



## Howard County Office of Transportation

3430 Court House Drive ■ Ellicott City, Maryland 21043 ■ 410-313-0702

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Bruce Gartner, Administrator

[bgartner@howardcountymd.gov](mailto:bgartner@howardcountymd.gov)

FAX 410-313-1655

TDD 410-313-2323

May 24, 2019

To: Members of the Central Maryland Transportation and Mobility Commission

Re: Proposal for Student Bus Pass Pilot

Cc: Cristin Tolen, General Manager, Regional Transportation Agency of Central Maryland

Dear Commissioners,

The Howard County Multimodal Transportation Board (MTB) is requesting that the Central Maryland Regional Transit Commission support the following recommendation:

*“To provide the Howard County Public School System with 200 monthly bus passes that will enable 100 students enrolled in the Innovative Pathways Summer Program to ride RTA buses free of charge for 6 weeks. (June 24 - August 2)*

*HCPSS staff will coordinate distribution of passes and verification of student enrollment in HCPSS. Staff would also be willing to organize training sessions for both students and parents on the use of Route Shout or other applications.*

*Students who use the passes will take part in a survey, designed by the HCPSS and the Office of Transportation and/or RTA in order to evaluate the program.*

*If the pilot is successful, the HCPSS and Office of Transportation and/or RTA would work together to expand the pilot to support students throughout the year, and advocate for increased funding to cover lost revenue and increased cost.”*

*NOTE: The Chairman of the MTB has requested that the CMTC consider changing the language to say that: “depending on the results of the pilot, the HPCSS and Office of Transportation and/or RTA would work together to.....*

### **Analysis by the Howard County Office of Transportation:**

Given that free transit would come at some cost and possibly include some unintended consequences, the Howard County Office of Transportation will advise County Administration of the recommendations of both the MTB and for their consideration before committing to a Pilot. The Office of Transportation is supportive of efforts to attract more riders and to create a sustainable transit system in the region.

Prior to action on this proposal the Commission should consider the following points regarding the advantages and disadvantages of the proposal to offer free transit fares to a group of current and/or potential customers.

While the cost of this particular pilot program would be small, the provision of free services to any population should be part of a broader discussion regarding transit and educational services provided by the county.

For your consideration, I have included a chart of potential advantages and concerns/challenges below.

<b>Potential Advantages and/or Benefits of Free Transit for HCPSS Students</b>	<b>Potential Concerns and/or Challenges of Free Transit for an Additional Group of Riders</b>
Encourages a New Generation Transit Riders.	Offers free ridership to a group that may be already paying for ridership.
Improved Access for Students - Students who can't afford the discounted \$20 monthly pass would be able to access more areas of the county, have more choices and opportunities.	Equity - Other economically disadvantaged riders/groups would not be receiving a similar benefit.
Potentially reduced automobile usage or less expensive trips - Less reliance on parents, relatives or services such as Uber or Lyft.	Disruptions – Some counties have had to limit ridership to the afternoon because of capacity issues and some have experienced impacts due to student behavior.
Information gathering - Along with collecting data from this group, having students engaged in learning about and discussing public transit promotes inclusion of crucial community voices.	Administration costs of transit increases - Transportation System begins to bear the cost of non-transportation expenses depending on how the program is funded and/or administered.
Better access to College Credits - A lack of transportation for after school activities was frequently cited as a reason for not applying for or withdrawing from the Jumpstart program. Stops are already located near 3 of the 5 schools that are part of the JumpStart Program.	Limits funds available for expansion in frequency or service area and may increase costs for driver training and supervision of some routes.
Lower cost for schools and increased equity between student populations - Applying for, monitoring, and reporting on grants comes at a cost and staff time. The short-lived nature of grants limits the reliability of the programs for schools and students.	Increased costs of monitoring and distributing passes – Steps would need to be taken to minimize fraud or misuse of passes.
Helps ensure that students are not only able to make regular plans, but also have a second option if their regular ride is unable to step up	Geographic distribution of benefits is unequal - parts of the county would gain more benefits than others considering the current transit service area.

or if they are temporarily in a different situation - such as Summer or Extended Day program.	
Minimizes impact of redistricting on students with fewer transportation options. Some students struggle to find transportation options when enrolled in a school that may be more difficult for them or their parents to reach.	
Howard County would join a growing list of local jurisdictions that are providing free transit to students. Experiences differ in other localities.	Regional Consistency - Considering the regional nature of RTA, consistency of policies among the four jurisdictions needs to be considered.

I look forward to discussing the proposal with you at the Commission meeting on 5/28/19.

Sincerely,



Bruce Gartner  
 Administrator, Howard County Office of Transportation