

BACKGROUND:

Established in 1975 through a mutual agreement between the City of Riverside and the Riverside Transit Agency (RTA) to provide paratransit services to seniors over the age of 60 and ADA certified individuals, the Special Transportation Division of the Parks, Recreation and Community Services Department operates the Riverside Connect Program within the city limits of Riverside.

The program, implemented in 1975 with just five buses, currently has a fleet of 34 – 16 passenger compressed natural gas (CNG) buses, 2- 9 passenger Transit Vans, a sedan, and a passenger van. Prior to the pandemic the program provided on average 600 to 700 rides per day but as a result of the pandemic, service demands have been slow to recover to pre COVID-19 numbers with the average number of rides per day currently at around 300 to 350.

Riverside Connect will be celebrating 50 years of service in 2025. The program continues to provide necessary transportation services to seniors and the disabled community 7 days a week, 363 days a year. Riverside Connect allows seniors and individuals living with a disability the ability to live an independent life by providing equitable access to transportation. Riverside Connect has traveled on average over 400 miles per year transporting senior and disabled residents throughout the City of Riverside.

Several key factors underscore the significance of this service for our residents:

1. **Independent Living:** For elderly residents and individuals with disabilities, Riverside Connect is instrumental in promoting an independent lifestyle. Riverside Connect empowers individuals to access essential services, healthcare services, and community activities without reliance on caregivers or family members.
2. **Accessibility and Inclusivity:** Riverside Connect ensures that individuals with disabilities have equal access to transportation, especially for those who may face challenges using traditional public transportation due to mobility impairments.
3. **Healthcare Access:** Riverside Connect facilitates access to vital healthcare services such as medical appointments and dialysis treatments. Reliable transportation to healthcare contributes to the overall well-being of the community.
4. **Reduction of Isolation:** Riverside Connect mitigates social isolation by connecting individuals who may have difficulty using traditional public transportation. Having the ability to use accessible reliable transportation helps combat feelings of isolation amongst the senior and disabled community.
5. **Employment Opportunities:** The transportation services Riverside Connect provides is a key component in enabling individuals with disabilities the opportunity to participate in the workforce. Riverside Connect provides a reliable and accessible means to commute to and from work.
6. **Community Engagement:** Riverside Connect contributes to community engagement by enabling individuals to participate in social, cultural, and recreational activities. Participation in these types of activities fosters a sense of belonging and community.
7. **Emergency Evacuation and Disaster Response:** When called upon by first responders, Riverside Connect can assist with the safe and timely evacuation of individuals with disabilities and those requiring special assistance during emergencies.

Riverside Connect is a cornerstone of an inclusive and compassionate community. By addressing transportation services, Riverside Connect contributes to the overall well-being, independence, and active participation of diverse community members. The continued support and enhancement

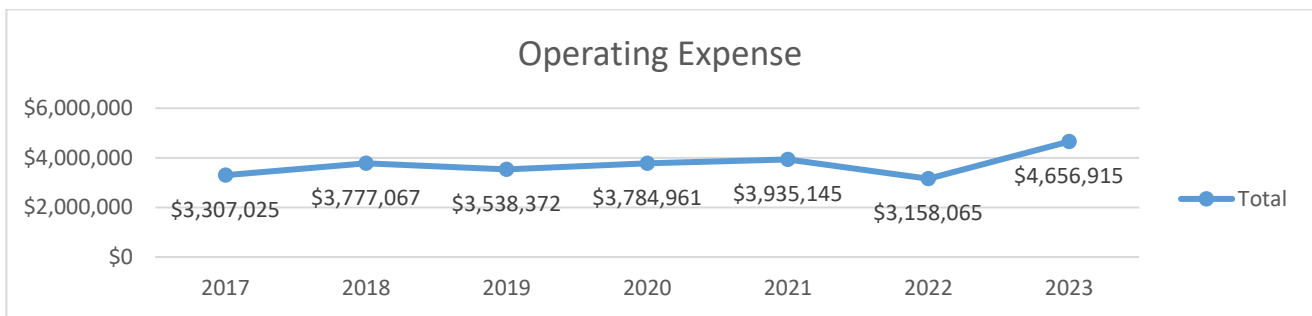
of Riverside Connect aligns with the City’s commitment to creating a community that is accessible and supportive to all. Riverside Connect is 100% funded by State and Local Transportation funds.

PUBLIC WORKSHOPS:

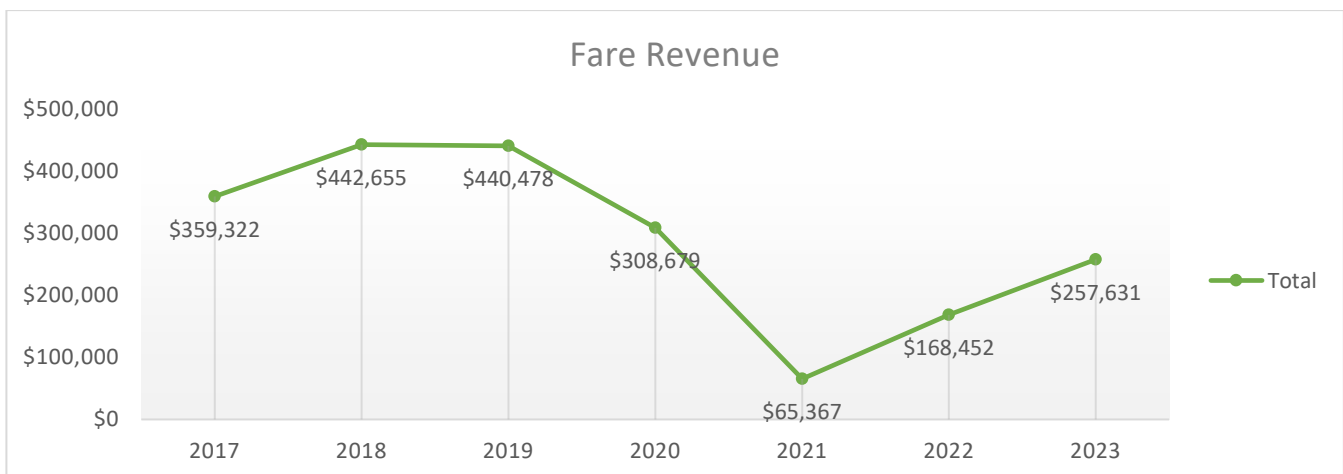
Public forums were held at **Dales Senior Center** on August 23, 2023, **Bordwell Park Community Center** on August 29, 2023, **La Sierra Senior Center** on August 30, 2023, **Villegas Park Community Center** on September 14, 2023, and at the **Janet Goeske Center** on September 21, 2023. Positive discussions and comments resulted from these workshops with overwhelming support of the proposed increase over the next two years. A paper notice was sent to all current registered participants in the program advising them of the fare increase proposal.

DISCUSSION:

Riverside Connect is 100% funded by State and Local Transportation Funds, no general fund moneys are used to support the program. In order to continue to be eligible to receive transportation funds, the Transportation Development Act of 1971 requires Riverside Connect to recover 10% of its operating costs through fares. Over the past several years the operating cost associated with providing paratransit services has steadily increased while the general fare has remained the same.



Conversely, the revenue from fares was at a gradual decrease transportation industry wide but the COVID-19 pandemic had a major effect on the public transportation industry. This is reflected in Riverside Connects gradual decline in revenue leading up to the COVID-19 pandemic and the over 60% reduction in fare revenue during that period.



The current fare structure for a one-way trip using Riverside Connect is \$3.00 per passenger for general trips and \$2.00 per passenger for medical trips. Clients may pay their fare in cash at boarding time or by adding funds to an electronic account that will be deducted electronically each time a client makes a trip. Per the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) fares for paratransit services cannot exceed twice the regular fixed route fare. RTA's current fixed route base fare is \$1.75, and their Dial A Ride Service's base fare is \$3.50.

Riverside Connect was able to achieve its mandatory farebox ratio of 10%, or more, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic but since then the program has struggled to recover from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and return to the pre COVID ridership numbers. Compounded with the increases in the overall cost to maintain and operate the service it will be increasingly difficult to satisfy the farebox obligation.

The last time transit fares increased was in 2017 when the general fare was increased by \$1.00, and a new Medical Fare was created. The City Council at that time highly recommended that smaller incremental increases be made more frequently to avoid larger increases in the future. For the Special Transportation Program to effectively serve the seniors and disabled residents of the City of Riverside the fare must increase to match the current fare rate that RTA has been charging for their Dial A Ride service since 2019 and the maximum fare allowable by the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. Enacting a .25 cent fare increase each year for the next two years for both general fares and medical fares will provide the leverage necessary to request additional Local Transportation and State funds and:

1. Help achieve a farebox recovery ratio of 10% or greater;
2. Maintain staffing to meet the current service demands;
3. Remain an affordable mode of transportation for those needing medical care; RTA Dial A Ride has charged \$3.50 per trip since 2019; and
4. Allow the program to continue to provide Riverside residents with the independence to meet their transportation needs without having to rely on caregivers or family members as it has for the past 49 years.

STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT:

Riverside Connect contributes to **Strategic Priority 6 – Infrastructure, Mobility & Connectivity**, which ensures safe, reliable infrastructure that benefits the community and facilitates connection between people, place, and information.

The transportation service provided by Riverside Connect aligns with the Infrastructure, Mobility & Connectivity Priority, and contributes to **Strategic Goal 6.1** in addressing the transportation needs of the Senior and Disabled residents of Riverside.

This action aligns with the following Cross-Cutting Threads:

1. **Fiscal Responsibility** – Riverside is a prudent steward of public funds and ensures responsible management of the City's financial resources while providing quality public services to all.
2. **Equity** – Riverside Connect ensures that equitable transportation is available to all

seniors and disabled residents within the City limits of Riverside.

- 3. **Community Trust** – Riverside Connect benefits the City’s diverse populations, and result in greater public good.
- 4. **Sustainability and Resiliency** – Riverside Connect is committed to meeting the transportation needs of the present without compromising the needs of the future and ensuring the City’s capacity to persevere, adapt and grow during good and difficult times alike.

FISCAL IMPACT:

The total annual estimated fiscal impact is approximately \$19,000 per year in increased revenue based on historical average ridership. The additional revenue collected will be deposited in the Special Transit Fund, Transit Fares Dial-A-Ride revenue account number 0000560-343530.

This fare increase also takes the recommendations of the 2017 City Council by having smaller incremental increase more frequently as to not place a drastic economic burden on our senior and disabled community. Special Transportation will continue to examine the Riverside Connect fare structure over three years and will propose increases as appropriate for the effective operations of the service.

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Concurs with;

Jim Perry, Chair
 Safety, Wellness and Youth Committee

Attachments: 1. Presentation
 2. Resolution