



County of Fairfax, Virginia



Student Free Fare Program UPDATE

Fairfax County & FCPS
Lines of Business Discussion
April 1, 2016

FCDOT Transit Services Division
FCPS Transportation





Student Free Fare Program

Provide free trips on Fairfax Connector buses to Fairfax County high school and middle school students

- Developed in response to a Board Matter
- FY2015 budget language requested the Department of Transportation explore transportation partnerships with Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS)
- County and FCPS LOBs intersection project



Purpose

- **Provide Fairfax County students with transportation options**
 - Freedom to access before and after school activities such as, tutoring, sports, clubs, community service, and employment
- **Workforce commuter preparedness**
 - Preparing the next generation of transit riders for a more urban transportation and multi-modal environment





Goals

- Short Term
 - Fill gaps for school transportation services impacted by new school hours for FCPS high school students
 - Provide flexibility for students to travel on existing service
 - Increase Fairfax Connector ridership





Goals

- Long Term

- As the County continues to grow more urban & densely populated; positions Fairfax Connector to be a vital and sustainable transportation option
- Establishes transit as an important component of the County's transportation system -- especially with Millennials
- Reduces congestion on transportation network, by reducing the number of trips that parents must make to transport students
- Workforce commuter preparedness





Pilot Program Requirements

- Pass required to ride
- Pass distribution and permission forms maintained and distributed by FCPS
- Passes valid on Fairfax Connector only
 - Monday - Friday
 - 6 a.m. to 8 p.m.
- Parent/guardian permission required
- Adherence to Fairfax Connector rules of conduct
- Provisions for home and private school students who reside in Fairfax County





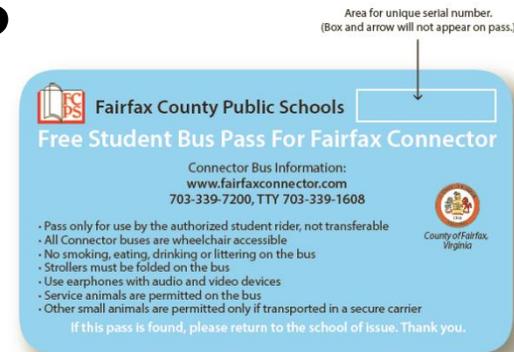
Fairfax Connector Responsibilities

- Outreach
 - Public & School
- Pass production
 - Cost sharing with FCPS
- Operational readiness
 - Enhanced bus operator training
 - Farebox programming (ridership data)





FCPS Responsibilities



- Pass distribution and tracking
 - 6,200 passes distributed to schools
 - Unique serial number
 - allows schools to administratively track passes assigned to students
- Regular coordination with FCDOT on school outreach strategies and pass distribution



In-School Outreach

- Targeted 5 schools based on
 - Fairfax Connector bus service access
 - Geographic distribution
- Schools
 - Chantilly High School (Chantilly)
 - Edison High School (Alexandria)
 - Madison High School (Vienna)
 - Mount Vernon High School (Alexandria)
 - South Lakes High School (Reston)





Outreach



- [Elizabeth's Journey](#): How to Ride
 - Featured on Channels 16 & 21; in school media
 - Travel training
 - Bike & Ride training
 - Rules of riding
 - *“Give respect to get respect”*





Outreach

- [Web](#) & social media   campaign
- Pre-school Year Events/Open Houses
 - On-site pass sign-up/distribution
 - On-site Fairfax Connector bus, operator & staff
 - Customized map with bus stop and route information





Student Participation Targeted 5 Schools

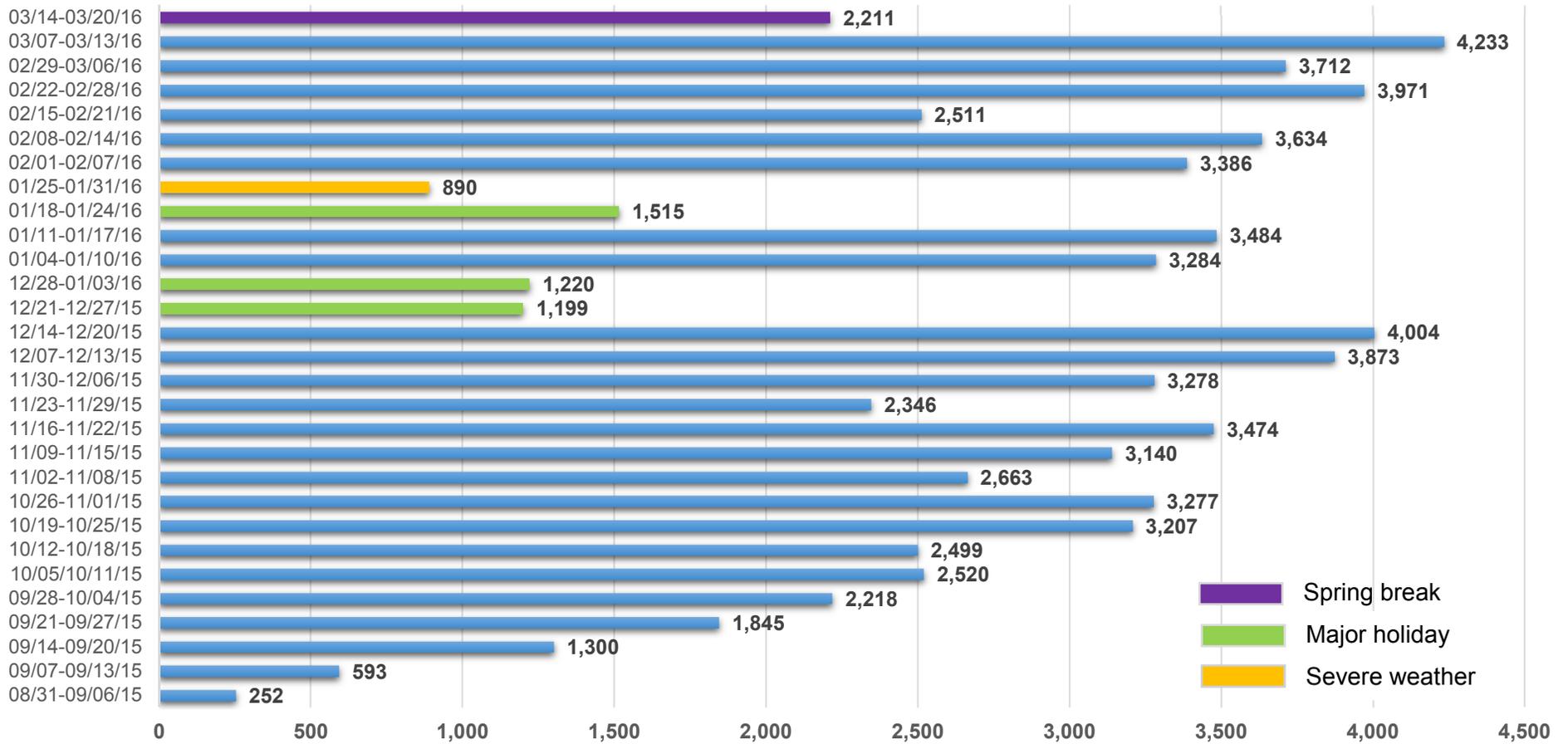
Location	# of Passes Distributed	High School Population	% of Students with Passes
Chantilly HS	191	2,680	7%
Edison HS	814	1,936	42%
James Madison HS	81	2,109	4%
Mt. Vernon HS	314	1,963	16%
South Lakes HS	943	2,430	39%
TOTALS	2,343	11,118 students	22% (average)





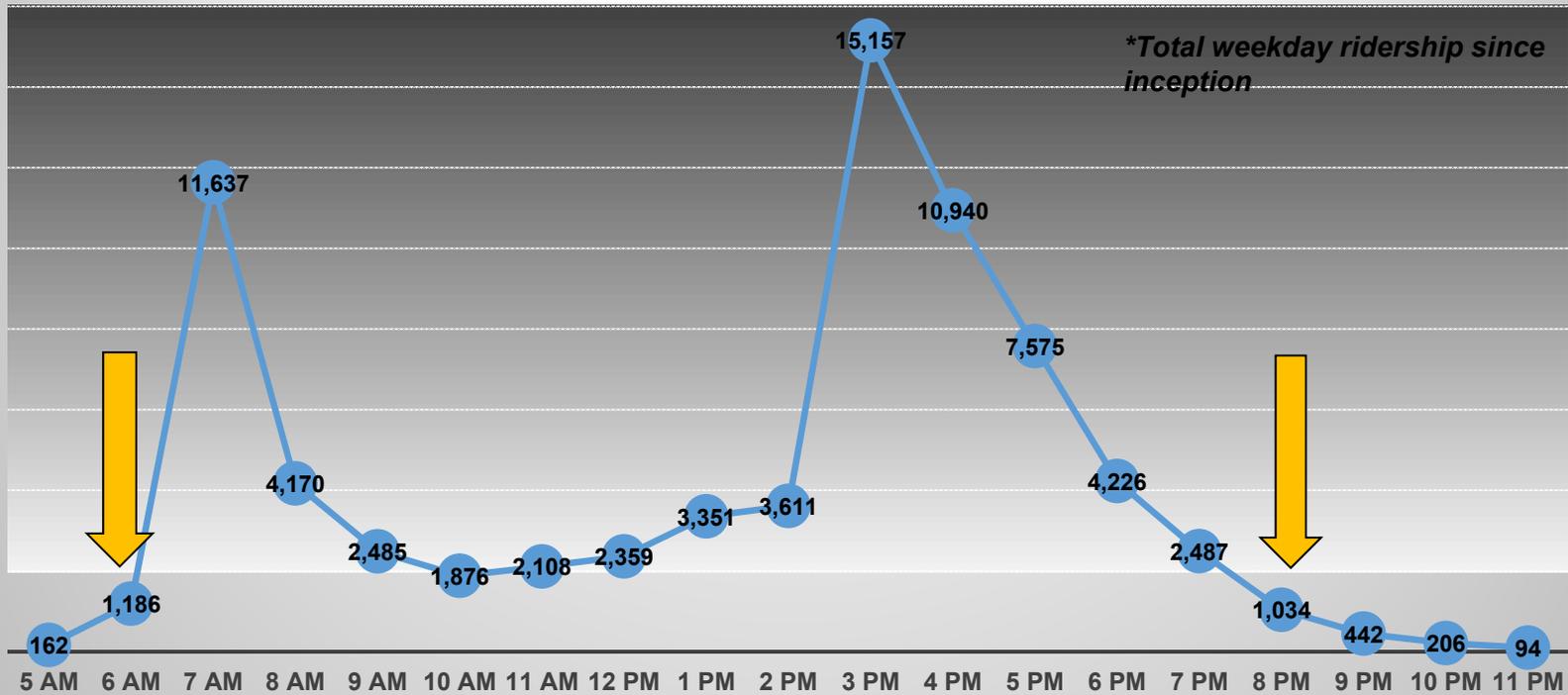
**75,739
Student Trips in
29 Weeks**

Fairfax Connector Weekly Student Ridership





Weekday Student Ridership by Time of Day *



A total of 904 student trips taken on before 6AM or after 8PM





Student Ridership

- Some student pass usage on weekends was recorded in our ridership data
 - Demonstrates demand for weekend service, which was also noted in student survey responses
 - Working with service contractor to monitor and address



Surveys: Assessing Opinions

- Program impact
 - Surveys
 - Quantitative and qualitative data from students, parents, school officials, and bus operators
 - Student surveys capture ideas for refining program
 - Increasing ridership



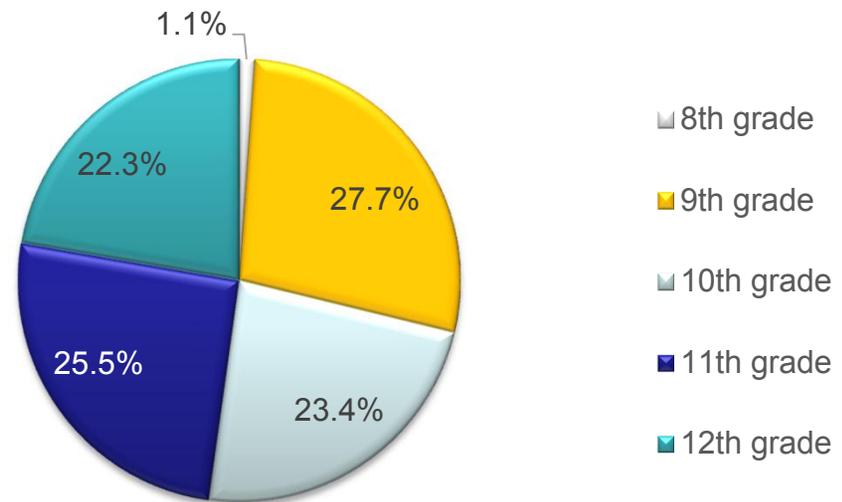


Student Survey Results

Survey Participation Rate (94 responses in total)

- **3.9% overall** South Lakes HS student pop.
- 10% of students with passes
- Near even distribution grades 9-12

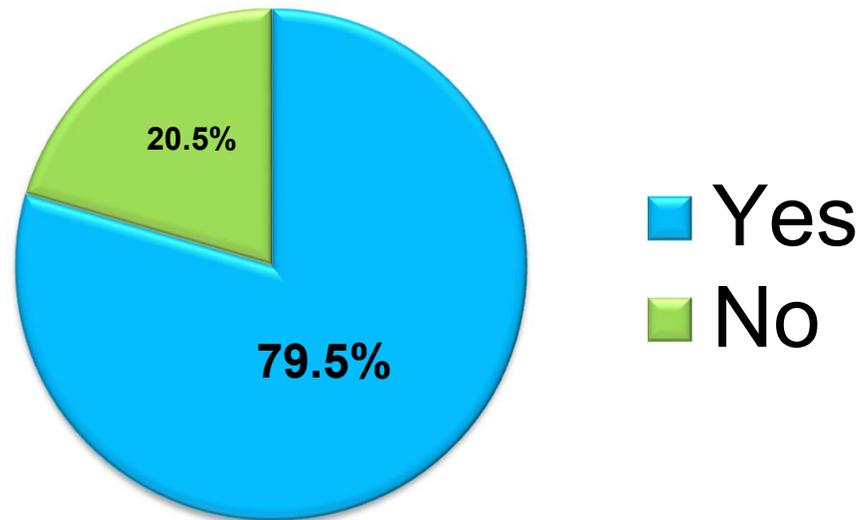
What grade are you in?





Pass Data

Do you have a Free Student Bus Pass?





Program Information

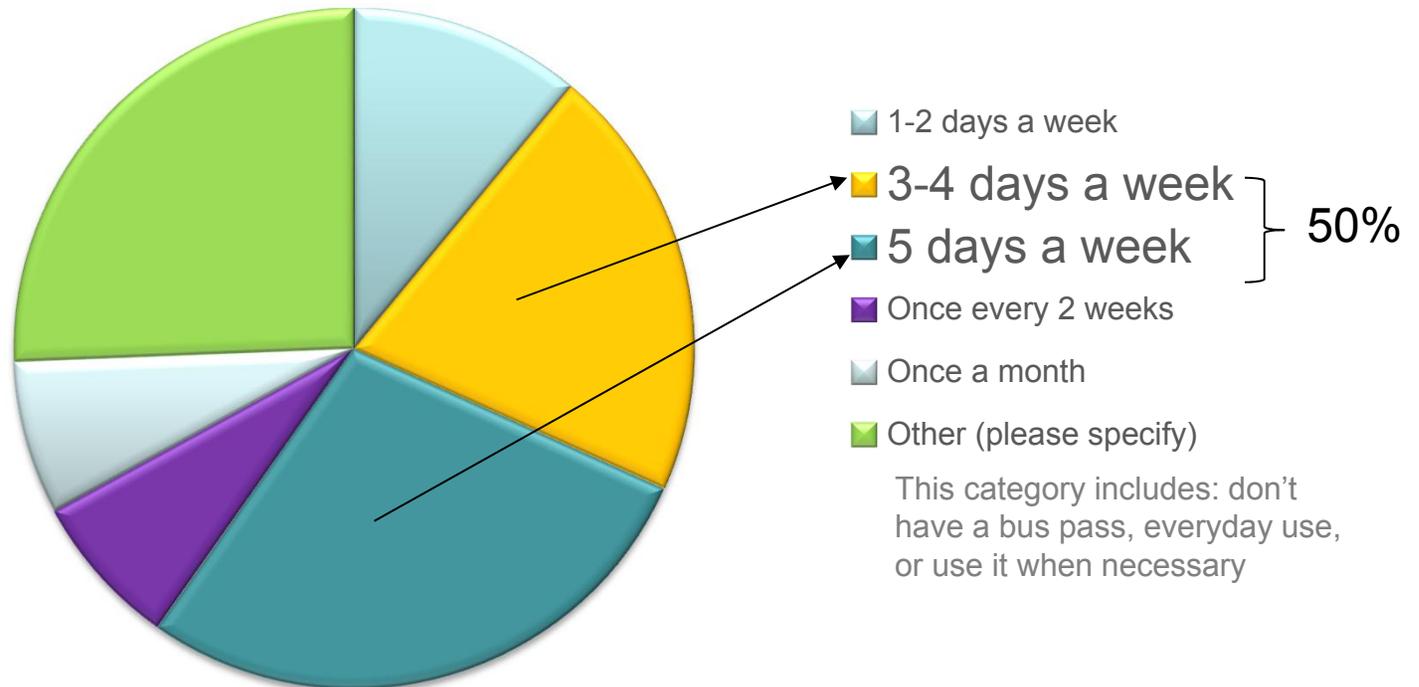
If you heard about the free bus pass at school, can you be more specific?

Answer Options	Response Percent	
School announcement	52.40%	
Friends	22.00%	
School orientation event	13.40%	
	4.90%	
Teacher, counselor, or administrator		
Parent or guardian	4.90%	
School website	1.20%	
Fairfax Connector flier	1.20%	



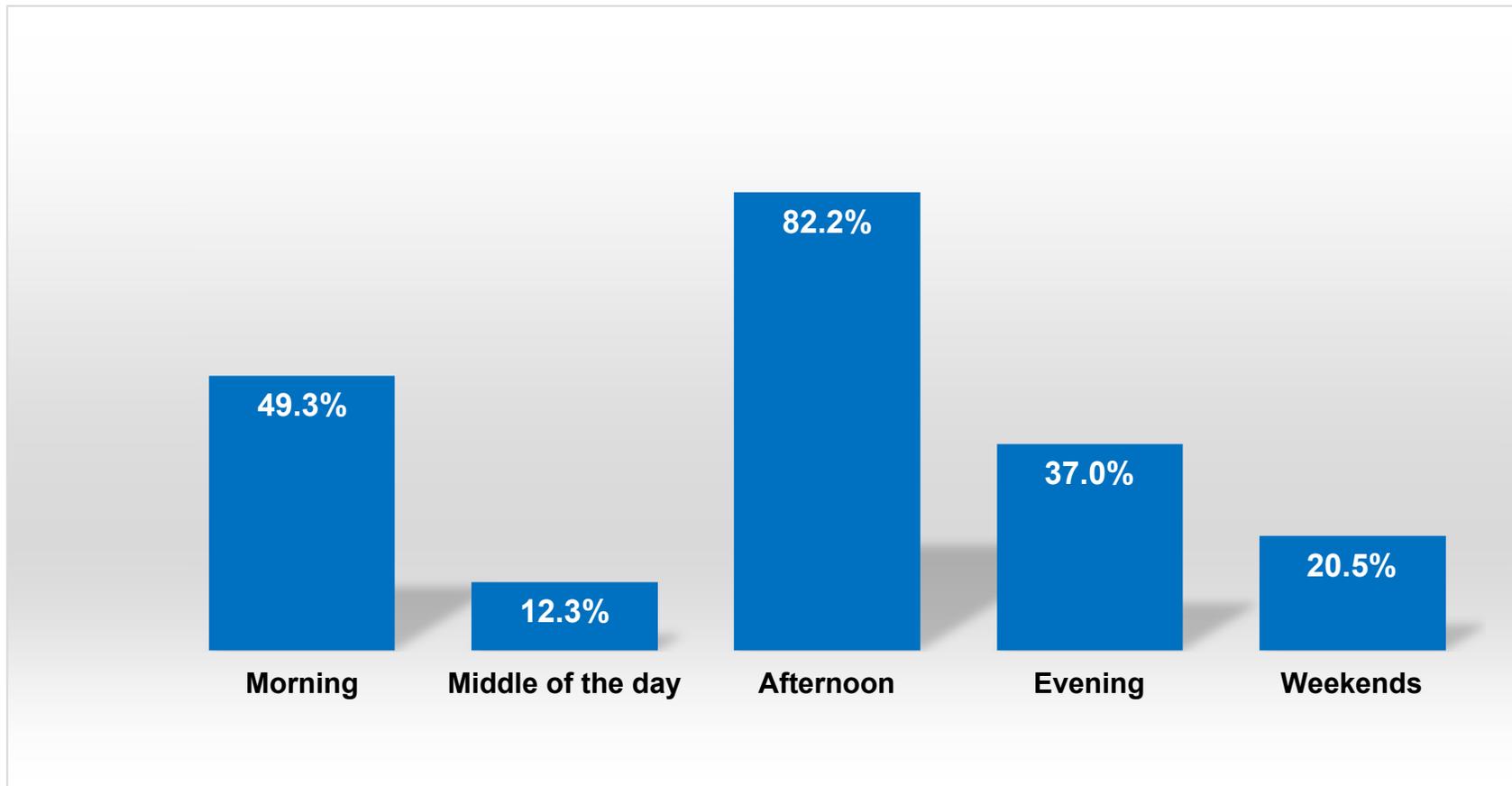
Pass Usage

How often do you use your free bus pass?





When do you use the pass?





Where do you go with your pass?

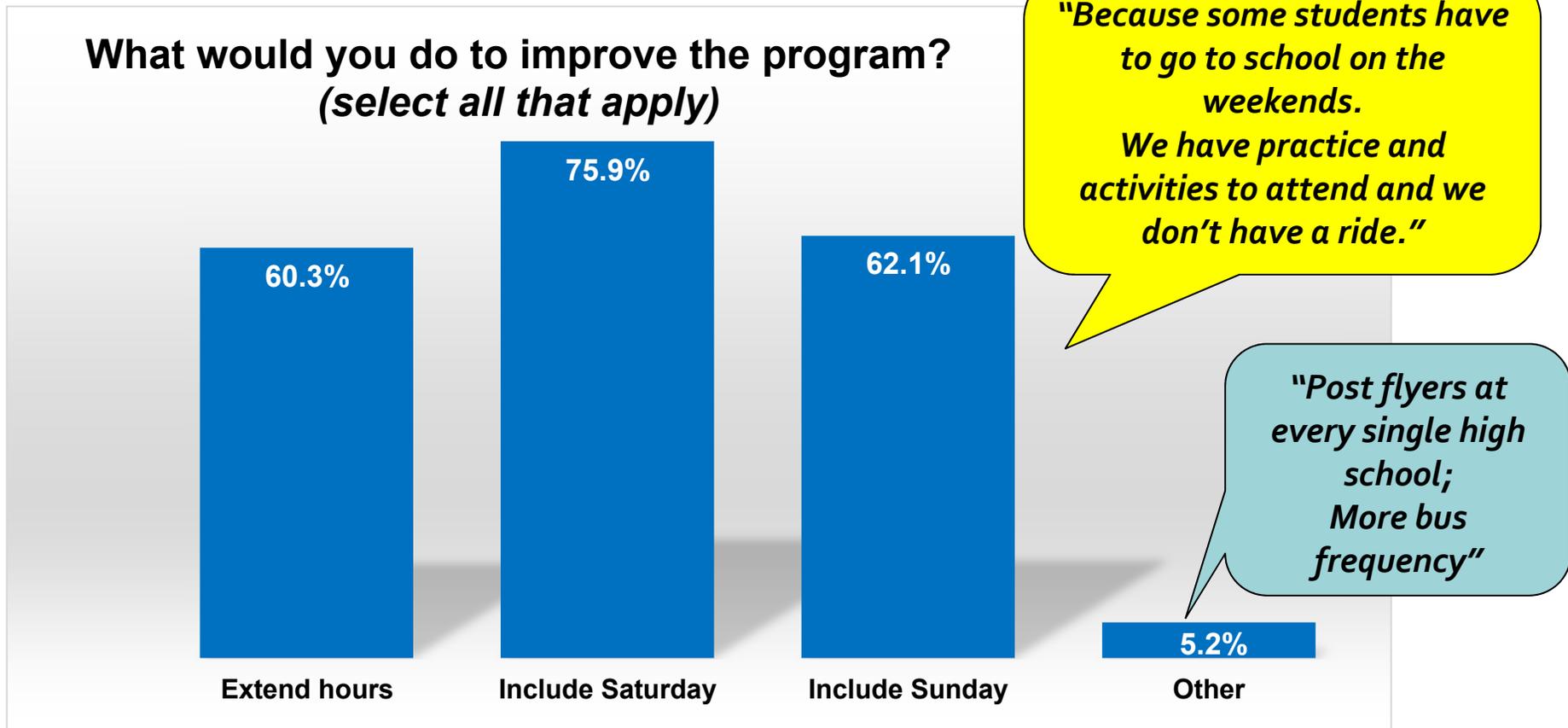
***Where do you typically travel with the free pass?
(select all that apply)***

Answer Options	Response Percent
To your home	45.6%
To your school	32.3%
To an after school job	11.8%
To another school for a special program or activity	4.4%
To an activity center (e.g. the mall, RECenter, parks, movie theater)	5.9%





How would you improve the program?





What the students are saying...

"I think it's a great idea to train kids to ride the bus at an early age."

"It's helpful to my education because it provides me with transportation when I stay after school with my teachers to improve my expertise on a subject. **Without the pass I would not have transportation."**

"This Connector pass is **VERY** convenient and **VERY** helpful to me and so many other students. This makes my commute to and from school so much simpler and has helped me so much especially when staying after school."





What Administrators are saying...

“Many of our students come from either dual income working families or single- low income working families. This makes transportation an issue for students who are involved with afterschool and extracurricular activities.

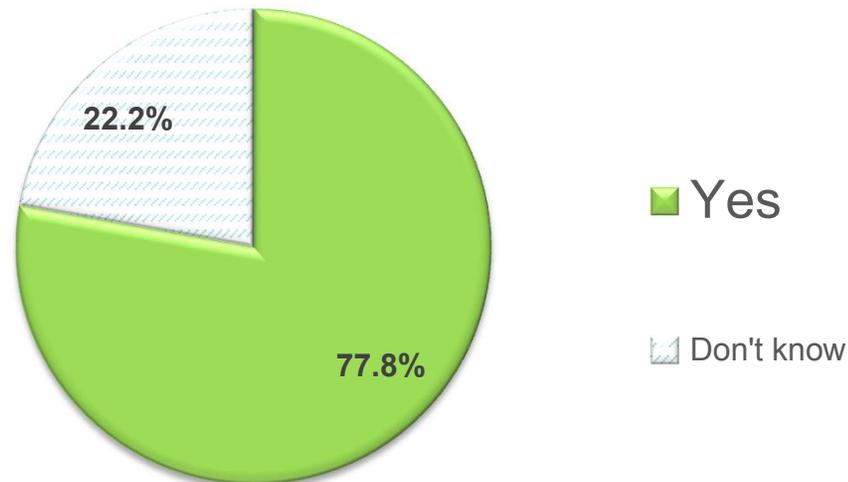
By having access to free transportation, our students are able to participate and be able to get home and back to their events.

It also allows the students to be active participants in the school.”



Fairfax Connector is Increasing Student Engagement

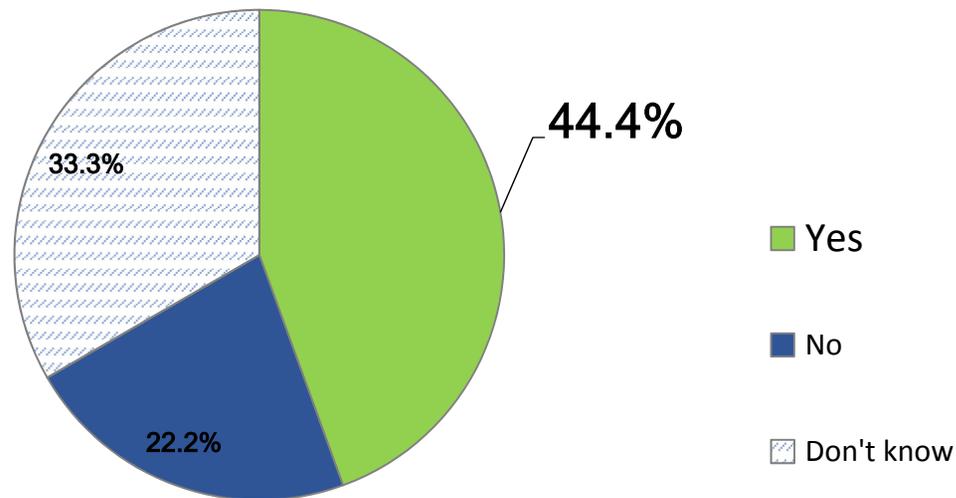
Have you seen increased student participation or their ability to engage in after school activities because the Fairfax Connector service is available?





Fairfax Connector is Improving Student Tardiness/Absenteeism

Do you feel that the Student Bus Pass Program has improved the rates of student tardiness or absenteeism?





What Administrators are saying...

"Connector gives our students more flexibility in their ability to stay after school for clubs and activities as well as extra help from teachers."

"Connector allows students to stay late for remediation and activities EVERY day.

Students who would ordinarily miss school altogether end up coming tardy rather than not at all.

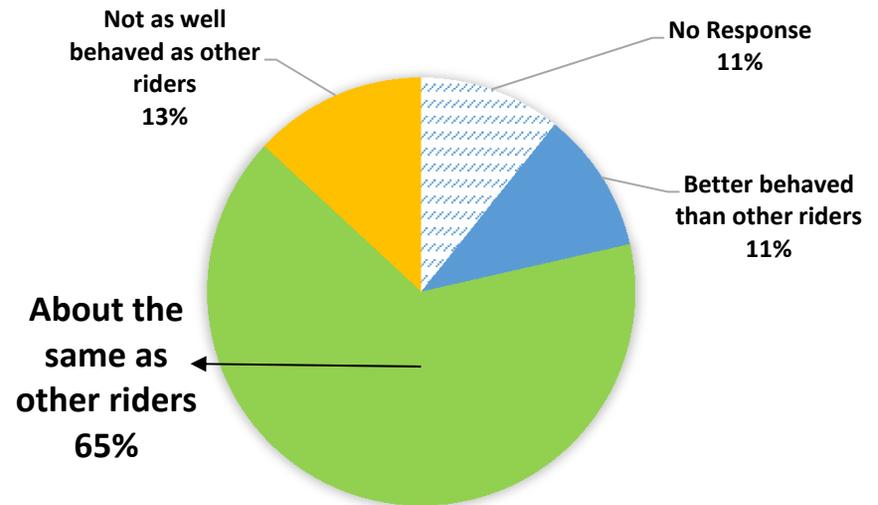
"With the early start times and lack of late buses in the afternoon, students are able to stay at school or come early to receive their education."



Assessing Challenges

- 168 bus operators surveyed
 - Student behavior on buses
 - a NON-issue
 - Rated by our operators as the SAME as other passengers
 - Behavior description rated at “GOOD” or “VERY GOOD”

STUDENT RIDER BEHAVIOR





Assessing Challenges

- Pass “Loss”
 - Max 2 replacements per student to prevent abuse
 - School principals set their own policy for replacement
 - Administrator survey recommendation suggests charging a “replacement fee” that increases with each replacement.
- Suspected Unauthorized Pass Use
 - Suspicious activity monitored
 - Students boarding buses without pass
 - Bus pass sharing
 - Friends
 - Older, non-eligible riders

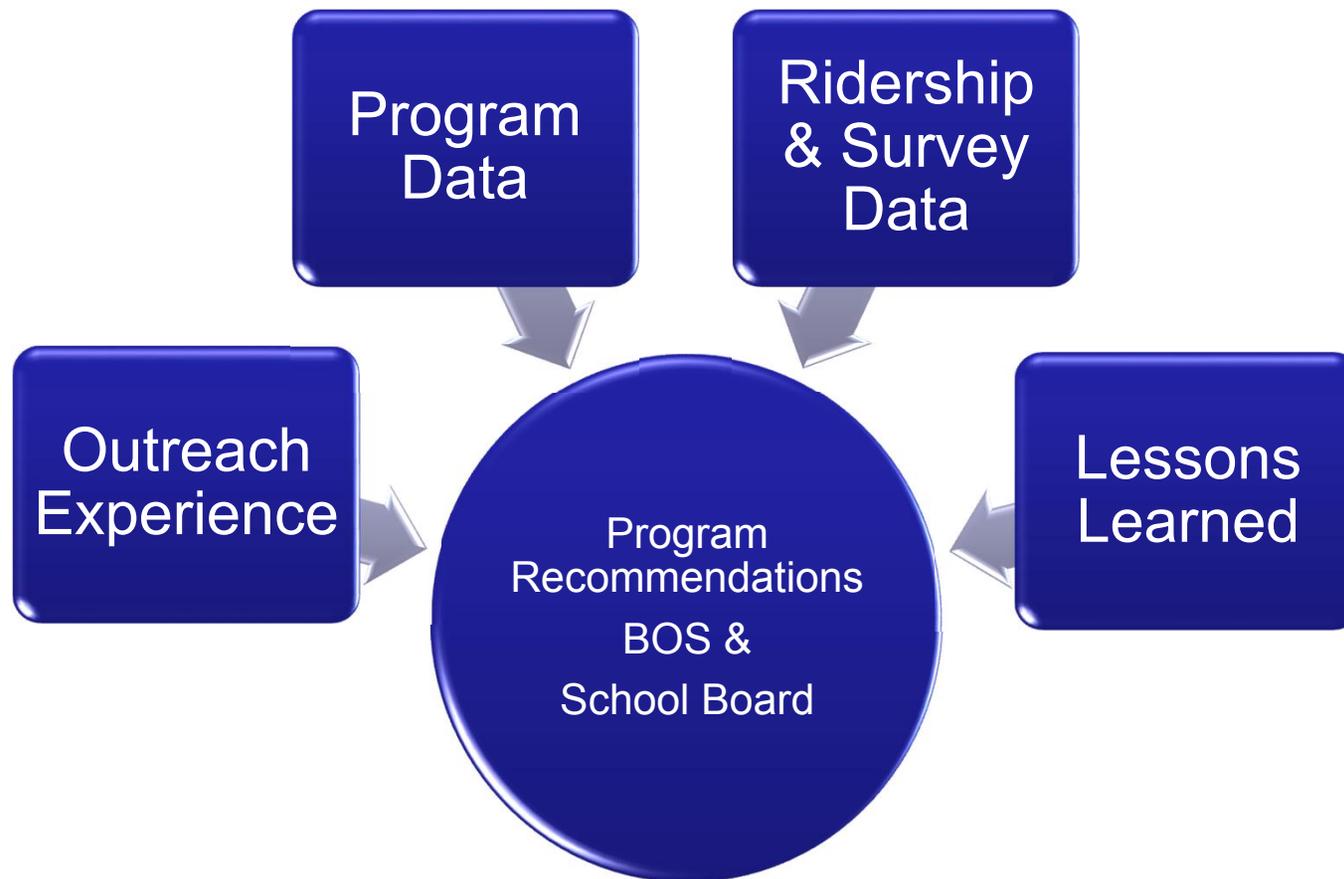


Assessing Challenges

- **Need for a photo-ID pass**
 - Based on bus operator and administrator input
 - Prevent abuse
 - Requires further coordination



Recommendations





Data Driven Recommendations

- Seek Board and FCPS feedback
- Seek Board approval for revised 2015-2016 school year program
- Expand program days and time
 - 5 am – 10 pm
 - 7 days a week (add use on Saturday & Sunday)
 - September 2016 – September 2017
- Add photo to Bus Pass/Universal Student ID's



Data Driven Recommendations (*con't.*)

- Additional high schools for targeted outreach; plus middle schools
- Reinforce availability for all high school and middle school students
- Return recommendations to Board Transportation Committee on May 24, 2016



Expanding & Continuing Partnerships

- **Partner with other transit service providers**

- City of Fairfax CUE
- Explore options for students and schools served only by Metrobus

- **FCPS**

- The Department of Vehicles Services
 - Buses, cars and service trucks are maintained at the four county garages.
- Radio Systems and Services Center
 - The radios for buses, cars and service trucks are installed and maintained by the radio shop. The entire system of repeaters and antennas are all part of the working relationship of the County and FCPS



Refine & Engage

- **Parity**

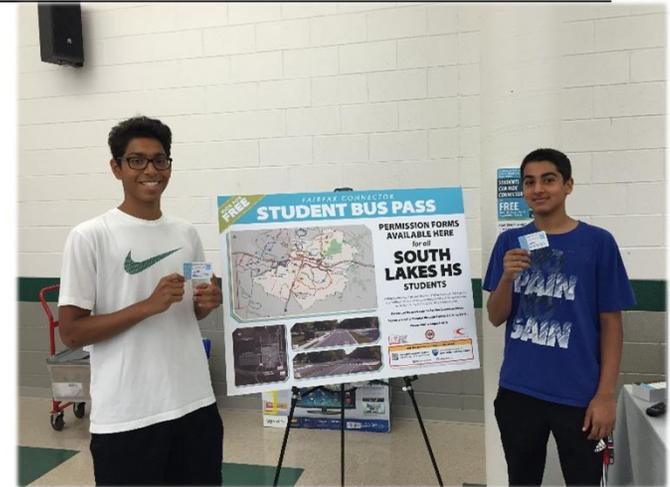
- Include bus pass information/forms along with school parking pass information

- **Outreach**

- Create “toolkit” for administrators
- Update “Elizabeth’s Journey” PSA video, as needed
- Update outreach materials and pass; color code
- Robust social media campaign
- Increase in-school and other outreach opportunities

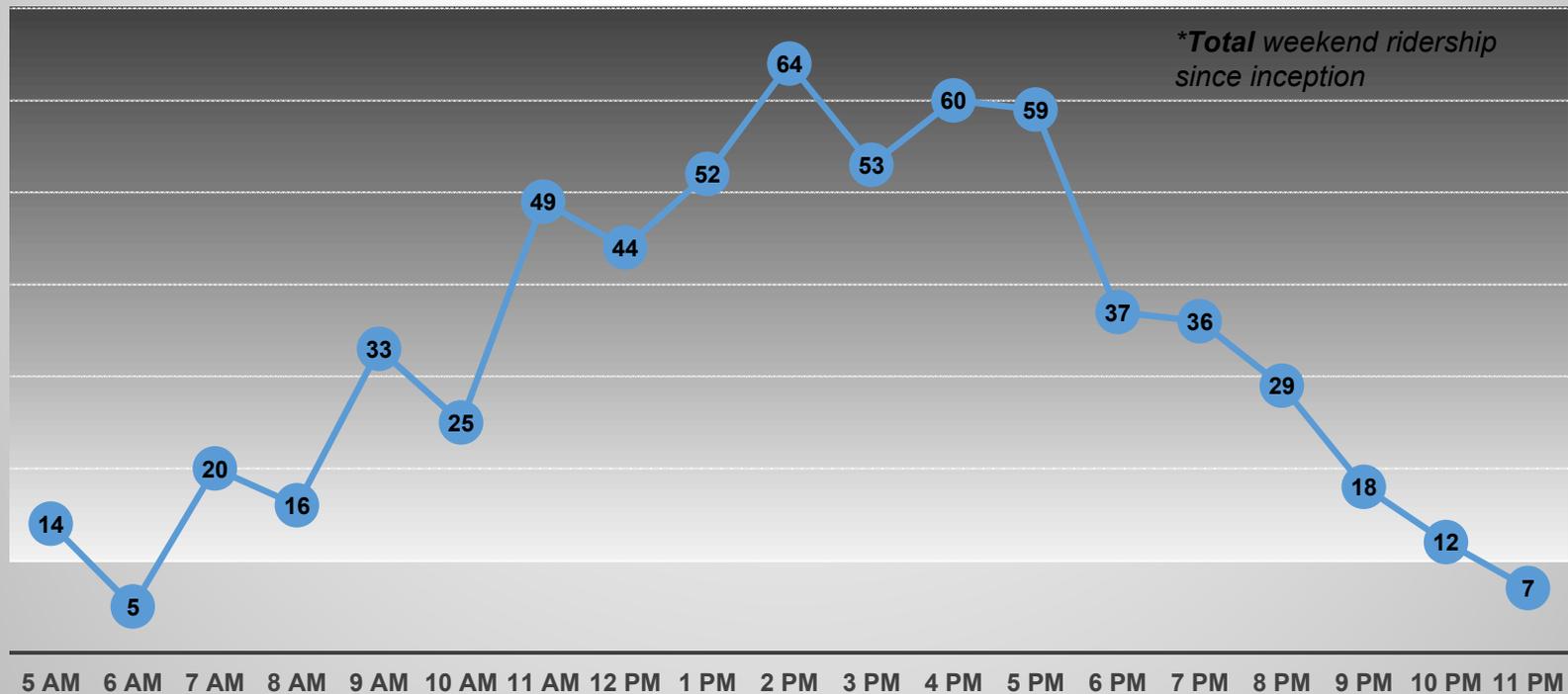


Questions/Discussion





Weekend Student Ridership by Time of Day *



A total of 633 student trips taken on Sat & Sun over 29 weeks

