing

ridership of \$195,000 to \$357,000. Using a ridership figure about halfway between these two numbers, the cost would be \$276,000.

4. DASH currently charges students the regular \$1.25 fare, so each free ride provided would cost \$1.25 in lost revenue.
5. The policy question that any subsidy proposal like this raises is how does the public subsidy (\$276,000 in this case) compare with the public benefit and the public purpose achieved. If the ridership of school aged children increases substantially due to the elimination of the fare, then a public benefit of greater mobility and transit use is achieved (along with the economic benefit of providing each currently paying student rider a \$1.25 free ride). Additionally, the benefit of reducing the number of cars on the road and the need for parking would be realized for new riders who now drive and park. If the increase in ridership is marginal (for example only a 10 percent increase in ridership which equates to about 143,000 additional riders per year), then the annual marginal cost of the increased ridership (\$276,000 in this case) may far outweigh the benefit (for example a 10 percent ridership increase comes at a cost of \$1.92 per ride added).

By limiting the subsidy to only the times when City public schools are in session (183 days starting in FY 2004 excluding summer school), the cost could be reduced to an estimated \$195,000. This allows students who are unable to ride the school bus home in the afternoon due to participation in after school activities to ride free and all students to travel on DASH for free during the days and hours identified but not ride free in the summer months, on weekends, and other non-school days.

The only cost of the subsidy identified above is the loss of DASH revenue, which would need to be replaced by other subsidized funds (i.e. the City's General Fund). The hours of this proposed program would mirror the hours of DASH's afternoon peak period. Since a number of DASH routes are already at capacity during the afternoon peak period, it is likely that there also would be a need to eventually add buses to existing routes, which would result in increased operating and capital expenses.

Other issues for consideration are administration and precedent. Alexandria Transit requires all riders to either pay a cash fare or present a pass, even for its own employees. The Alexandria City Public Schools issues school bus passes to secondary school students; however, the policy at private schools would have to be determined. If a separate pass needs to be created and administered by DASH, this would impact administrative costs. Also, DASH does not currently offer discount fare programs for any special need populations. The implementation of a Kids Ride Free program could result in increased requests for special fare treatment for other groups (such as senior citizens, low-income residents, or the disabled).

DASH currently sells a deep discounted monthly pass for \$30.00. This pass is available to any rider for unlimited rides throughout the calendar month and provides a 45% discount off of the base fare for regular weekday riders. This equates to a fare of approximately 68¢ a trip. DASH also has its own unique 4-hour transfer pass, good on any DASH bus in any direction.



Ride On and Transit Services

Transit Information: 240-777-7433

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Kids Ride Free Program

All school age children may ride free on Ride On and Metrobus service between 2:00PM and 7:00PM Monday to Friday.



Students must present a photo ID issued by the Montgomery County Public School System or a special bus pass/ID. These special passes/ID's display the Ride

On logo, are signed by the school principal and are available through the schools that do not have photo ID's. See [sample pass](#). Private school students are also eligible. Private school principals may obtain passes by calling 240-777-7433.

Middle or High School students must show a school picture ID

Elementary age students need NOT show ID. If a student does not have a picture ID, contact the school administration for more information.

Students must board at bus stop within Montgomery County. On routes that serve more than one jurisdiction, the operator must collect regular fares from passengers who board at all stops outside Montgomery County. (Note: Students boarding in Montgomery County may ride to a destination in another jurisdiction if they wish, but returning to Montgomery County from a bus stop in another jurisdiction requires payment of the regular applicable fare.)

Following are the only Metrobus routes that are included in the program:
C2,C4,C7,C8,C9,D5,F4,F6,J1,J2,J3,J4,J5,J7,J9,K6,L7,L8,Q2,
T2,Y5,Y7,Y8,Y9,Z2,Z6,Z8,Z9,Z11,Z13,Z29

All Ride On routes are included in the program.

Read [Student Bill of Rights and Responsibilities](#).

If you want to take Ride On during other times, the [Youth Cruiser Pass](#) is for you. It will save you money.

The Kids Ride Free card looks like this:



Kids Ride Free!

EXPIRES 8-31-09

2-7 PM MONDAY-FRIDAY

VALID YEAR ROUND

Student Name: _____ **No.** _____

School Name (print): _____

Principal's Signature: _____

RIDE ON TERMS & CONDITIONS

MONTGOMERY COUNTY TRANSIT

- Pass may be confiscated by the operator.
- Pass good only on Ride On and Metrobuses*.
- Pass usage only by students in Montgomery County.
- Pass must be presented upon boarding the bus.
- No transfers issued with this pass.
- Pass must remain in the possession of passenger.
- Must adhere to the "Student Bill of Rights & Responsibilities."
- * **See *www.rideonbus* for Metrobus routes**



If found, please return to: Montgomery County
Division of Transit Services, 101 Monroe St., 5th Floor
Rockville, Maryland 20850

Ride On & Transit Services · Montgomery County Department of Transportation
· Rockville, Maryland 20850 · mcdot.rideonbus@montgomerycountymd.gov
Contact us · telephone: 240-777-7433 · fax: 240-777-5801 · TDD: 240-777-5869

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