



COUNTY OF HUMBOLDT

Legislation Text

File #: 22-1515, Version: 1

To: Board of Supervisors

From: County Administrative Office

Agenda Section: Consent

SUBJECT:

Approve a Budget Transfer from Contingency to Establish an Employee Bus Pass Program in Partnership with the Humboldt Transit Authority (4/5 Vote Required)

RECOMMENDATION(S):

That the Board of Supervisors:

1. Approve the Budget Transfer to be used to establish an Employee Bus Pass Benefit Program in the County Administrative Office (CAO) Budget Unit 1100-103 (4/5 vote required); and
2. Direct staff to develop and implement an Employee Bus Pass Benefit Program.

SOURCE OF FUNDING:

General Fund Contingency Reserve (1100-990)

DISCUSSION:

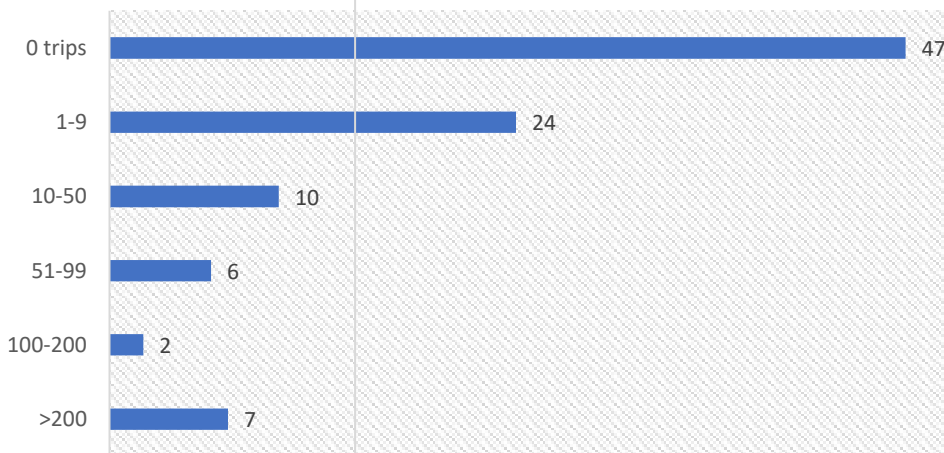
In January 2022, the county kicked off a pilot employee bus pass program. The program, launched through the Humboldt Transit Authority (HTA), was a test program to gauge employee interest in utilizing the transit system for commuting to work and to increase overall ridership for the HTA. Initially, the County Administrative Office offered 50 passes on a first-come, first-served basis to employees. There was a greater than expected interest in the passes by employees and so an additional 46 passes were distributed (four of the passes received did not scan correctly). Employees were encouraged to use the bus passes for commuting to and from work and other errands, including personal trips.

The passes are plastic credit card-sized swipe-cards that can be used on local HTA bus routes. The cards allow the HTA to track by pass number, the date and time of the trip, the route number, bus number, driver, direction and fare box swiped.

Of the 96 bus passes distributed to employees, 49 of the passes were used for at least one trip from Jan. 25, 2022 to Sept. 30, 2022 (36 weeks). If an employee rode the bus twice a day during the 5-day work week through the full span of the pilot program, the employee would have logged 360 bus trips. Seven of the 49 employees logged more than 200 trips during the pilot program, two employees logged

between 100 and 200 trips, six employees between 51 and 99 trips, 10 employees logged between 10 and 50 trips and 24 employees logged between one and nine (1-9) trips. There were 47 passes that did not log any bus trips.

Cummulative Trips per Issued Pass
(36- Week Pilot Program)



The ridership data during the pilot program indicates that a small core group of employees consistently used the transportation system. One reason that ridership may not have been higher is the nature of the “pilot” program. Employees who received bus passes were told it was a pilot program and encouraged to use the bus passes but were provided little or no information on the length of the pilot program, expiration or other parameters. More interaction with those 96 employees who were enthusiastic to originally receive and use the bus passes may have increased ridership.

Proposed County Employee Bus Pass Program (CEBPP)

Bus pass programs provide benefits to employees and the employer. Some of the benefits include:

1. Providing a no-cost or lower-cost option for employees to commute to work. This is particularly attractive when fuel prices are higher, as is the case today.
2. Reducing employee stress and providing time for reading or other activities during the commute.
3. County cost reductions. While there is a cost to the county for bus passes, over time employees who commute by bus reduce expenses associated with purchasing, leasing, and maintaining parking lots and garages. For a little perspective on the costs, on April 1, 2021, the county executed a lease with the state for 18 parking spaces on the grounds of the Employment Development Department Property next to the County Courthouse facilities. The 3-year lease currently charges \$62 per month per space. That fee will increase to \$64 on April 1, 2023. As a comparison, commuting every workday for a month cost \$44.80 and the HTA currently offers an unlimited regional monthly bus pass for \$50.
4. Employer-provided transit passes are not a taxable benefit to the employee, so long as the

benefit meets the Internal Revenue Service requirements and does not exceed a monthly pass value of \$280.

- Increasing ridership has environmental benefits and supports the financial sustainability of the community-wide transportation authority. The HTA is an important community asset, and many businesses and individuals rely on the HTA to meet transportation needs.

The proposed CEBPP would issue swipe cards to all interested employees. The county will be billed by bus trips, so if an employee does not use an issued pass, it does not cost the county or reduce the amount of benefit available to others. To make the program more affordable, on Nov. 1, 2022, the HTA Board approved a 20% discount to the county and other agencies who implement an employee bus pass program. The chart below summarizes what the cost of the pilot program passes would have been with and without the 20% discount.

Month	Total	RTS	ETS	WC	SHI	Total \$	w/20% Discount	Users
January	60	38	22			\$ 110.60	\$ 88.48	12
February	212	133	79	1		\$ 393.20	\$ 314.56	22
March	392	298	94			\$ 757.40	\$ 605.92	22
April	347	273	74			\$ 676.90	\$ 541.52	22
May	442	326	116			\$ 847.00	\$ 677.60	27
June	419	311	108			\$ 804.30	\$ 643.44	25
July	372	268	104			\$ 708.40	\$ 566.72	25
August	353	263	90	2		\$ 684.90	\$ 547.92	22
September	293	181	112			\$ 536.90	\$ 429.52	22
Total	2,890	2,091	799	3	-	\$ 5,519.60	\$ 4,415.68	199
<i>Redwood Transit System (RTS)</i> <i>Eureka Transit Service (ETS)</i> <i>Willow Creek (WC)</i> <i>Southern Humboldt Intercity (SHI)</i>								

To encourage use of the passes by employees, staff recommends building in a few incentives and outreach efforts for the newly established CEBPP. The proposed incentives can be modified as the program develops to better meet its needs.

- First, sponsor a contest with a gift card or small prize for proposing a better name than County Employee Bus Pass Program (CEBPP). This will help spread the word and provide the county program a better name than CEBPP.
- Ensure emergency rides are available, if and when needed. A common reason employees do not commute by bus is the fear that an emergency during the work-day involving kids or other family members will arise and the employee won't have access to a vehicle to quickly respond. A solution is to guarantee that a ride is available in such an event. This can be as simple as paying for a taxi, Lyft or Uber; providing access to a pool vehicle or allowing a co-worker to drive an employee home on county time.
- Sponsor an annual "Ride the Bus Day" which encourages employees to ride the bus, especially

for the first time. The county can support the event by providing information on routes, schedules and transfers, offering commuter tips, connecting interested employees with “bus mentors,” and providing free coffee and breakfast sandwiches. This helps take away the unknowns for employees and if they participate, makes it easier for employees to transition to commuting by bus.

4. For those departments which can accommodate alternative schedules, allow bus commuters to flex their schedule to make commuting by bus more convenient. This could mean starting work a little earlier or later; or adjusting the lunch break to leave a little earlier or start a little later.
5. Provide regular reminders of the CEBPP, through Human Resources, HumNet, email outreach, flyers, labor groups, Hum21, department meetings, employee gatherings (such as Lunch on the Green), and new employee orientation.
6. Create incentives for regular ridership, such as monthly drawings in which the employee receives one entry for each ride logged during that month.

The initial ridership goal for the CEBPP is 100 employee participants. This would be more than four times the ridership of the current pilot program and establish participation by approximately 5% of employees.

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

The estimated cost of the CEBPP, excluding staff time to administer the program, for the remaining 6 months of the current Fiscal Year 2022-23 is set forth below.

Estimated CEBPP Cost	
1-1-2023 to 06-30-2023 HTA Cost	\$ 13,680
Emergency Ride Program	\$ 500
Program Incentives/Outreach	\$ 2,500
Total Estimated Cost - 6 months	\$ 18,960

Staff is recommending that the Board fund the CEBPP from the General Fund Contingency. The General Fund Contingency (1100990-2015) balance is currently at \$1,144,686 and will be reduced to \$1,125,726, if the request is approved by your Board. If the program is successful, over time the cost to lease, build, enforce and maintain employee parking lots will decrease by more than the program cost.

STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK:

This action supports your Board’s Strategic Framework by creating opportunities for improved safety and health , investing in county employees, and advancing local interest in natural resources.

OTHER AGENCY INVOLVEMENT:

Humboldt Transportation Authority (HTA)

ALTERNATIVES TO STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Do not establish the CEBPP and end the pilot bus pass program.
2. Board direction for alternative program details, such as a higher or a lower level of funding.
3. Board discretion.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Budget Transfer Request Form

PREVIOUS ACTION/REFERRAL:

Board Order No.: N/A

Meeting of: N/A

File No.: N/A