

**MOTION BY SUPERVISORS HOLLY J. MITCHELL
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Expanding Metro LIFE Program Through Cross-Agency Collaboration

The Los Angeles County (County) Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Metro) Low Income Fare is Easy (LIFE) Program (Program) is the region’s primary transit discount program for low-income residents in the County. Metro’s 2022 Customer Experience Survey showed that almost 80 percent of riders identify as Latinx/Hispanic or Black, and 75 percent are from low-income households. Year after year, low-income riders and people of color continue to make up the vast majority of Metro’s ridership.

The LIFE Program’s free rides can be used to travel not only on Metro’s system, but also on 14 participating transit operators across the County. Since its launch in 2019, LIFE has been a tremendous success, but not without continued adjustment and iteration to expand the Program’s reach. In 2021, the Metro Board passed a motion¹, authored by Supervisor Mitchell, committing to double LIFE enrollment and overhaul the Program’s enrollment process. Metro streamlined the application system to enable on-the-spot enrollment and self-certification and added 90 days of unlimited free rides to incentivize enrollment. With these efforts, enrollment is now over 345,000 riders, more than triple the goal set out in the motion. However, there are more riders that Metro can reach.

¹ <https://boardagendas.metro.net/board-report/2021-0627/>

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Minimizing enrollment barriers has proven that entry into the Program is key to maximizing its reach and utilization. Recently, the Metro Board approved a motion², authored by Supervisor Mitchell, directing Metro to upgrade its fare payment technology called Transit Access Pass (TAP) to enable social benefit cards, such as the Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card to serve as a TAP card, Metro's fare media card. When an individual taps their EBT card to board a bus or enter a rail station, Metro's TAP system will recognize the user as LIFE-eligible and provide immediate access to Metro's transit system. This technological upgrade has the potential to unlock increased mobility and transportation access to low-income residents across the County, including the County's 1.4 million EBT cardholders.

The County and Metro will need to collaborate closely with the State and take steps to ensure Metro's TAP system can accept EBT cards to access the transit system to realize the full potential of these upgrades. The upcoming chip/tap enabled EBT cards will have the baseline technology that could support Metro's TAP system. It is critical that the County does its part to enable LIFE's expansion in providing free and discounted transit toward a future where access to transportation is never a barrier for residents in the County.

WE THEREFORE MOVE THAT THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS:

1. Direct the Director of the Department of Public Social Services to collaborate with the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Metro) and relevant state and federal partners, in coordination with the Chief Executive Office's Legislative Affairs and Intergovernmental Relations Branch, to evaluate a range of options and associated costs and make the necessary technical and system upgrades to the EuroPay, Mastercard, and Visa systems to accept Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) cards in order to:
 - a. Enroll residents into the Low Income Fare Is Easy (LIFE) Program upon qualification without undergoing an additional LIFE application;

² <https://boardagendas.metro.net/board-report/2024-0497/>

- b. Enable upgraded, chip/tap EBT card holders enrolled in the LIFE Program to use their cards in lieu of Metro fare media to access LIFE's free and discounted rides; and
- c. Report back to the Board in writing within 120 days with a progress update on the above that includes, but is not limited to:
 - i. Social benefit programs identified for automatic LIFE enrollment, including availability of an EBT card for Program participants;
 - ii. Technical and system upgrade requirements; and
 - iii. A plan to implement automatic LIFE enrollment and utilization of the EBT card as fare media.

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