

August 7, 2024

To: Mayor and Members of City Council

From: Sheryl MM Long, City Manager

202401871

Subject: Report on Partnering with METRO for Discounted Monthly Passes for City of Cincinnati Employees

REFERENCE DOCUMENT #202401111

On May 7, 2024, the Climate, Environment, and Infrastructure Committee referred the following for a report:

MOTION, submitted by Councilmembers Harris, Walsh, Jeffreys and Owens **WE MOVE** that the administration partner with METRO to engage in their METRO Pass program to provide interested City of Cincinnati Employees with discounted monthly passes. This should be promoted through the annual employee survey with eventual consideration of further subsidizing the passes to help recruit and retain talent.

The following report outlines the process by which the City of Cincinnati can partner with METRO to offer discounted monthly bus passes to interested employees. Specifically, it provides a detailed explanation of the program referenced by Council, METRO Pass Program, out of Minneapolis/St. Paul Minnesota and the roles, responsibilities, and costs associated. The report also details current offerings by Cincinnati's Southwest Ohio Regional Transit Authority (SORTA/Metro).

Additionally, the report clarifies the purpose of the annual Temp Check survey and explores its potential utility in assessing employee interest in the METRO Pass program. Furthermore, it considers the inclusion of questions in the survey to determine employee willingness to cover the costs through payroll deductions.

METRO PASS PROGRAM

Metropass is a program offered by Metro Transit, out of Minneapolis/St. Paul Minnesota, that provides employees of participating organizations with unlimited-ride transit passes at a deeply discounted rate. Employers can choose to cover the full cost, subsidize part of it, or pass the cost to employees. The program requires an initial one-year commitment, after which it moves to monthly billing. It helps reduce commuting stress, lowers transportation costs, and supports sustainable travel options.

The Metropass program requires participating employers to make at least a commitment of an initial year period before moving to monthly billing. In addition to actively promoting the METRO Pass program to eligible employees to ensure maximum participation, employers must designate a

Metropass administrator who would be responsible for setting up an account on the secure administrator site, submit participant names, verify active passes monthly for accurate billing schedule and conduct orientation sessions, distribute the physical Metropass to employees, and remind participants of usage terms while managing the ordering, cancellation, replacement, and suspension of passes through the administrator site.

The METRO Pass program costs \$83 per employee each month, compared to the \$120 regular monthly pass, and provides unlimited access to regional buses and trains. Employers can estimate the total monthly cost by multiplying \$83 by the number of participating employees. For instance, if 100 employees participate, the monthly cost would be \$8,300/month or \$99,600 a year. Employers have the option to either pass the full cost to employees through a payroll deduction, subsidize part of the cost, or fully cover the cost.¹

SORTA/METRO PASS PROGRAMS IN CINCINNATI

SORTA/Metro offers several transit pass options, although there is not an exact equivalent to the Metropass program found in Minneapolis/St. Paul advertised on its site.

SORTA/Metro provides a variety of passes to suit different commuting needs. The 30-Day Rolling Passes include the Hamilton County Local pass at \$80, which is valid for unlimited rides within Hamilton County for 30 days. The Hamilton County Express pass costs \$106 and includes Routes 52X and 72X, while the Suburban County Express pass is priced at \$150 and covers Routes 42X, 71X, and 82X. Additionally, the Metro/TANK pass is available for \$105, allowing unlimited travel within Hamilton County and on all local TANK routes.

For shorter-term needs, SORTA/Metro offers Day Passes. The Hamilton County Local Day Pass is priced at \$4.00 and provides unlimited rides within a 24-hour period. The Metro/TANK Day Pass, costing \$5.00, offers unlimited travel on both Metro and TANK buses for 24 hours.

In addition to these passes, SORTA/Metro offers Stored Value Cards in increments of \$10, \$20, and \$30, which function like cash for fare payments.

Special programs are also available, such as the Fare Deal Program, which offers half-price fares for seniors, individuals with disabilities, and others who meet specific eligibility criteria. This program includes a monthly sticker priced at \$40. Another program, the Metro Veterans Program, provides discounted fares for veterans.

While SORTA/Metro does not currently offer an exact equivalent to the Metropass program for area employers, efforts have been made to explore similar options. In 2022, the City of Cincinnati's Department of Human Resources (HR) requested that Metro consider providing a bulk discount for City employees, either as a flat rate discount of 10-20% or through employer or employee contributions. At that time, SORTA/Metro needed to work with their ticketing and payment solutions vendor, Masabi, to test integration with the Transit app technology for handling bulk payments.

Since 2022, there has been no further engagement between HR and SORTA/Metro regarding this initiative. The HR department presumed that SORTA/Metro was exploring potential avenues and recommendations for such a partnership that could benefit not just the City of Cincinnati but also other area employers.

¹ <https://www.metrotransit.org/metropass-overview>

TEMP CHECK EMPLOYEE SURVEY

The City of Cincinnati plans to release its second annual Temp Check survey during the open enrollment period in October 2024. This survey is essential for evaluating various aspects of the workforce, including job satisfaction, employee morale, engagement levels, and overall organizational effectiveness.

To ascertain employee interest in participating in a program like Metropass, the following questions could be included in the upcoming Temp Check survey:

- "Do you currently use public transit for your commute?"
- "If a subsidized public transit pass program were available, how likely would you be to use public transit for your commute?"
- "Would you be willing to cover the cost of the public transit pass through a payroll deduction if the program provided you with significant savings?"

SUMMARY

In closing, this report explores the potential for the City of Cincinnati to collaborate with SORTA/Metro to offer discounted monthly transit passes to its employees, modeled after the Metropass program in Minneapolis/St. Paul. It also highlights the opportunity for the City to use the annual Temp Check survey to assess employee interest and willingness to participate in and potentially cover the costs of the program.

Should SORTA/Metro possess a program comparable to the Metropass that is not yet advertised to area employers but is willing to extend it to the City, it will be necessary for City Council and the Administration to decide whether to fully or partially subsidize the cost per participant, or have employees cover the cost entirely. Additionally, an administrator must be designated to manage the program, ensuring active participation and accurate billing.

c: Natasha Hampton, Assistant City Manager
 Latisha Hazell, Director of Human Resources