

Bay Area Infrastructure Financing Authority (BAIFA)

March 24, 2021

Agenda Item 3a - 21-0338

FasTrak[®] STARTSM Program Pilot Update

Subject: Overview of engagement plans for the means-based toll discount pilot called FasTrak START on BAIFA's I-880 Express Lanes.

Background: The FasTrak START pilot is, nationally, a first-of-its-kind effort to address affordability of express lane tolls for residents earning a low-income. For most Bay Area households, transportation is the third-biggest monthly expense—trailing only the cost of housing and food. The pilot responds to policymaker, advocate, and public comments received about express lanes: during the project performance evaluation phase of Plan Bay Area 2050; at Commission and Policy Advisory Council Equity & Access Subcommittee meetings; and at public hearings to amend BAIFA's toll ordinance for I-880 and the I-680 Express Lanes extension. The FasTrak START pilot will leverage the systems, services, and lessons from Clipper[®] STARTSM, the means-based transit fare discount program launched in July 2020 by MTC.

Staff's proposed approach to community engagement considers both process (how potential customers are involved and influence decision-making) and outcome (what we want to achieve regarding service delivery). Staff together with stakeholders are currently developing a more detailed understanding of how to deliver and operate the pilot, including necessary technical system changes, policies and business rules, and evaluation plan. Staff has formed an Advisory Group of key stakeholders comprised of representatives from express lane and bridge operators, county delivery partners, Caltrans, the Policy Advisory Council's Equity & Access Subcommittee and a few advocacy organizations to advise on these program components and improve the utility of the findings from this pilot.

In December 2020, when staff officially introduced the FasTrak START pilot at BAIFA, Authority members requested staff return with more detail about its engagement and outreach plans: staff intends to deliver the pilot in a way that is consistent with MTC's Equity Platform, emphasizing the 'Listen and Learn' and 'Define and Measure' pillars during this early phase of pilot design and evaluation framework. Community engagement is envisioned to be delivered in three broad contexts, with particular focus on low-income communities, including low-income communities of color:

1. Community engagement on how the pilot should work;
2. Community engagement on how to reach and inform potential customers about the pilot; and
3. Community engagement on how customers experience the pilot during operations.

Staff will conduct three types of community engagement: focus groups, telephone town halls and surveys. Focus groups are interactive discussions of 8-10 participants over Zoom. Staff will conduct focus groups in multiple languages to: engage potential low-income customers in pilot design; help answer questions about the rules of the program; and help customers get FasTrak toll tags. The focus groups will also help staff identify barriers to participation, travel patterns, amount of the toll discount and recommended methods of multi-cultural and multi-lingual marketing and outreach. Staff will conduct telephone town halls, a way for people without access to computers or the internet to participate. The public will have an opportunity to learn about the program and provide feedback about similar pilot design questions via the telephone.

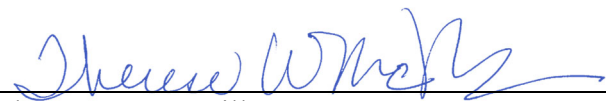
Mid-pilot and at the end of the pilot, staff will also conduct focus groups and surveys to get feedback from participants about their experiences with the pilot: how they became aware of it, how the application process and getting FasTrak worked for them, how valuable the discount was, whether they changed their travel behavior and other topics. This feedback will be factored into the pilot evaluation and lessons learned.

Staff plans to use several methods to promote the program to potential target participants once it is ready to launch. While staff will send hard copy mailings and emails to a broad list of community-based organizations (CBOs), staff also intends to compensate and partner with three CBOs to promote the program and provide hands-on assistance to people who want help applying. Staff also will reach out to social service agencies to engage their support in promoting the program. These efforts will be supplemented by paid advertising. Outreach methods will be vetted in the focus groups, and with the Advisory Group and the Equity & Access Subcommittee.

Issues: Staff will present its stakeholder and community engagement plans for BAIFA feedback at the meeting, and then proceed with community and stakeholder engagement on pilot design. Staff will also share initial thinking on public outreach and marketing to support the pilot launch at the meeting. Staff will return to BAIFA around September 2021 before finalizing outreach and marketing plans for the launch of the pilot.

Recommendation: This item is presented for information only.

Attachments: Presentation – FasTrak® STARTSM Pilot: Customer Engagement Plan


Therese W. McMillan