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Metro Board votes unanimously to adopt Universal Pass program for college students

U-Pass Program will provide easier access to discounted fares and make part-time students eligible

Los Angeles, CA – May 26, 2016

At this morning's meeting, the Metro Board of Directors voted unanimously to institute a two-year Universal Pass (U-Pass) pilot program. This creates partnerships with colleges to make discounted fares more conveniently accessible to students and extends eligibility to part-time college students taking 8 or more units per semester.

Until today's vote, students had to submit a paper application and pay \$43 in advance every month to get Metro's college student TAP card, which sometimes took up to 6 weeks to arrive. As a result, less than 1% of the eligible student population took advantage of the program. In addition, only students who enrolled in 12 or more units per semester qualified for the discount. Part-time students were required to pay the regular fare of \$1.75 per ride, where there is no discount given to college students, or the regular monthly fare of \$100.

While it may seem reasonable to limit fare subsidies to full-time students who have less time to work and therefore less access to income, this overlooked the economic reality of many part-time students. To take just the community college population, research shows that more than 70% enroll part-time. This includes many non-traditional students who are returning to school to improve their career prospects and earning potential, but are balancing their studies with other responsibilities such as childcare. Students often juggle multiple jobs to earn an income while taking evening classes, and paying \$100 for a monthly transit pass is just out of reach. By lowering the unit requirement to 8 credits, this program makes an additional 98,000 students at LA County's 20 community colleges eligible for the discount.

Though scholarships are available for tuition or books for low-income students, many students cite lack of access to convenient and affordable transportation as a barrier to school attendance. At a summit on this topic at Trade Tech College on May 13th, this was the major theme in the conversation among the 120 student attendees from 18 colleges across the county. Luz Juan, a student at East Los Angeles College who testified at today's Metro Board meeting, shared her struggles to afford \$1.75 for her bus fare each way and said, "Discounted transit fares definitely supports college students' academic success." Students from Cal Poly Pomona, Glendale Community College, LA Trade Tech College, Pasadena City College, and UCLA also attended the meeting and testified in support of the program.

By adopting the U-Pass program, Metro took a major step in supporting college student access to transit. By eliminating the shortcomings of the previous program, the agency hopes to increase participation from 1% to 10% of eligible students. Though transit ridership is currently on the decline throughout Southern California, Metro's U-Pass program could attract new riders to its services and make college a place where Angelenos develop the habit of using public transit.

"These reforms to the Universal Student Pass Pilot Program are a win-win, giving students access to safe, efficient and affordable transportation while also giving Metro a great opportunity to grow ridership," said Supervisor and Metro Board Chair Mark Ridley-Thomas. "If students get hooked, there's potential for them to become life-long riders, which would then benefit schools by relieving parking issues, he added. I anticipate that schools will also step up to the plate by increasing the subsidy and making the pass even more attractive."

LA Trade Technical College President Larry Frank also expressed strong support for this proposal: "This program will help create the college-going culture that we are seeking to create in South LA with our partners in the South LA Transit Empowerment Zone (SLATE-Z), as well as develop the next generation of transit riders in Los Angeles, which will greatly benefit our transit system." During his public remarks at the Board meeting, Frank also made a commitment to partnering with Metro to implement the new program to ensure its success.

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CONTACT:

Heddy Nam, Director, South LA Transit Empowerment Zone, NAMH@lattc.edu, 213-763-7272