



Fare Free Pilot Program

Frequently Asked Questions

When will buses be free?

Answer: Buses will be free to ride from January 1, 2023 through December 31, 2023.

Who is eligible to ride the bus for free?

Answer: Anyone can ride for free.

What services are free?

Answer: All services are all free of charge (fixed route, T Lift, Night Line, future Sunday microtransit).

Do I still need to apply to use T Lift?

Answer: Yes, you still need to apply for T Lift services to determine if you are eligible for paratransit service. Please visit <https://lawrencetransit.org/accessibility/> to find the T Lift application.

How long can I ride the bus?

Answer: You can ride for one full loop of a route. You must exit the bus at the end of the route, if you did not get off during the route. If you need somewhere to stay out of the heat, cold, or rain, please let the driver know so they can connect you with someone who can help.

Can I store personal items on the bus?

Answer: No. You will need to take all personal items with you when you get off the bus.

How is the City funding fare free transit?

Answer: The City is able to provide fare free transit through a dedicated sales tax, federal funds, and state funds. Without fares, Lawrence Transit will still have the funds to provide all current services in 2023.



Will the fare free pilot program be extended beyond December 31, 2023?

Answer: Staff will evaluate program impacts at the end of each quarter in 2023 to determine if the program can be extended without reductions in service. In the event that continuation of the program would require service reductions, staff will conduct public engagement to make a community-led decision on the program's future after December 31, 2023.

Who will benefit from free bus rides?

Answer: Everyone in our community. All riders, especially those who are low-income, will benefit from removing the cost barrier to using the bus. Bus service will speed up, without the additional time to use the fare box or provide transfer slips. Automobile drivers will benefit from each additional trip made by bus instead of by car, reducing road congestion. Local businesses benefit, as bus riders spend money on their family, homes, food, health care, and retail instead of on transportation costs.

How does the fare free pilot program fit into the City Strategic Plan?

Answer: The anticipated increases in ridership from the program would have a significant positive impact on several Strategic Plan Progress Indicators, particularly CC-9 and CC-11, which aim to increase transit ridership and shift travelers toward more sustainable modes of transportation.

Is free transit a good use of local taxes?

Answer: Fare free transit is not the same as free transit. Voters approved a 10-year local sales tax with 70% approval in 2018 that provides dedicated local match funds for transit required to leverage state and federal funds. Fares add more revenue that can be invested in service, but at a low overall revenue percentage (3-6%). Having or not having a fare requirement does not affect the voter-approved 10-year sales tax referendum from 2017.

Why isn't the bus free for people who are low-income and still require fare for everyone else?

Answer: Collecting fares from any one user group requires substantial time and cost for staff to print and distribute paper fare, manage digital fares, collect and process fares and cash, and report and reconcile funds. The low percentage of overall revenue that fares provide (3-6%) is not worth the time, effort, and impact to service. Fare free service for all is anticipated to have a positive impact on low-income riders and should advance City goals around equity.



What is the current time and cost spent to collect fares?

Answer: There is an estimated 480 hours of Lawrence Transit staff time and 600 hours of bus driver time spent each year on fare collection. Additionally, about \$16,000 is spent annually to print paper passes and pay for bank courier service.

Can fare box technology be upgraded to make payment easier instead of going fare free?

Answer: Technology can reduce labor and expenses of managing fares, and other communities have gone this route. Staff does not anticipate that upgraded fare box technology will save time or money. The estimated capital cost to install new technology would be \$750,000, and the ongoing maintenance cost would be about \$20,000 per year. Bus drivers would still have to manage fare compliance through verifying IDs, admin staff would still need to process all paper and coin fares, Brink's would be required to transfer money to the bank, and drivers would still deal with conflict at the fare box when someone doesn't pay or when technology does not work.

Shouldn't riders have to pay for using a taxpayer-funded service?

Answer: Transit riders, and the community as a whole, pay for transit service by paying sales tax for every day purchases, through a 10-year voter-approved local sales tax with 70% approval in 2017 that provides dedicated local match funds for transit required to leverage state and federal funds. Fares contribute only 3-6% of total revenue, which does not have a large impact on the quality of service.

Will fare free increase new riders or people already riding the bus?

Answer: Staff anticipates that new riders will be encouraged to try the fare free system, but also believes that new rides from existing riders is a positive outcome. In either case, transit can help people make trips that they otherwise would make in a different vehicle or not take at all. Fare free programs in other communities have resulted in ridership increases of 20%-60%.

Will the potential reduction or elimination of the state sales tax on food affect the dedicated transit sales tax?



Answer: No, local sales taxes passed by voter referendum will not be affected by reductions or eliminations in state sales taxes.

Will fare free transit increase crime on buses?

Answer: It is not anticipated to increase crime. Most conflicts on the bus between drivers and riders are because of a disagreement about fares. Fare free service will reduce this source of disputes.

How will fare free service affect the local economy?

Answer: Eliminating bus fares adds money back into the local economy. Riders spending \$400-\$1,000 per year on bus fare today can instead invest those dollars back into their family, their homes, food, health care, and retail in Lawrence.

How does fare free service affect the efficiency of bus service?

Answer: Without fares, bus drivers can speed up service without pausing to verify reduced fare eligibility, fill out transfer slips, or manage conflicts that can result from issues at the fare box.