

No Greater Need. No Greater Opportunity.

Sign-on Letter in Support of the Allegheny County Department of Human Services Discount Fares Pilot Program Being Made Permanent and Zero-Fare for SNAP Households

Dear Allegheny County Leadership:

We, the undersigned organizations, are supporters of the [Fair Fares for a Full Recovery Campaign](#) calling for a permanent, fully zero-fare transit program for all SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) households in Allegheny County. Our communities and constituents rely on public transportation to access our social services, staff our businesses, attend our schools, participate in our programs and live full and healthy lives. **A long-term, zero fare program for all SNAP households in Allegheny County will ensure freedom of movement, unlock economic opportunity, and investment in underserved areas, while strengthening the County's transit system as a whole.** We know that in cities like Kansas City, Boston, Richmond, and across the state of Connecticut, the removal of long-standing public transit cost barriers has yielded immediate, expansive benefits such as improvements to the health and employment of riders, increased ridership, bus safety, as well as decreased greenhouse gas emissions.

We have seen firsthand the transformative impact of a zero fare program on the lives of thousands of low-income families, by building relationships and following up with participants in Allegheny County Department of Human Services' (ACDHS) recent [Discounted Fare Pilot](#) program currently benefiting over 14,000 people. Transit riders in this program [have shared stories](#) of how they obtained new jobs in the past year because they newly had the means to get to work, how people were able to get to the grocery store and access healthy foods, of how health needs were newly attended to on a regular and proactive basis, and of how families with children were able to improve and enrich their quality of life by visiting libraries and parks, once transportation costs were no longer an issue. We celebrate the ACDHS leadership for their commitment to cross-agency collaboration and for recognizing the vital need for affordable public transportation in meeting our region's human service goals.

The structure of Allegheny County's current pilot low-income fare program is distinctive and mutually beneficial for all involved: ACDHS provides the resources to ensure that Pittsburgh Regional Transit (PRT) does not suffer operating funding losses as a result of this program, and thus PRT gains a both dedicated source of funding and increased ridership, at a time when ridership is still significantly below pre-pandemic levels. The County Department of Human Services is able to invest a modest sum and see gains across so many critical human service needs, including around healthy

food access, healthcare, childcare, employment access and more. As for riders, fare relief is an important step towards racial and economic equity: In the Pittsburgh region, PRT fares fall heaviest on low-income households, led by women of color, who are the most reliant on public transit and have the highest likelihood of paying the full cash fare for every trip.¹ This symbiotic relationship between the Department of Human Services and Pittsburgh Regional Transit is one that should be the basis of a permanent, expanded program, and will likely be a model that will be emulated in other counties across the United States.

PRT named “an affordable fares policy” as its second-highest policy priority in its recently-released [long-range plan](#), specifically touting its commitment to “providing a more affordable fare structure for its lowest-income riders.” In order to fulfill that commitment, PRT must also contribute to the reduced-fare pilot program’s success and long-term financial viability. We support a reasonable funding formula that holds PRT harmless for additional costs incurred but does not obligate DHS to provide a revenue windfall to PRT. Funding to PRT should be discounted at least as much as any other bulk purchase/reimbursement arrangement used by PRT. In addition, this program should be simple to use and modeled after similar programs benefiting seniors and students, **with no additional means testing beyond verifying SNAP program participation.**

We are very heartened by incoming County Executive Sara Innamorato’s long-time support for the program and campaign commitments to its permanent, expanded implementation and look forward together to make this a reality!

The time is now: We urge our County elected leadership, the Allegheny County Department of Human Services and Pittsburgh Regional Transit to expeditiously implement a permanent zero fare program for all SNAP households in Allegheny County,

Sincerely,

Pittsburgh Food Policy Council
Pittsburghers for Public Transit
Urban Kind Institute
Just Harvest

[Add your organization’s name by signing on at fairfairnow.com](https://www.fairfairnow.com)

¹ Four Nines Technologies. (2021). *Port Authority of Allegheny County 2019-2021 Fare Structure and Policy Study* (p. 18). <https://www.rideprt.org/siteassets/inside-the-pa/surveys-and-reports/2021fournines.pdf>