

Regional Network Management Customer Advisory Group

February 23, 2024

Agenda Item 5a

Clipper START Pilot Program Update

Subject:

Status of Clipper START Pilot Program to grow and evolve the Program

Background:

Clipper START is a Bay Area regional transit fare-discount program, providing eligible adults aged 19 – 64, earning a low-income at or below 200% Federal Poverty Level, a 20% or 50% single-ride fare discount on participating Bay Area transit agencies. MTC together with transit operators and community partners are working to remove fare-related barriers to using public transit experienced by people earning lower incomes. The Clipper START Program began as a Pilot with four participating transit operators in July 2020 (Phase 1); and an additional 17 transit operators joining the program in August 2020 (Phase 2).

In June 2023, MTC extended the Pilot to June 30, 2025 and updated the subsidy approach, providing operating assistance payments as a one-time lump sum payment rather than an ongoing reimbursement (MTC Resolution No. 4320, Revised). In addition, the twenty-one participating operators supported providing a 50% discount (an increase from seven operators offering a 50% discount) and Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (SCVTA) agreed to join the program (Phase 3). Starting in January 2024, all twenty-two Clipper-system operators are offering a 50% fare discount. This growth in transit operator voluntary participation demonstrates the collective goal to improve customer experience, increase ridership, and provide a greater and more consistent discount to program participants.

Today’s item provides an update on the performance of Clipper START and highlights Phase 3 actions to further evolve and grow the program.

Phase Three: Evolving and Growing the Program

Applying MTC’s Equity Platform (MTC Resolution No. 4955), the Clipper START Pilot completed a two-year, third-party evaluation to “define and measure” and “listen and learn.” Results identified a range of potential strategies to be implemented to increase participation

(uptake) in the program, improve customer experience, and decrease program costs. These strategies fall into three broad categories:

- Design and implement a customer-focused marketing campaign grounded in engagement, education, and equity partnerships;
- Improve the product for better customer experience; and
- Simplify and broaden access to the Clipper START benefit.

The strategies and range of options advancing for preliminary assessment, evidence-based, and **potentially** implementable program elements are listed in Attachment B and include:

1) Ways to simplify and make it easier for customers to participate:	Auto-enrollment (with customer consent); Self-verification
2) Broadening access by adjusting the income level of measurement:	Eligibility Threshold
3) Improving the product for better customer experience:	Fare-capping

Strategies Being Implemented

The Pilot experienced slow growth in the first two years, but growth increased in the third year. Year three statistics (in comparison to Year two) were:

- 29,500 applications submitted, a 97% increase over the first two years
- 25,900 applications approved, a 99% increase
- 17,900 active users, an 83% increase
- 1.8 million trips taken, an increase of 155%
- 582,000 transfers, an increase of 133%

Staff are continuing to implement strategies to increase uptake such as all-agency participation and the unified 50% discount. In addition, marketing will continue to focus on Equity Priority Communities and provide multilingual advertising and materials. The spring 2023 campaign will be continued but will be boosted by additional efforts with transit operators, contracting directly with community-based organizations (who serve as hubs for outreach and assistance), and the development of new resources such as instructional videos.

Strategies being Assessed through a Coordinated Approach

Strategies identified above are potential responses to cross-cutting barriers to access being experienced on other MTC means-based, equity-oriented policies and programs. Staff's proposed internal agency approach is to address these barriers holistically, through a customer-centered, collective approach, instead of in isolation via project-by-project. This is to ensure internal means-based initiatives are coordinated, provide a common agenda for change, share measurements for data and results, provide mutually benefitting actions, and foster continuous communications. A six-to-eight-month technical analysis for means-based enrollment and eligibility threshold models is being launched in January 2024. This task is intended to focus on Clipper START, Express Lane START, and State Route 37, with an emphasis on how and where the policies for the projects align related to eligibility threshold(s) and enrollment models, potential partnership options with existing income-based program providers; and, adjusting the eligibility threshold in MTC's equity programs.

Next Steps

Next steps include continuous program monitoring and marketing improvements. Staff will provide an update on the draft findings of the technical analysis in summer 2024.

Issues: None identified.

Recommendations: Information.

Attachments:

- Attachment A: Presentation
- Attachment B: Preliminary Assumptions: Strategy Concepts in Development and Working Program Examples: Preliminary List