

FARE FREE UTA

Last year we proposed that legislative appropriators eliminate all fares on all Utah Transit Authority transit modes and that position hasn't changed. What has is that Governor Cox has proposed a one-year pilot program of free fares across the entire UTA system. We are delighted to support that proposal – it is smart and timely.

Utah can afford it! With a robust budget “surplus”, plus new federal funds already received and more to come, now is the time to invest in public transit – and in greater upward mobility and economic opportunities.

The Governor has recommended approval of \$25.5 in one-time federal funding to replace lost passenger revenue for the Fare Free pilot program.

UTA estimates 2022 and 2023 Revenues from passenger fares at \$36 million 5.4% of total operating revenues (\$671 million 2023 estimated budget).

FARE FREE UTA will make life easier for working folks who pay \$85 for a monthly pass, saving them \$1020 a year.

Free fares will help clear our air by getting more cars off the road, improving health and quality of life and reducing traffic and accidents, saving lives and road repair costs. This could be one of the biggest air quality initiatives yet by the Legislature, and could provide the quickest results in reducing air pollution.

Transportation is the second highest household expense, after housing. Making transit free and easy will greatly improve “location affordability” by reducing transportation costs, potentially eliminating the need for two or even one car, and offsetting the increasingly unaffordable housing prices along the Wasatch Front.

Other transit systems have successfully gone fare free - in 100 cities worldwide - and numerous U.S. communities have eliminated fares, including Washington, D.C., Kansas City, Missoula, Olympia, and Corvallis. More are studying the option. In some cities, going fare-less increased ridership by 20% or more.

<https://www.cnbc.com/2020/03/02/free-public-transportation-is-a-reality-in-100-citiesheres-why.html>

<https://freepublictransport.info/city/>

UTA ridership declined by 2.4 million from 2015 to 2018, and is gradually recovering ridership post-pandemic, expecting to reach 2019 levels by 2025. Eliminating fares would boost ridership significantly and more quickly – sending a big “Welcome Back!” to passengers who stopped riding during the pandemic.

We encourage legislators to give serious consideration to this proposition.

Prepared by Crossroads Urban Center 1/2023