



Item #13

DATE: December 2, 2020
TO: GCTD Board of Directors
FROM: Dawn Perkins, CPA, Director of Finance
SUBJECT: Consider Resuming of Fare Collection

SUMMARY

In October 2020, staff brought an item to the Board to consider resuming fares once protective shields were installed fleetwide. At that meeting, the Board directed staff to postpone resuming fares in order to help support the economic recovery of the community and asked that the item be brought back for further discussion at the December meeting.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, Gold Coast Transit District (GCTD) has continued to provide reliable transportation for its customers, taking all reasonable measures to ensure the safety of employees as well as the public. As part of these measures, GCTD suspended fare collection system-wide in March in order to minimize direct contact between bus operators and customers. To date, GCTD estimates a financial impact of \$1.5m in farebox revenue loss in the seven months since pandemic began.

In recognition of the prolonged need for social distancing to reduce the spread of COVID-19, GCTD maintenance staff have completed installing protective Plexiglas barriers that now allow for front door boarding and the resumption of fare collection, while also protecting the health and safety of GCTD employees and customers. Upon resuming fare collection, GCTD will continue other protective measures, such as requiring masks and social distancing on board vehicles for the foreseeable future. GCTD's FY 20-21 budget anticipated that fare collection would resume once the shields were installed. The financial impact of resuming fares is estimated to generate approximately \$125,000 - \$300,000 per month based on currently daily ridership.

It is recommended that the Board consider authorizing staff to resume fare collection, in January 2021 and authorize the General Manager to temporarily modify fare policies to promote the use of contactless fare payment, once fare collection is resumed.

BACKGROUND

The COVID-19 pandemic created a need for GCTD to socially distance its bus operators and customers to reduce the risk of transmission. In March, GCTD began requesting that customers board buses through the rear door while seniors and people with disabilities requiring assistance or boarding with the ramp continued to board at the front door. Additionally, GCTD installed "caution tape" between the back and front of the bus to create physical distance between bus operator and customers. Bus loads are limited to 14 passengers per 40' bus and 12 passengers per 35' bus.

GOLD COAST TRANSIT DISTRICT

Additionally, all ADA paratransit trips are (point to point) single rider at this time and disinfected between trips. Masks are required for all employees and passengers using the transit system. These measures, in addition to ongoing efforts such as enhanced cleaning and disinfecting have helped to limit the risk of transmission from the COVID-19 pandemic and protect operators and customers during the boarding process.

In recognition of the ongoing and anticipated long term need to maintain social distancing to reduce the spread of COVID-19, GCTD evaluated several protective barrier options that would allow for resuming front door boarding and allow for fare collection while also protecting the health and safety of GCTD employees and customers. GCTD staff tested three styles of barrier systems in order to find a barrier that provided protection between bus operator and customers, provided ease of maintenance and replacement, and its ability to meet applicable safety standards (such as low glare). The barriers being installed are Department of Transportation (DOT) certified, and have been road tested by GCTD operations and maintenance personnel.

Currently, one of the unintended consequences of not collecting fares, is that some passengers are using the buses to ride for extended periods of time without disembarking. Our bus operators are having to kick people off the buses at the end of a full trip. As the winter progresses, this is sure to become worse as the temperatures change and it becomes rainy. Resuming fare collection may help ensure that our buses are reserved for passengers going to a destination and ensure that those needing to get to work or appointments will have a comfortable ride. In addition, staff reached out to GCTD peer agencies Monterey, Santa Cruz, Contra Costa, Riverside and Glendale -- all have responded that they resumed fare collections once the shields were installed. Based on industry practice and protective measures, and the need for revenue from fares staff recommends that GCTD resume fare collection in January 2021.

GCTD's FY 20-21 budget assumptions anticipated that fare collection would resume once the shields were installed. The installation of barriers on GCTD's fleet has been completed. The financial impact of resuming fares is estimated to generate approximately \$125,000 - \$300,000 per month based on currently daily ridership.

Upon resuming fares, GCTD would allow passengers to board from the front door, however social distancing and mask requirements on board the bus would continue. GCTD would also work with its current mobile ticket provider, Token Transit to offer a promotion discount to passengers to encourage the use of contactless fare payment. GCTD would use previously allocated LCTOP funds to subsidize the costs associated with the Token Transit program.

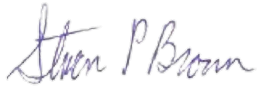
RECOMMENDATION(S)

It is recommended that the Board authorize staff to resume fare collection in January 2021. This will allow staff to publicize the resumption of fare collections as well to resume armored car service and other internal processes. Additionally, staff recommends authorizing the General Manager to implement temporary modifications to fare policies in order to continue its effort to improve physical distancing on buses, by promoting contactless fare collection methods that allow fare payment using smart phones.

Alternatives to the Recommended Action

At the time of preparation of this report, staff has received updates from Santa Barbara who will not resume fares until the County reaches a lower tier of COVID-19 restrictions and VCTC staff say that they plan to continue to suspend fares through January 18, 2021 or until the public health emergency is lifted in Ventura County. As an alternative to the above recommended action, the Board of Directors may consider directing staff to continue to suspend fare collection in order to mirror plans of other transit operators in the region.

GENERAL MANAGER'S CONCURRENCE



Steven P. Brown
General Manager