Agenda Item 6

METROPOLITAN
TRANSPORTATION
COMMISSION

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Memorandum

TO: Minority Citizens Advisory Committee DATE: March 3, 2009

FR: Valerie Knepper

RE: TransLink® for Transit Oriented Development: Project Status Report

Project Description

During the summer of 2008 MTC implemented a joint pilot project with AC Transit to provide free TransLink® cards loaded with free AC Transit services to residents of select transit oriented developments (TODs). MTC's long-term intention is use the pilot project as a "proof of concept" to encourage cities, developers, and the transit agencies to work together to further implement transit pass programs. One key long-run concept is that cities will reduce their parking requirements for developments that offer residents free or discounted transit passes, and the transit agencies will cooperate by providing flexible and supportive terms for the passes.

Status

We have completed the roll out of the TransLink® for TOD pilot project, providing approximately 1,400 free TransLink® passes loaded with 6-12 months of free AC Transit to 3,427 residents of 24 transit oriented developments in the East Bay. The selected developments have good to excellent AC Transit service, low parking ratios, and responsive management. The sites are spread throughout the East Bay, and include a mix of market-rate and affordable housing, rental and owner occupied; as shown below:

- Oakland (The Grand, The Uptown, Lion Creek Crossings, Temescal Place, Mayfair Apartments)
- Emeryville (Avalon and Avenue 64)
- El Cerrito (The Village)
- Albany (Bayside Commons)
- Alameda (Park Webster)
- San Leandro (Woodchase Apartments)
- Berkeley - The 13 selected Berkeley sites are all affordable housing developments, including several senior projects, and are mostly smaller in size. Berkeley's mayor, Commissioner Tom Bates, took a strong interest and offered assistance in the selection and subsequent registration at the 13 Berkeley developments.

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Findings to Date

For this program, 1,394 passes have been distributed. We are beginning to monitor the usage of the passes – in the first month each pass was used an average of 15 times. Residents will be surveyed again at the close of their free pass program. MTC will analyze the transit usage and survey data as it is collected over the course of the next year.

In total the program has been offered to residents of almost 3427 residents in 2,000 units; over one third of the untis – 796 – are below market rate. (Note that almost all of the residents of below market rate units were provided with one-year passes, while residents of most of the market rate units were provided with six-month passes; over half of the benefits were offered to the people in the below market rate units.)

The preliminary numbers point to a trend of the highest registration rates at the senior home facilities and those with very active site management, although one of our market rate developments, Temescal Place, received one of the highest acceptance rates (67%) and one of our senior developments, The Avalon in El Cerrito, a subsidized senior housing development, garnered a lower response than anticipated. Over time we will evaluate factors that may be involved in the responsiveness at individual sites, such as transit quality, active site management, advertising and development design. For example it appears that the physical design of the developments that funnel residents through the registration event location contributed to higher registration rates than developments without central lobbies.

Key Issues and Potential Solutions

Public response – While there was a great deal of enthusiasm for the program overall, with a number of developments and residents requesting to participate, some residents at the sign-ups expressed skepticism of the program, and others did not see transit as of interest to them. Improved publicity materials might help.

Technical Issues – We encountered a few problems with the software technology (some of the cards were not loaded properly with the monthly pass), some of the TransLink® readers have not functioned properly, and there was a limited awareness about the program by bus operators. Some of these issues are not surprising with a pilot project. As a way to prevent undue frustration for cardholders, our literature might suggest that card users carry bus fare with them in the instance their card does not work properly. AC Transit bus personnel could receive extra training regarding TransLink®, to identify faulty card readers and to properly report them for maintenance. Customer service could be improved by improved training and directing residents to the TransLink® customer service number.

Limited support by site coordinators - responsiveness of site coordinators is critical in the effectiveness and the overall registration/yield rate of the site and follow-up registrations. In particular it was difficult to get active support by professional managers of market rate developments that are leased up. If we want to expand the program, we need to address how to develop a program that relies on site managers to conduct the registration process. This could potentially be accomplished if we were to improve our informational packets to direct site coordinators through the registration process, though it would appear unlikely to have consistent registration success at sites without at least some administrative support from a transit agency or advocacy group. Additional support might be gained by developing more publicity and a

competitive application process for interested sites, and/or communicating with residents to create interest in participation.

Cost effective approach – the most cost-effective approach to registering residents would be through online registration. The requirement for user photos on the TransLink® cards creates a significant roadblock to internet registration. The true value of the photos as a tool for preventing fraud should be evaluated, as the processing of the cards with the photo requirement does greatly increase the difficulty and expense of the program. If a photo were no longer required, online registration would become a viable option for large-scale registration. It will still be important for TransLink® to provide an in-person or telephone registration process in order to accommodate those who lack internet access. The most plausible non-internet registration option might involve registering residents at existing AC Transit offices, although other options should be considered.

Participation of other agencies – it is important to consider how other agencies and interest groups might become involved. In addition to looking to the cities to fund passes through developer funding in exchange for lower parking requirements, MTC might look to BAAQMD to fund transit passes programs in lieu of parking, ABAG to provide input on both the future TOD site selection process and evaluate sites' urban form, advocacy groups to support implementation and promote the project, and transit agencies to help create flexible programs and identify TOD sites of interest with strong transit quality.

Scaling - there are several issues involving guidelines, criteria, funding and leadership. MTC might choose to either continue leading a TransLink® for TOD program, coordinating cities and transit agencies, and establishing its own program criteria. Cities or congestion management agencies could use the pilot project as a model to create their own programs, working directly with transit agencies. The process for TOD site selection, ongoing communication and coordination with site coordinators (developers, property managers, and homeowners' associations) the registration process and ongoing customer care will need to be considered.

Long Term Direction - a key to the long-range success of a transit pass program will be the cooperative participation by many interests. As key components, cities should reduce parking requirements for developers who offer their residents free transit passes as part of a Transportation Demand Management package, along with car share vehicles, pedestrian and bike friendly design elements, and transit agencies should actively support "universal pass" programs.

Next Steps

We will be working with AC Transit to monitor the usage of the passes, analyzing the results of the surveys, and evaluating long term impacts and implications for the effectiveness of such programs. In particular we will consider the extent to which the program creates long term transit and TransLink customers and reduces VMT and GHGs, and the implications for further policies, upon completion of the current program in June 2009.

We appreciate your questions and comments.