

***TCRP Synthesis 131***  
***College Student Transit Pass Programs***

**MARIELA GARCIA COLBERG**

*Senior Program Officer*

*Transportation Research Board*

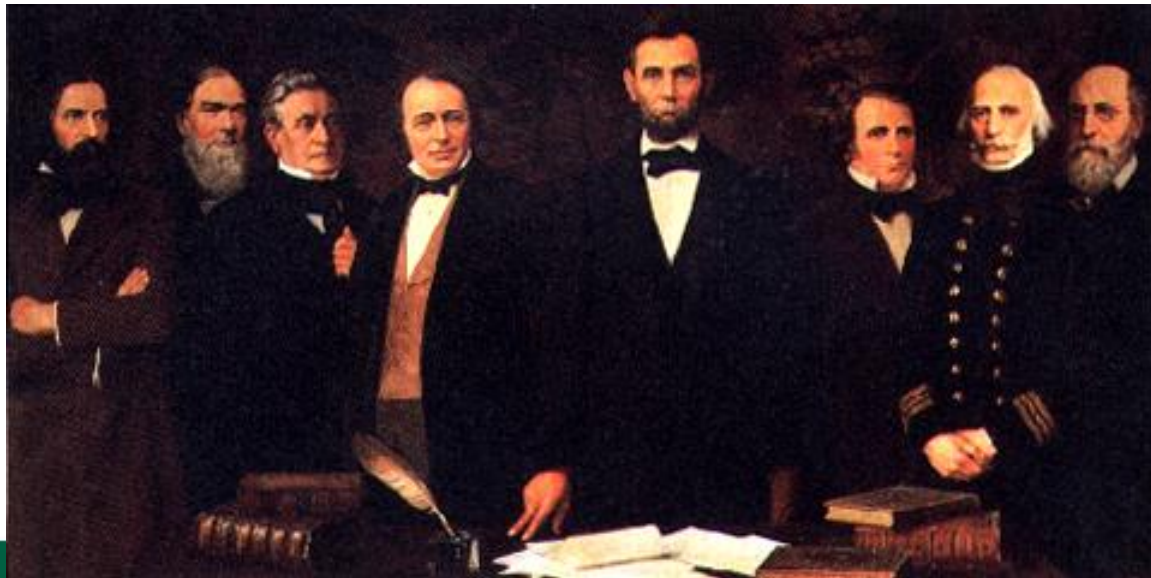
*Washington, DC*



2018 Public Transportation &  
Universities Conference

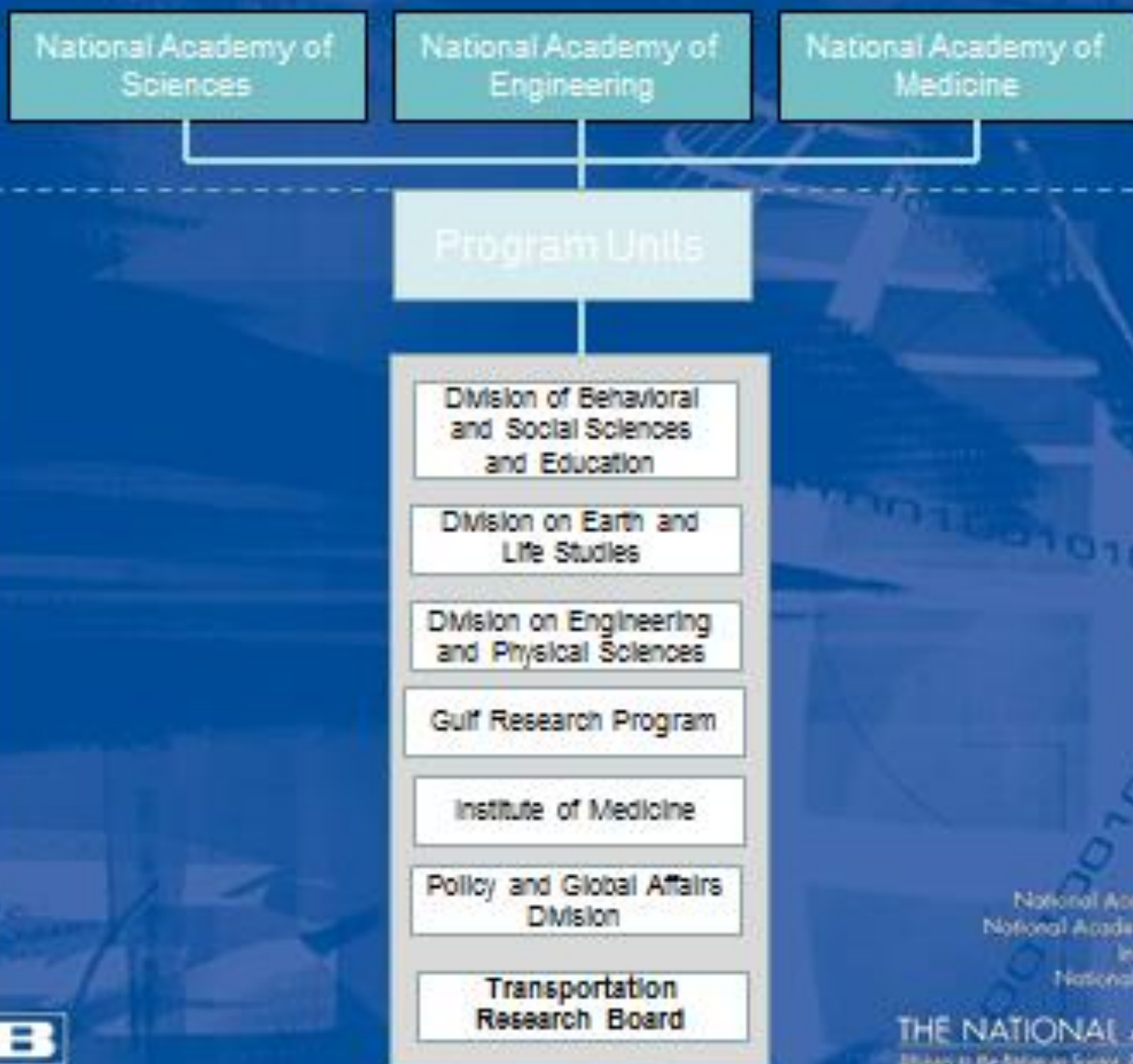
# 1863

## Founding of the National Academy of Sciences



# TRANSPORTATION

## RESEARCH BOARD



National Academy of Sciences  
National Academy of Engineering  
Institute of Medicine  
National Research Council

**THE NATIONAL ACADEMIES**  
Division of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine

# What is TCRP?

- ✓ Celebrating 25 years, authorized by Congress
- ✓ Funded and sponsored FTA
- ✓ Managed by the Transportation Research Board
- ✓ Industry-driven, applied research program that develops near-term, practical solutions to problems airport operators face
- ✓ Research contractors selected on a competitive proposal basis
- ✓ Volunteer panels develop scope, select contractors, oversee research, and review results

# Synthesis Studies

- Short and concise
- Current practices of the transportation systems
- Panel with practitioners that supervise the work

# TCRP Project J-7 Synthesis 131

## College Student Transit Pass Programs

[www.nap.edu/catalog/25052/college-student-transit-pass-programs](http://www.nap.edu/catalog/25052/college-student-transit-pass-programs)



Sources: Blacksburg Transit (Upper left), Milwaukee County Transit System (Up Middle), Foothill Transit (Upper Right), University of Washington Transportation Services (Lower Left), and Los Angeles Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Lower Right)

# TCRP

SYNTHESIS 131

## College Student Transit Pass Programs

*A Synthesis of Transit Practice*

*The National Academies of*  
SCIENCES • ENGINEERING • MEDICINE

  
TRANSPORTATION RESEARCH BOARD

TRANSIT  
COOPERATIVE  
RESEARCH  
PROGRAM

Sponsored by  
the Federal  
Transit Administration

# *TCRP Synthesis 131*

## *College Student Transit Pass Programs*

### AUTHORS

Drs. Jie Yu and Edward Beimborn from University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

### PANEL MEMBERS

- **Devon Deming, LA Metro, Los Angeles, CA**
- **David Eatman, City of Raleigh, Raleigh, NC**
- **Yingling Fan, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN**
- **Tracey Foster, Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority, Washington, DC**
- **Katie Gagnon, Foothill Transit, West Covina, CA**
- **Paul J. Larrousse, Rutgers, NJ**
- **Timothy Allan Witten, Blacksburg Transit, Blacksburg, VA**
- **Anna Corniel, FTA Liaison**



# *TCRP Synthesis 131*

## *College Student Transit Pass Programs*

### METHODOLOGY

- The investigators gathered the information reported in this synthesis from three sources:
  - 1) a literature review
  - 2) an on-line survey received from 21 out of 25 locations with college student transit pass programs, and
  - 3) an in-depth study of five (5) specific case examples/profiles representing different models of programs

# Roles of Agencies, Institutions, and Students

- U-Pass programs are a collaborative effort between transit agencies, university students and university administrators.
- The programs are most easily implemented where there is enthusiastic support for the concept at the upper levels of transit management (e.g., transit board).
- A key element is student support gathered through referenda to approve the use of student fees to pay for a pass.

# Program Design and Implementation

- Students, faculty and staff, or even the general public can be U-Pass users.
- U-Pass programs cover a wide range of public transit services. Passes can either be used in an unlimited manner or a limited manner.
- Transit route/service changes have been reported after the U-Pass program was implemented in many locations.
- Passes can be identified in several ways, such as combined use of a student ID and a smart card/sticker, a student ID only, and a smart card/sticker only. Integration technology between the student IDs and the smart card is desirable.
- The university and transit agency join together to market the program and use extensive social media.
- **Very few programs currently allow students to use the pass after they leave the institution.**

# Financing

- The program budget for the pass varies dramatically. U-Pass programs use a broad range of funding sources.
- The cost of the pass can be determined by using several basic principles, such as a revenue neutral approach, comparable pass cost, cost recovery, and per trip costs.
- In locations with multiple universities, each university has flexibility in how it administers the pass. Most locations use a uniform pass cost for different universities, with each university financing and managing the cost of the pass as they choose. Multiple transit agencies in a region are accommodated through separate agreements or through existing fare sharing agreements.

# Benefits and Challenges

- The primary benefits of a U-Pass program for transit agencies are: increased transit ridership to campus; use of off-peak transit capacity; creating lifetime riders, and increased transit revenue. The primary benefits for educational institutions are: reduced demand for campus parking, reduced commuting costs for students, and improved college affordability through the avoidance of vehicle purchases. Students benefit by reduced costs of attending college, avoidance of parking problems, and improved mobility.
- Challenges for transit agencies are abusive pass use and additional costs for more buses and facilities. Educational institutions are concerned about the cost of the program for the institution, the reaction of non-users to the pass fees, and resistance to increased parking fees when those are used to finance the program.

# Impacts

- Two main factors are used to evaluate the program, i.e., ridership and participation rates.
- U-Pass programs have been shown to have a major impact on student/faculty/staff transit ridership.
- In general, transit agencies and educational institutions are satisfied with the U-Pass program.
- The smart card technology used for many U-Pass programs provides substantial data that can be used to evaluate the program quickly. The investigated programs do not report a problem with fraud. Universities limit fraud by monitoring pass use and charging fees for pass replacement.

# CASE EXAMPLES

• Selected case examples –



1. Blacksburg Transit and Virginia Tech

2. King County Metro and University of Washington



3. Milwaukee County Transit System-  
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee



4. Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority and participating institutions

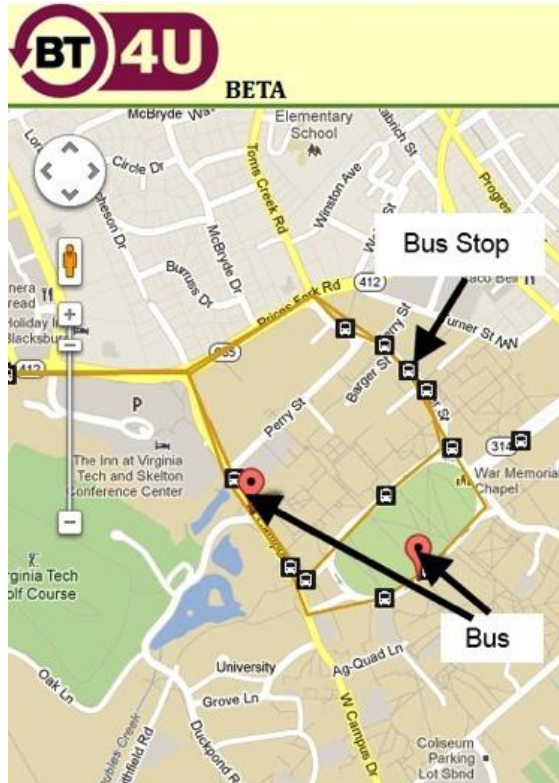
5. Foothill Transit and Citrus College, Mt. San Antonio College and the University of LaVerne



**Foothill Transit**



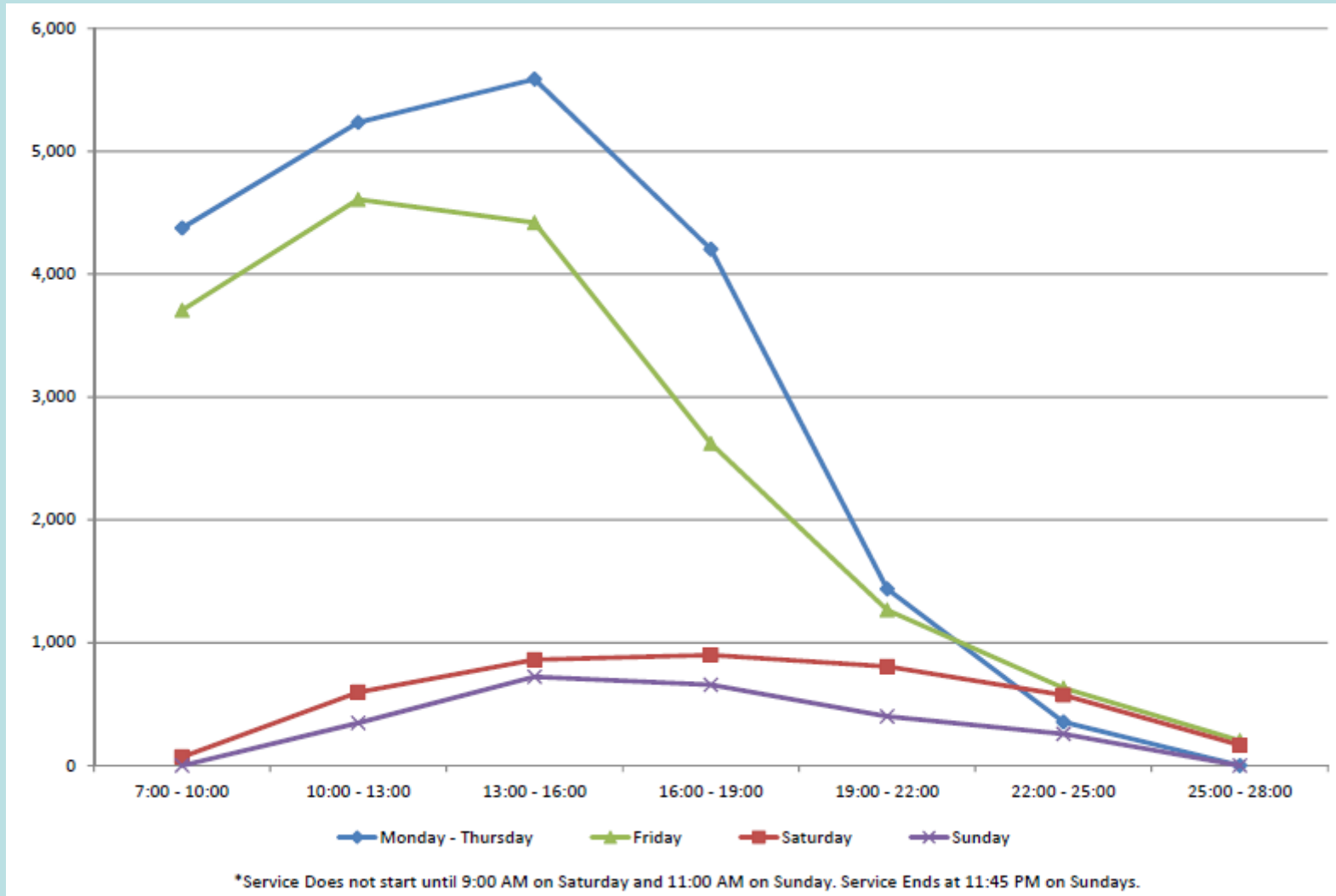
# BLACKSBURG TRANSIT



- *“ Understand the wants, needs and demands of students. Technology needs to work for them, they expect different means of communication”*

Blacksburg Transit Staff





Average total passengers by time of day, all fixed routes.

# King County Transit

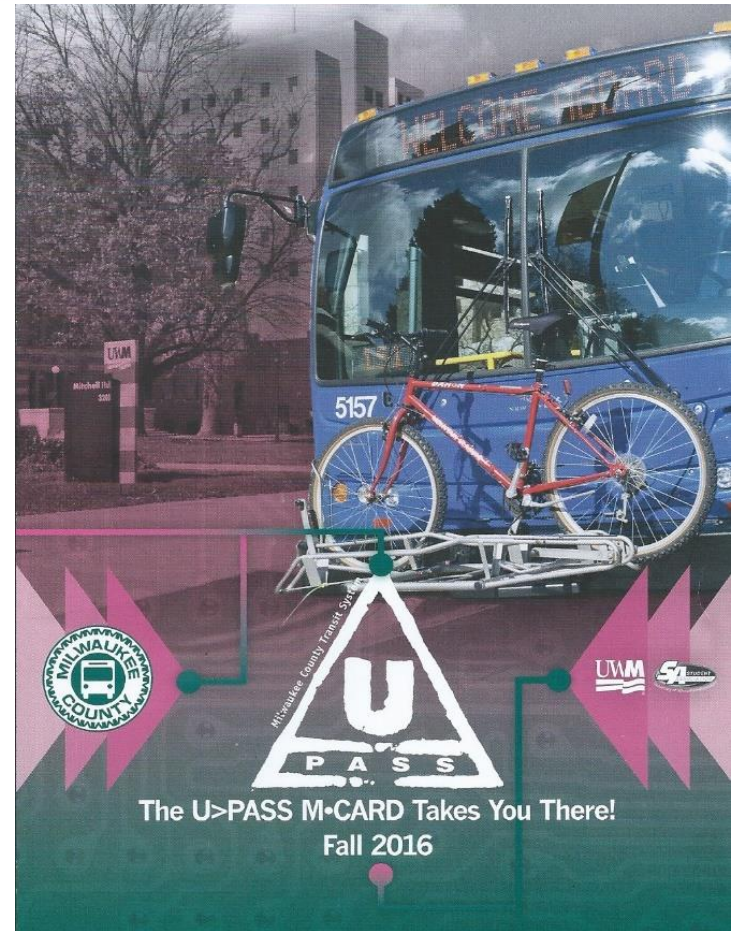


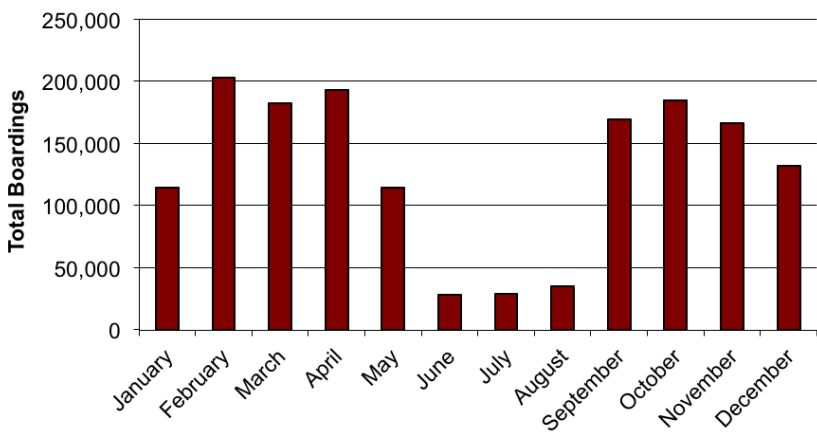
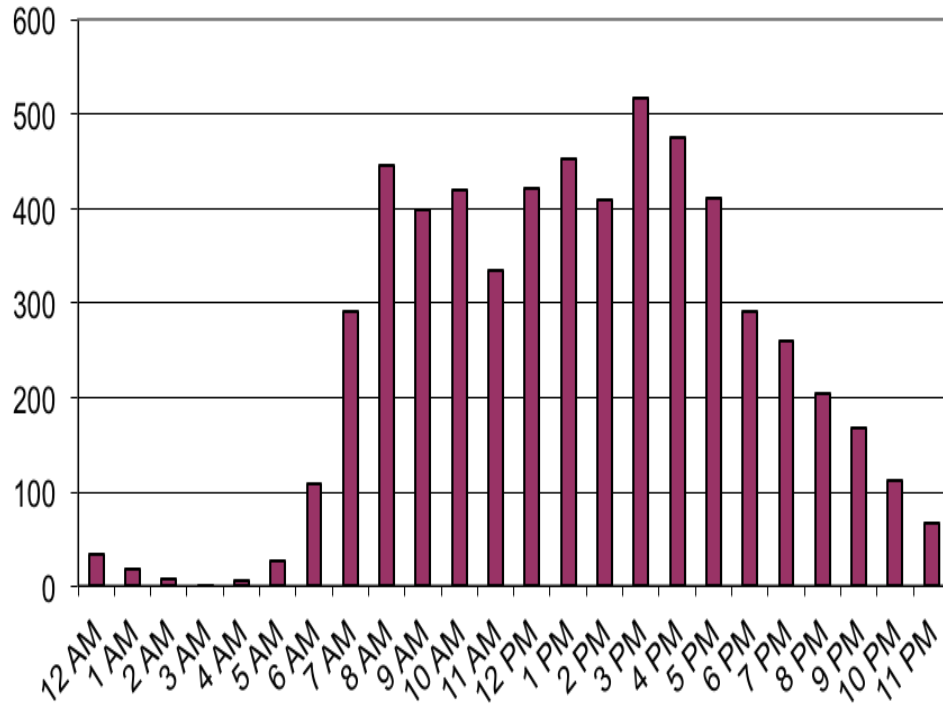
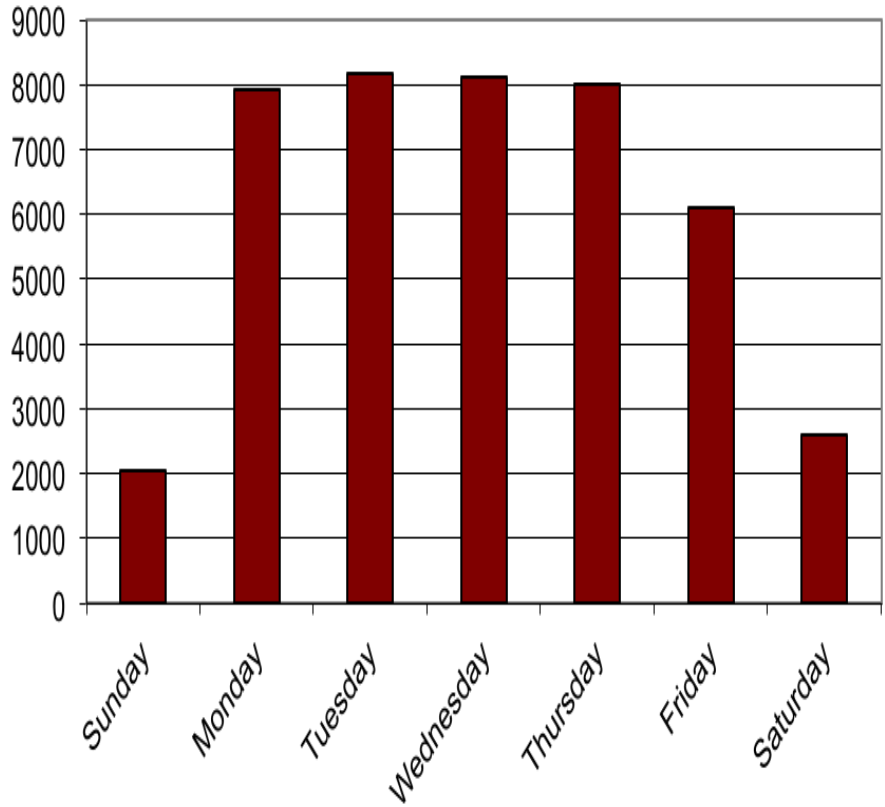
*“ Get everyone on board-  
transit board, transit  
management, students,  
university administrators.  
Support from the top has been  
key. The board and upper  
management want it to be  
successful and trust the staff”*

Source: King County Metro  
Staff

# MILWAUKEE COUNTY TRANSIT SYSTEM

- Started with University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Since then six other universities have been added.
- Very limited campus and parking
- A revenue neutral approach was used at the beginning
- Smart cards with ID must be presented. No integration at time of study.





# Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (LACMTA)



- **Los Angeles has 24 transit agencies and nearly 80 universities and colleges.**
- **LACMTA put a limit on its cost based on first semester existing ridership at each school. LACMTA requires universities to pay their estimated usage for the first semester.**
- **Each university decides how it will pay for student passes: parking fees, student segregated fees, general university budget**
- **Robust marketing**
- **Program uses chip – equipped stickers that are attached to student IDS. (If the sticker is peeled off, pass wont work.)**
- **Pass transition after graduation – 1 year reduced fee.**

# FOOTHILL TRANSIT



**Your bus is on the ballot**

Vote on OrgSync May 23 - May 24

**Citrus College students, vote on the future of the Class Pass on May 23 and May 24**

Students may vote for the ASCC Fall 2017 Elections on OrgSync ([orgsync.com/152347/forms/258937](http://orgsync.com/152347/forms/258937))

**A yes vote means...**

- You want to continue the Class Pass program
- Citrus College students will continue to receive unlimited rides on local Foothill Transit buses and the Silver Streak every semester
- A \$7 transit fee will be added to full-time Citrus College student registration fees every Fall and Spring semester (\$6 for part-time students) to help cover costs of the program
- A \$3 transit fee will be added to Citrus College part-time student registration fees every Winter and Summer intersession to help cover costs of the program. A \$4 transit fee will be added for full-time students in winter and summer intersessions

**A no vote means...**

- You do not want to continue the Class Pass program
- Citrus College students will no longer receive unlimited rides on Foothill Transit buses
- No transit fees will be added to Citrus College registration fees. Students who wish to ride Foothill Transit instead of driving will pay \$1.25 per ride\*, \$33 for a Student Local 31-Day Pass\* or \$52.00 for a Student Silver Streak 31-Day Pass\*

\* fares and passes are subject to change

Visit [foothilltransit.org/citruscollege](http://foothilltransit.org/citruscollege) to learn more

Several participating institutions used referenda before the adoption of a fee to pay for the pass.

At Citrus College, 83% of the student voters approved the use of student fees to pay for the pass

**Good grades** can take you anywhere –  
**we'll take you** to class



**FOOTHILL USES PRINT, BANNERS AND SOCIAL MEDIA TO MARKET ITS PROGRAM.**



***WIN - WIN***

Thank you!

[mgarciacolberg@nas.edu](mailto:mgarciacolberg@nas.edu)

