

## Testimony in Support of Expanded Budget for Kids Ride Free Program

Resolution to Approve FY20 Transportation, Fee, Charges and Fares - April 23, 2019

I'm Tina Slater, Transportation Chair for Sierra Club Montgomery County Group.

Sierra Club supports increasing money in the budget for the Kids Ride Free program to expand hours and include all days of the week. Our climate depends on reducing GHG emissions, which means moving people in the fewest number of vehicles. The Kids Ride Free program encourages more transit use.

Currently, students 18 or younger, who are Montgomery County residents, may use the Ride On bus (and most Metrobus routes within the county) on weekdays for free between the hours of 2:00 and 8:00 pm. When kids ride free, there is some revenue loss to Ride-On and to WMATA. If we were to continue the program as it is today, there is no net revenue loss. There are several proposed alternatives, all of which would impact the budget. The most generous free rides program (all bus service hours, 7 days a week) would have a \$1 million added net cost. But look at what we would get for it –

- More young people will become familiar with the county transit system and will continue to use it as they get older
- Students have independence to go to afterschool club/sports activities, jobs, internships, and attend classes at other schools (like Edison High School of Technology)
- They can pick up siblings, go to medical appointments, get to the library, connect to Metro or get back home
- Being able to go across town and hang out with friends on weekends is a ticket to independence!
- Parents can be freed up from “chauffeur duties” if kids use transit on their own
- It's even more helpful to low income households, since their children can ride for free

The Council has talked about viewing the budget through an equity lens. Lower income communities have nearly double the number of carless households, when compared with higher income areas. Giving students access to free transit anywhere in the county will open up countless opportunities.

During the T&E Committee session, Director Roshdieh said MCDOT will be reviewing the entire transit system (developed some 40 years ago). The system has grown over the years, and it's time for a comprehensive look at where the population now resides and the many new schools that have been added. These students are future Ride-On customers and MCDOT wants them to use the system a lot!

Money added to the budget for Kids Ride Free is an economic investment, which we'll get back many times over. As more kids become transit riders -- it's good for the county, it's good for the environment, and these students will eventually become paying customers. Kids Ride Free fosters a culture of transit ridership.

Tina Slater  
Sierra Club MoCo Group, Transportation Chair  
[Slater.tina@gmail.com](mailto:Slater.tina@gmail.com)