



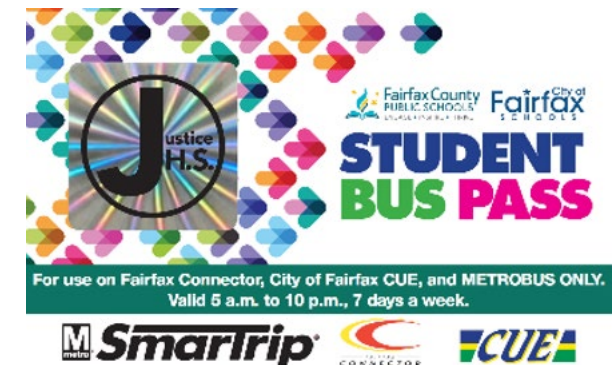
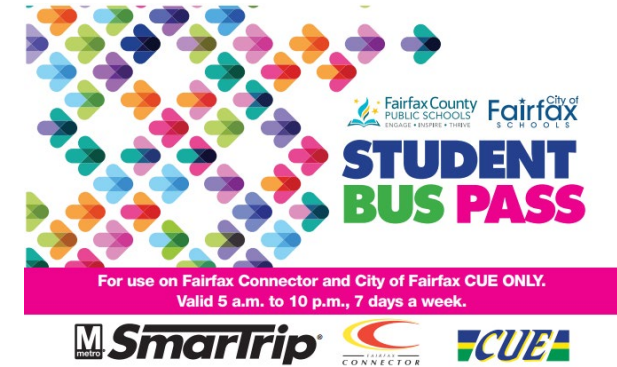
# Implications of Free Fares on the Fairfax Connector

Board Transportation Committee Meeting  
December 13, 2022

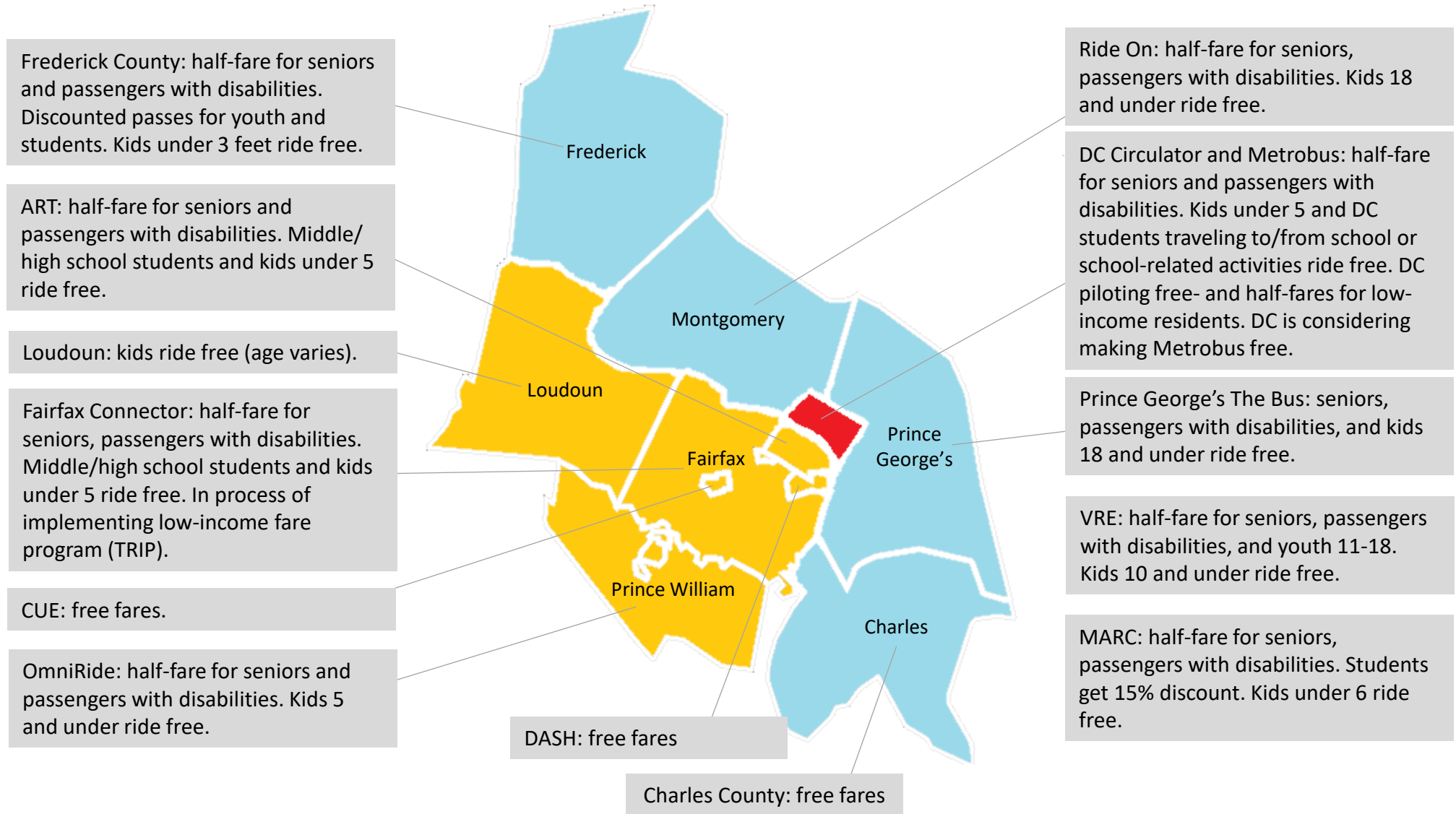
John Zarbo, Chief, Operations Section  
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Fairfax County Department of Transportation

# Existing Fare Reduction Programs

- Reduced Fare Program (seniors and passengers with disabilities) half-fare discount
- Children ages 4 and under ride free (up to two with fare paying adult)
- Free student bus pass for Fairfax County middle and high school students to ride on all Fairfax Connector routes and on Metrobus for select schools
- Free transfers to/from WMATA bus and rail service
- Transit Ridership Incentive Program (TRIP) half-fare discount for economically disadvantaged residents



# Transit Fare Implementation in the NCR



# Nationwide Sample Free Fare Transit Agencies

- Most agencies that went fare free during the pandemic have reimplemented fares
- Some agencies are looking at various fare-free pilot programs or conducting studies

Transit Agency	Location	Fleet Size (2020)	End date
Fairfax Connector	Fairfax County, VA	323	
Kansas City Area Transportation Authority/RideKC (KCATA)	Kansas City, MO	225	Through 2023
ABQ RIDE	Albuquerque, NM	185	June 30, 2023
Greater Richmond Transit Company (GRTC)	Richmond, VA	150	June 2025
Driving Alexandria Safely Home (DASH)	Alexandria, VA	121	June 2025
GoRaleigh	Raleigh, NC	103	June 30, 2023
Intercity Transit	Olympia, WA	82	Through 2023
Merrimack Valley Regional Transit Authority (MVRTA)	Lawrence and Haverhill, MA	50	March 2024
Southeast Area Transit District (SEAT)	Southeastern Connecticut	30	December 1, 2022

# Pros and Cons of Fairfax Connector Free Fares

Pros	Cons
Supports One Fairfax policy – more equitable access for passengers with limited income	Negative impact to budget (Loss of ridership revenue and revenue diversification impacts)
Increase in ridership	Inequitable benefit for County riders with only Metrobus options
Elimination of farebox capital program costs	Loss of farebox data specific to rider or fare categories
Elimination of ongoing fare collection costs	Increase in non-destination riders can lead to additional security incidents
Eliminate fare disputes as cause of operator assault	Would provide benefits to riders who are receiving transit benefits from their employers and others who can afford to pay the fare
Possible decreases in bus dwell time	Potential Title VI Civil Rights concern regarding the impact of free fare to non-economically disadvantaged riders

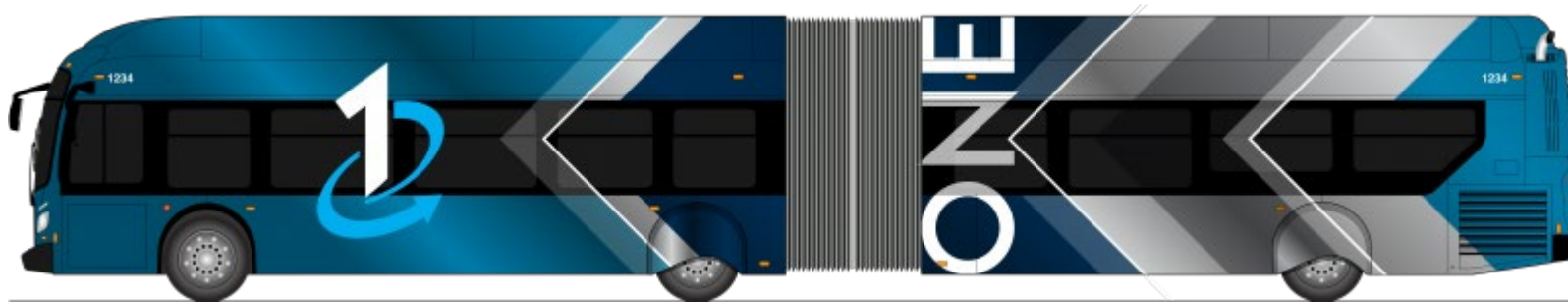
# TRIP Background

- State grant program supporting low/no fare programs to increase transit ridership
  - Grant Agreement approved May 24, 2022
- CTB awarded Fairfax County ~\$5.49 million for a three-year half-fare pilot program
  - County share ~\$4.2 million over three years
- Qualification to receive reduced fares are annual income at or below 225% of the federal poverty level by household size
- Implementation: February 2023



# Budget Implications – Revenue Loss

- Scenario includes free fares for all Fairfax Connector riders starting in FY2024
- Assumptions ~\$500K in annual savings (no armored car service, SmarTrip participation fees, farebox parts, etc.)
- Full free fares option starting in FY2024 ~\$9 million loss annually
- Increases to ~\$13 million annually starting in FY2030 - assumes BRT service will be fare free



# Staff Recommendations

- Continue free fare programs including;
  - Free student bus pass and +Metrobus program for five select schools
  - Reduced Fare Program (seniors and passengers with disabilities)
  - Free transfers to/from WMATA bus and rail service
  - Children under 4 ride free
- Pilot the TRIP program (50% off Fairfax Connector fares) to launch in February 2023
  - Three years of funding for the program.
  - Status report to the board on program progress in February 2024
- Eliminate fares for children between 5 and 11 years old, with paying adult







## Questions/Discussion

Does the Board want to pursue additional fare reduction strategies?