

Purpose

This fare policy is intended to describe the CATS fare structure in relation to different types of transit services and fare media offered. Fare Policy issues affect all aspects of public transportation and fare-related decisions have enormous effects on ridership, revenue, the amount of service that can be offered, and community perceptions of public transportation.

Fare policies will be reviewed every two years to ensure consistency with the Financial Policies adopted by the MTC.

The fare policy elements presented herein provide guidance for fare-related decisions in the context of fulfilling the mission of the transit system, protecting the public interest, and supporting the Financial Policies adopted by the MTC.

Objectives

- ◆ Encourage ridership by pricing transit affordably for all segments of the service area population, particularly those whose mobility options are limited.
- ◆ Establish a fare structure that is simple and readily understandable by current and potential riders.
- ◆ Provide fare media that maximizes the convenience of paying fares.
- ◆ Price different types and levels of service equitably.
- ◆ Meet the Financial Policies' mandated system subsidy.

Elements

- ◆ **Base Fare**
The base cash fare for local bus service shall be at a level that is reasonably affordable for riders and that represent a fair share of the costs of operating transit services. Limited-stop services that principally cover the same geographic territory shall also charge the base local fares.
- ◆ **Express Bus Fare**
Express bus service shall be offered at a premium fare, in recognition of the greater travel speeds, longer average trip lengths, and additional passenger amenities offered by such service. The express bus fare for routes within Mecklenburg County shall be maintained at approximately 40 percent greater than the base cash fare rounded to the nearest logical dollars and cents. Express customers may transfer to local service at no additional charge.
- ◆ **Regional Express Bus Fare**
Regional express bus service for routes that extend beyond Mecklenburg County shall be maintained at a level twice the base cash fare in recognition of much longer average trip lengths and the fact that the dedicated sales tax is

not levied outside of the County. Regional express bus customers may transfer to local or other express service at no additional charge.

The adopted CATS Financial Policies require reimbursements from governmental units outside Mecklenburg County for service delivery into those areas.

Reverse Commute Fare

CATS shall charge the base local fare for reverse-commute express service to utilize available capacity with no significant additional operating cost and to serve the wider societal goal of offering an opportunity to access suburban jobs at a reasonable cost. Until noon, customers traveling outbound on express and regional express buses will be charged the local base cash fare. After 12:00 PM, customers traveling inbound on express and regional express buses will be charged the local base cash fare. Reverse commute customers may transfer to local service at no additional charge.

Community Shuttle Fare

A community shuttle service fare shall be lower than the base fare in recognition of the shorter trip lengths on these services and the different roles of these shuttles as feeders to local routes and as a means of mobility at the neighborhood level. When transferring to a local or express shuttle, customers shall be required to pay an additional charge equal to the difference between the shuttle fare and the service to which they are transferring.

Employment/Activity Center Fare

Where shuttle service operates at employment/activity centers with CATS sharing funding responsibility with business groups, local governments, or other entities, fares shall be set based on mutual agreement among the funding partners on a case-by-case basis.

Fare for Special Event Services

Where special event service is implemented for sporting events or similar activities, fares shall be set by CATS on a case-by-case basis.

◆ **Vanpool Fare**

Vanpool fares shall be based in part on the roundtrip miles, with higher fares associated with longer trip lengths. In addition, a flat monthly rate shall be applied based on van size and the number of participants in the vanpool. CATS will provide a monthly subsidy per vanpool. The monthly vanpool rate is set by the contracted provider.

◆ **Light Rail Fare**

Light Rail fare shall match the local bus fare, in recognition of the similarity in trip lengths, the desirability of attracting as many riders as possible to the system, and the availability of a bus-rail transfer in many cases where the local fixed-route bus network provides feeder service to light rail.

◆ **Streetcar Fare** shall be free of charge.

◆ **Commuter Rail/Bus Rapid Transit Fare** will be established prior to initiation of new service.

◆ **Microtransit Fare**

Microtransit fare shall be aligned with the local bus fare. Users must schedule trips in advance and have proper pass type (ex. physical, digital, or transfer) as proof of payment.

◆ **Transfers** shall be available free of charge except from less expensive to more expensive services (e.g., local bus to express bus). The cost of transfers to higher priced services shall be the difference in fares. Transfers are valid for up to 90 minutes from issuance.

Free transfers in the same direction of travel will be offered to/from bus service and Light Rail Transit service.

◆ **Discounted Fares**

Discounted fares shall be available for senior citizens, passengers with disabilities, students through high school, and children 12 years and younger. Appropriate identification shall be required for discounted fares. The fare for senior riders (age 62 and over) and passengers with disabilities shall be 50 percent of the cash fare for the service rounded to the nearest logical dollars and cents. The fare for students through high school and children 12 years and younger shall be 50 percent of the cash fare for the service riding. Children 5 years and younger or under 46 inches tall shall not be required to pay a fare.

◆ **Fare Adjustments/Promotions:**

CATS may adjust pricing of passes at its discretion to ensure accessibility, promote engagement, or respond to economic or operational circumstances. This may include temporary or permanent price reductions, special promotions, or discounted rates for specific groups. Adjustments will be communicated and will remain subject to the terms and conditions set by CATS

on a case-by-case basis. Reductions will last no more than a 6-month period, unless otherwise specified and approved, adhering to federal guidelines. Additionally, CATS, at the discretion of the CEO, shall have the right to temporarily suspend the charging of fares for all or any portion of the public transportation system in response to operational needs, emergencies, or safety concerns. This will be communicated via CATS standard communications procedures for service changes.

◆ **Passes**

Monthly passes shall be priced at the equivalent of 40 single trips, for both local and express passes. Seven-day/weekly passes shall be priced at the equivalent of 14 single trips.

All 10-Ride passes except the ADA 10-Ride pass, shall be priced at the cost of 10 individual rides. The ADA 10-Ride pass will retain the 15 percent discount.

◆ **Special Transportation Services Fares**

Special Transportation Services (STS) provides services mandated by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Federal regulations permit a fare of no more than twice the local bus fare, but CATS has historically charged less than the maximum allowed. STS fares are all prepaid through ten-ride ticket books or an unlimited-use monthly pass. STS monthly passes can be used on non-STIS services in which the fare is equal to or less than the STS fare.

Fare Capping

Fare capping is the rewarding of a CATS Monthly pass for the remainder of the calendar month after a passenger's monthly spend total reaches the fare equivalent of the cost of a Local Monthly pass through the CATS Pass mobile app.

The only fare types which will count toward the monthly Fare Capping spending totals are as follows: Regular Fares for Local Monthly; Weekly; Day Pass; and One Way; No other CATS fare type or reduced fare type will count toward the monthly Fare Capping spending total.

Sales Discounts

Sales discounts may be offered to the following types of organizations: 1) for organizations that sell passes in volume (100+) which is currently a maximum of 10 percent discount and (2) to provide non-profit service providers, who provide targeted services to clients who are at or below the federal poverty level, with a 25 percent discount on passes for their clients.

All-Access Pass Agreements

For the purposes of this Policy, the following definition shall apply:

All-Access Agreement: An agreement negotiated by CATS with a third-party organization wherein CATS extends a discounted bulk rate and the third-party purchases passes at that rate for substantially all members, clients, or employees of that third party. Such passes may be for a time period of no less than 1 (one) month and must apply to all CATS services.

The key terms of each such potential All-Access Agreement shall be brought before the MTC for approval of the discount before such agreement is executed, except as otherwise stated in this section. At the discretion of CATS's CEO, MTC approval is not required for Agreements that are consistent with previously approved All-Access Pass Agreements and the key terms thereof as described below.

Educational institutions and non-profit organizations are eligible for an All-Access pass at the annual rate of \$50 per participant. For-profit organizations are subject to an annual rate of \$100 per participant. To qualify for the applicable rate **all** members, clients and/or employees must be enrolled in the program for the organization's physical locations served by CATS. Rates are assessed on a per-participant basis annually pending contract terms and are billed on an annual basis. Future rate increases are based on MTC approval of fare policy changes. For educational institutions, faculty and staff have the option to opt-in individually. Fee capped at 3 percent increase annually. For educational institutions, faculty and staff have the option to opt-in individually.

Fare Adjustment Policy

Fare adjustments will be evaluated every two years for consistency with the Financial Policies. This does not preclude the MTC from approving fare adjustments at other times to compensate for unusual, uncontrollable increases in operating costs, e.g. very significant fuel cost increases. The MTC also may choose to not adjust fares due to economic conditions or other reasons.

Fares for all other services shall be adjusted to maintain their relationship to the base cash fare as outlined in this policy.

Due to the greater cost per passenger of operating ADA service and the extension of this service countywide, fares for services operated by STS shall increase by twice the amount of local bus fare increases. For example, if local bus fares increase by \$0.10, the STS increase will be \$0.20.

Proposed Fare increases will be included in the Transit Operating Program, which must be approved by the MTC. After approval of the Transit Operating Program, current fares will be updated as an attachment to this policy. In unusual

circumstances, fare increases may be approved by the MTC outside of the annual Transit Operating Program schedule.

Summary of Changes

- 1.0 Updated vanpool language to reflect that the flat monthly rate would be applied based on vehicle size and number of participants, CATS will provide a subsidy, the monthly vanpool rate is set by the contracted provider.
- 2.0 Added section for Microtransit; fares shall be aligned with local bus fare.
- 3.0 Added language for fare adjustments and promotions to reflect special discounted fares.
- 4.0 Added language giving CATS CEO discretion to make changes in fare as needed.
- 5.0 Added language on how fare promotions will be communicated to public.
- 6.0 Amended All-Access pass program to include non-profit organizations at the same rate as accredited colleges and universities at a rate of \$50 per year. For-profit organizations are subject to an annual rate of \$100 per participant. Removed language noting all "participants associated with entity must opt-in" and replaced with "passes must be purchased for substantially all similarly situated members, clients, and/or employees of that organization."

Previous Revision: May 24, 2023

Current Fares as of July 1, 2025 and Fare Policies by Fare Type

Information provided in this attachment will be updated to reflect any current fare changes.

Type of Service	Current Fare	Recommended Fare Adjustments
Local bus, light rail, express services reverse commute	\$2.20	\$ 0.25 or the average of 2-year inflation, whichever is greater, every two years
Express routes within Mecklenburg County	\$3.00	40 percent greater than local bus fare
Regional Express* routes to neighboring counties	\$4.40	Twice the local bus fare
Streetcar	Free	
Activity Center Services	Set by agreement	Fare determined by mutual agreement with partnering organization(s)
Community shuttle service	\$0.90	40 to 50 percent of the local bus fare
Local bus and light rail All-Day Pass	\$6.60	Priced at equivalent of 3 one-way rides
Vanpool Service A minimum of 4 persons and as many as 15	Overall rate is set by contract provider. CATS will provide a subsidy for vanpool between 45% and 55%.	Overall rate is set by contract provider and is based on number of participants, miles traveled, and cost of fuel.
Commuter rail/bus rapid transit	N/A	If implemented, pricing to be determined
Micro Transit	\$2.20	Based on local base fare
People 62 years and up and passengers with disabilities, with valid Transit ID or Medicare card	\$ 1.10 Local bus & light rail \$ 1.50 Express Bus \$ 2.20 Express Plus*	50 percent of service fare excluding STS & vanpool
K-12 students with valid current year school or Transit ID 6am to 4:30 pm	\$1.10 Local bus & light rail \$1.50 Express Bus \$2.20 Express Plus*	50 percent of service fare excluding STS & vanpool
Children 5 years and younger or Children 46" tall or less (accompanied by an adult)	Free	
STS (ADA service) STS yellow tickets	\$3.50 \$35.00 (book of 10)	Valued at up to twice that of the local bus fare
Monthly passes	\$88.00 Local \$121.00 Express \$140.00 STS (ADA Service) \$176.00 Express Plus*	Priced at the equivalent cost of 40 single trips
Senior/ADA Monthly passes	\$44.00 Local \$60.50 Express \$88.00 Express Plus*	One half of monthly price for service
10-Ride Pass	\$22.00 Local \$30.00 Express \$44.00 Express Plus*	Pass is valid on bus only

Weekly local passes (unlimited rides)	\$30.80 Local	Priced at the equivalent cost of 14 single trips
All Access Pass	\$50.00 per year for Educational and non-profit institutions \$100 per year for For-profit businesses	Capped at 3% annual increase
Fares for Special Event Services		Set by CATS on a case-by-case basis

* Regional Express is identified as "Express Plus" on fare media.

Previous Fare Increase: July 1, 2014