

October 17, 2025

Transit Fare Change Study

Overview

[California Senate Bill 1703 \(Peace, 2003\)](#) assigns SANDAG the responsibility for setting a regional transit fare policy, including setting fares for transit services in the region. At its February 13, 2025, meeting, the Metropolitan Transit System (MTS) Board of Directors voted to authorize staff to work with SANDAG and North County Transit District (NCTD) to conduct a transit fare change study which would consider multiple scenarios and estimate the effects on ridership and fare revenue. Staff from the three agencies have started to meet regularly to conduct this study. [Board Policy No. 029](#) provides guidelines for setting a uniform, fair, and equitable region-wide fare system within the County of San Diego for the MTS and NCTD– San Diego Railroad. The [Comprehensive Fare Ordinance](#) includes the existing fare structure used by MTS and NCTD, with a detailed listing of the available fares, their prices, and their limitations.

Key Considerations

Transit fare revenue is an important part of the operating budgets of MTS and NCTD. SANDAG initiates a transit fare change study at the request of either agency. Conducting a transit fare change study includes the following steps:

- Executing the public participation plan in compliance with [Board Policies No. 025](#) and [029](#) to hear from transit riders and other members of the public
- Collecting and evaluating data on transit riders to determine how their ridership levels might change in response to fare changes
- Developing scenarios for proposed fare structures, such as changes to one-way fares, daily passes, or monthly passes; eligibility for free or discounted fares; transfer rules; or geographical fare zones
- Modeling the effects of proposed scenario(s) on transit ridership and fare revenues
- Analyzing the effects of proposed scenario(s) on population groups pursuant to [Board Policy No. 018, Title VI Requirements and Guidelines for Federal Transit Administration Recipients \(Circular 4702.1B\)](#), and other guidance, as applicable.

Staff from SANDAG, MTS, and NCTD are collaborating on public outreach throughout multiple phases of the study, starting with a survey of transit riders available October 6, 2025, through November 7, 2025. The survey asks respondents to identify the transit services they use most commonly, how often they ride, the main reasons they use transit, and tradeoffs they would make between transit fares, levels of transit service, and free or discounted fares for certain riders. The survey also asks for demographic

Action: Information

Staff will present an update on the Transit Fare Change Study that SANDAG is conducting on behalf of the Metropolitan Transit System and North County Transit District.

Fiscal Impact:

The Transit Fare Change Study is funded as part of Overall Work Program Project No. 3320100.

Schedule/Scope Impact:

Any transit fare changes approved by the Metropolitan Transit System Board, North County Transit District Board, and SANDAG Transportation Committee would be enacted no sooner than July 1, 2026.

information to link responses with other data collection efforts, including the 2023 On-Board Transit Passenger Survey, and ensure sufficient representation among respondents.

Additional outreach efforts include holding pop-up events at both MTS and NCTD transit centers, hosting online and in-person meetings in both transit agencies' service areas, and issuing public notices of proposed fare changes and upcoming meetings in a variety of printed and electronic formats.

After conducting the study and collecting feedback, MTS and NCTD may recommend changes to transit fares. Proposed fare changes can only be implemented through SANDAG's approval of an amendment to the Comprehensive Fare Ordinance. [Board Policy No. 001](#) delegates this responsibility to the Transportation Committee (TC). Proposed amendments are presented to the Boards of Directors of MTS and NCTD for consideration before they are taken to the TC.

Next Steps

Staff will return to the TC in early 2026 with the results of the first round of public outreach to share results and begin discussing scenarios to evaluate. After additional analysis and discussion with the Boards of Directors of MTS and NCTD, there may be proposed changes to the Comprehensive Fare Ordinance. If so, the Transportation Committee will be asked to conduct two readings of the proposed changes as early as spring 2026. If approved, transit fare changes generally may go into effect no sooner than 30 days after the second reading.

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