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The Role of Collaborative Governance in Implementation of Low-Income Transit Rider
Discounts: A Comparison of ORCA LIFT and Clipper START

By

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THESIS

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Abstract

The case study of two regional low-income transit discount programs, Clipper START in the San Francisco Bay Area, California and ORCA LIFT in Puget Sound region, Washington demonstrates the role of governance in transit discount provision. Income-based discounts are gaining prominence as a way to improve the equity of fare structures, but fragmentation of transit at the regional level means many regions have a proliferation of agencies with multiple fare structures, mechanisms, and organizational structures. Collaborative governance, a typology defined by partnerships between government agencies, community partners, and in some cases higher levels of government has been proposed as a solution to regional governance challenges such as transit discount integration. Conversely, multi-level governance or hierarchical governance is characterized by higher levels of government serving organizational or administrative roles for lower levels. The long history of collaboration between transit agencies in the Puget Sound region beginning with the creation of the regional transit coordinator (Sound Transit) created the necessary foundation for successful collaborative governance. In the Bay Area, the Metropolitan Transportation Commission is not a transit operator, but the regional government body and has historically been the initiator of regional fare integration policies. Comparing Clipper START, which was largely overseen by the Metropolitan Transportation Commission, the Metropolitan Planning Organization of the region, with ORCA LIFT, administered primarily by King County Metro, one of the largest agencies in the Seattle metropolitan region, provides two examples of overcoming regional fragmentation to create a regional discount program. The analysis finds that collaborative governance more effectively incentivizes joint action by creating opportunities for more diverse

and effective partnerships, which provides better outcomes for riders without sacrificing financial viability. However, in regions where a strong foundation for horizontal collaboration may not yet exist, hierarchical implementation by the MPO can also achieve efficient outcomes when agencies buy into the program. Describing the role of governance structures on provision of low-income transit rider discounts at the regional level provides insights for both agencies and MPOs looking to implement similar region-wide programs.

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Introduction

Transit serves a vital role connecting people across metropolitan regions with jobs, healthcare, and community. However, oftentimes transit fare structures in the United States are inequitable and can create cross-subsidies through mode and fare structure that may not accurately reflect distance traveled or ability to pay (Harmony 2018). When low-income residents travel shorter distances during off-peak hours on buses but pay the same flat rate, they are effectively paying a higher per-mile rate than longer distance peak hour travelers (Brown AE, 2018). And distance-based fares in theory can improve the equity of fares based on service-rendered, but penalize residents who cannot afford to live close to job centers and must commute long distances for work (Harmony, 2018). Lowering fares can improve access for lower-income community members who are balancing transit fares and transportation costs with housing budgets and food budgets but may come at a cost for agencies which rely on fares to fund operations. One method to improve the equity of fare structures and access for low-income transit riders is by offering targeted fare discounts based on income (Perrotta 2017; Darling 2021), but discounts for low-income transit riders are relatively rare - although gaining prominence (Saphores et al. 2020; Darling et al. 2021).

Barriers to implementation of discounts may include: lack of funding, lack of political will, and high fare recovery ratio requirements. One underexplored barrier is the complex governance of transit policy at the regional level. People have continued to spread out and live across city and

county jurisdictional barriers and this has become even more true in recent years for low-income residents who cannot afford to live in the city they work in (Allen and Farber, 2021; Blumenberg and Wander, 2023). Partially due to devolution of funding to more local levels (Wachs, 2003), transit has become more and more fragmented at the regional level (Weinreich et al., 2018) - meaning there are many independent transit agencies in a region with sometimes overlapping service boundaries. Fragmentation in public transit provision can lead to poor interconnections, lack of interoperability, and poor service outcomes for riders (Mattioli 2020). With the fragmentation of local governance - including that of transit - rose two major streams of scholarship about how to govern at the regional scale.

One idea, generally more popular in the transportation literature, is that a strong metropolitan government - such as the Metropolitan Planning Organizations strengthened by ISTEA in 1991 can provide regional governance of transit. The other idea, more dominant in the public policy sector, is that polycentrism is not inherently bad and can create better service outcomes and any challenges caused by fragmentation can be mitigated with horizontal collaboration among disparate agencies (Ostrom et al. 1961; Hooghe and Marks 2003). From these ideas comes the predominant research question: How does governance impact the provision of low-income transit rider discounts?

This question is explored by comparing the governance and outcomes of ORCA LIFT in the Seattle Puget Sound Region with Clipper START in the San Francisco Bay Area Region. The regions have different backgrounds of collaboration and the policies, while both aimed at

improving affordability of transit for low-income residents, are administered with completely different organization structures. While only two cases are examined, the juxtaposition of Metropolitan Planning Organization oversight in one (Clipper START) versus transit agency oversight in the other (ORCA LIFT) covers the primary options for transit fare policy implementation in the United States. Comparing the programs will shed light on the role of collaborative governance in policies promoting equity at the regional level and provide insights for other regions interested in implementing discounts for low-income transit riders.

Theoretical Framework

Transit Equity and Justice

Common frameworks of equity and justice in the transportation field can help ground an evaluation of discounted fare policies in transit. In the transportation-oriented realm of equity and justice there exist three dominant threads: transportation equity, transportation justice, and mobility justice. Within these frameworks there are sub theories, contrasting definitions, similar but not quite identical terms, and different methodologies used in the current scholarship. Focusing on the connections between these distinct theories and transit fare policy will help disentangle the definitions of justice that underlie decision-making on fare policy. Ultimately, a solid understanding of what it means for transit fare policy to be equitable is needed.

Fare policy research generally focuses on equity among transit riders in contrast to transit subsidy research which evaluates equity throughout the tax-paying public (Brown AE, 2018).

While understanding system-wide equity impacts of the transit economy as a whole is important, this relates more to the overarching political economy of transportation than agency-level fare policy decisions. Within transportation there are multiple definitions of equity that can be mapped onto different scales and modes of transportation planning. Generally, equity is evaluated based on comparisons between groups of the distribution of services, costs, and benefits. Litman (2021) defines four types: horizontal - “equal treatment of equals,” vertical with respect to need and ability, vertical with respect to income and social class, and social justice. Cervero (1981) defined three types of equity evaluations: benefits received criterion, cost criterion, and ability-to-pay criterion. The benefits received criterion defines the cost as equitable if people pay in proportion to the benefits they receive. The cost criterion defines the cost as equitable if the cost paid matches the cost the agency incurs. And the ability-to-pay criterion defines the cost as equitable if the cost matches the income of the rider. The price of transit fares does not only dictate immediate affordability constraints, but also influences access for riders.

There are equity and justice implications for transit fare policy outside of internal or external comparisons between groups sharing costs and benefits. There are multiple strands of transportation justice, but they are generally less focused on quantitative criteria evaluations and take a more all-encompassing view of the harms and benefits of the transportation system. Karner et al. (2020) called for a transition from transportation equity centric planning to transportation justice because equity measures are too state centric and do not reckon with the history of harm entrenched in the current transportation system. An example of transportation equity is transportation project criteria evaluations that integrate demographic variables to

capture households more likely to be negatively impacted by transportation infrastructure (such as predominantly non-white population, low-income, limited English proficiency, zero-vehicle households, etc.). Transportation equity tools can be useful to avoid re-entrenching past harm wrought by transportation infrastructure, but does not seek to systematically seek justice and harm reparation. Martens (2017) presented a theory of transportation justice based on Dworkin's domain of justice and the idea that people should be provided a minimum (or sufficient) level of access through the transportation system. Access refers to the ease of reaching end destinations through appropriate transportation modes. Access can be improved through land use changes and transportation improvements that prioritize multiple modes of transportation rather than driving alone. Pereira et al. (2017) proposed distributive justice which came from Rawlsian egalitarianism and capability approaches. Pereira et al.'s distributive justice called for a minimum level of accessibility to destinations in addition to the minimization of transportation system externalities on disadvantaged groups. Transportation justice (particularly the California variation) also follows largely from environmental justice and US Civil Rights (Vanoutrive and Cooper, 2019) and has strong ties to fights in the public transportation realm. Marten's theory has been critiqued because of the placement of people into a domain of justice where they are treated in a paternalistic manner by the state which removes agency from those individuals (Vanoutrive and Cooper, 2019). Dictating the solutions for transportation injustices and imposing them onto people does not inherently solve the underlying causes of injustice. While theories of transportation justice vary in their philosophical underpinnings, a subset of them call for a sufficient level of access to be provided and they generally strive for a move away from simple cost-benefit analyses towards more holistic planning frameworks.

Transportation justice generally calls for a move away from traditional planning methods and towards a more just transportation system, but the proposed alternatives have detractors partly based on the interplay between the state and people.

Mobility justice places power disparities and legacies of injustice at the forefront of the theory and calls for, among other things, radical power redistribution. In mobility justice, a more mobile conception is mapped onto spatial inequality, rather than being tied directly to the transportation system. Mimi Sheller 2018 theorizes mobility justice by detailing the mobilities of people, places, things, inequalities, in the world today and how they are dictated by race, gender, colonialism, and intersectional facets of inequality. The racial disparity of fare citations on Black transit riders in majority white neighborhoods in DC is a cogent example of the racialized restrictions on movement in the transportation environment and the intersection of racism, policing, and place that shapes different experiences of mobility (Carter and Johnson, 2021). This intersectional view of mobility injustices creates new ways of thinking about social dimensions within their relation to mobility, politics of mobility, and sites of action for envisioning new mobility paradigms. The Untokening presents mobility justice as a movement by and for “individuals from marginalized groups who occupy stolen Indigenous land in North America” (The Untokening, n.d.). Mobility justice explicitly reckons with power disparities and sheds light on the greater importance of grappling with justice and injustice in the transportation realm and beyond.

Transit fare equity research generally adheres to one of these existing frames of equity or justice. Horizontal and vertical equity, along with the three criteria described by Cervero (1981)

are commonly used in equity evaluations of fare policy. Considerations about affordability and the relationship between affordability and access occasionally lean more towards the transportation justice frameworks, however, since fare policy is largely a state-centric process and transportation justice seeks for a more democratic planning process it may not always lend itself appropriately to narrowly scoped fare policy evaluations. In addition, mobility justice is not a framework for evaluations of policy by transit agencies, mobility justice is a radical and transformative vision for the future. Critically though, mobility justice grounds evaluations about transit policies in an understanding of why transit matters. Vertical and horizontal equity are important to understand and are particularly useful in the transit sphere, but a heavy focus on financial balance can risk losing sight of the importance of public transportation for providing riders with critical access to jobs, healthcare, recreation, friends, family, and experiences. Providing low-income transit riders with discounted fares will not create an equitable or just transportation system, but can serve as a small step towards reaching payment equity for a service that is necessary to access daily life.

Regional Governance

Transportation crosses jurisdictional boundaries at the city, county, region, state, and country levels, leading to complicated problems that require collaboration across scales and agencies. The funding mechanisms of transportation in the United States, particularly for transit, have led to smaller and smaller loci of control while people and jobs have continued to spread out, leading to a scalar mismatch between transit users and transit planners. While the current state of transit points to a need for understanding collaboration across agencies and jurisdictional

boundaries, the research trends towards more quantitative techno-rational aims rather than towards understanding the processes and structures behind the decision-making processes of transit (Weinreich et al, 2018; Marsden and Reardon, 2017). Shedding light on the role of collaboration in regional transit governance can provide insights on interjurisdictional policies (such as low-income transit rider discounts) and answer questions about how to manage and structure fare policies to benefit riders across the system.

Generally, the scale of a public good or resource should be adequately scoped to negate boundary crossing issues and internalize externalities. An efficient provision of public goods would internalize the externalities by operating at the correct scale (Ostrom et al. 1961). Ostrom et al. 1961 defines the boundaries of the local unit of government as the “package” within which goods are provided to those inside the boundaries. A classic example of a boundary crossing problem is smog, which cannot be controlled on the city or local government level and does not adhere to political boundaries and is better regulated by the state or federal level. Mass transit in the metropolitan region is one example of an issue that may be better solved by a larger political system organized at the metropolitan level, rather than a polycentric more local system because of the boundary crossing issue (Ostrom et al., 1961). The scale of governance has implications for planning, implementation, and policy (Marsden and May, 2006). Funding impacts the scale of public good provision, and the funding of public transit has devolved to lower levels of government over the last several decades.

Devolution of funding has led to fragmentation of transit service and a shift from government to governance. The funding of public transportation operations is largely dependent on county-

level funding, which has led to boundary issues and fragmentation of decision-making and service operations (Weinreich 2018). Local option sales taxes (LOSTs) have proliferated in California (Lederman et al. 2018; Albrecht et al. 2017) and create conflicts between counties and MPOs, require strict adherence to ballot language, and create projects that appeal to voters (whose ideals may not necessarily match the users of the transit system) (Wachs 2003; Goldman and Wachs 2003). Placing transit funding at more local levels is a result of austerity urbanism which followed neoliberalism and required smaller and smaller forms of government to bear the brunt of decades of governmental gutting (Peck, 2012). Solving transportation at the regional level when authority is vested at the local level is an example of a collective action problem - or one that requires coordination from multiple stakeholders to reach better outcomes than can be achieved alone. Since public transportation is largely seen as a social service (Garrett and Taylor, 1999), it is at risk of losing funding when local or state governments trim the fat. Fare recovery ratio requirements, or the idea that transit agencies must cover a certain amount of operations funding from fares, is a result of austerity urbanism and the treatment of local governments as businesses rather than service providers. Devolution from the central government to dispersed governance has occurred across many sectors, and in transportation a large part of the cause is the funding model favoring states and sub-regional local authorities (Weir et al., 2009; Wachs, 2003). The devolution of funding and authority of transit to more local levels has led to fragmentation and difficulties with regional governance of transit systems.

Fragmentation can lead to difficulties coordinating schedules, fare integration, and service reach throughout regions. Fragmentation in this context means: “the division of planning and

policy implementation among multiple units of government in a given area”, as defined by Weinreich et al. 2018 (p. 20). Fragmentation is not always defined negatively, and may align with the type II governance described by Hooghe and Marks (2003) that internalizes externalities and allows people to vote with their feet and choose appropriate service areas to meet their needs. However, in the case of transit regional coordination is critical. People and jobs have continued to suburbanize and spread out and cross multiple jurisdictional boundaries as they commute throughout the region in day-to-day life (Blumenberg and King 2021; Rivasplata 2012). Particularly for transit service integration, the importance of regional coordination has been well studied and documented (Miller et al. 2005; Rivasplata 2012). Fragmentation in public transit provision can lead to poor interconnections, lack of interoperability, and poor service outcomes for riders. In order to have an overall good public transportation network there must be cross-subsidies between modes, routes, and operations which are incompatible with the competitive market fostered by fragmentation (Mattioli et al., 2020). Regionalization, processes that overcome fragmentation and prioritize connections between transit agencies, can help overcome fragmentation and can be reached through vertical or horizontal mechanisms (Weinreich et al., 2018; O’Sullivan and Patel, 2004). Vertical regionalization aligns with multi-level governance and hierarchical forms of governance that identify a strong regional government as a solution to fragmentation. Alternatively, collaborative governance can serve as one form of horizontal regionalization when transit agencies coordinate directly with each other.

The devolution of funding of transportation and public transport has largely mirrored other public service provisions and aligns with the shift from government to governance. While

government generally refers to a central decision-making authority, governance refers more to a process of decision-making that involves multiple actors. The outcomes of government and governance are not inherently different, the difference lies in the processes (Stoker, 1998, p.18). Stoker detailed the following five propositions about governance:

1. "Governance refers to a set of institutions and actors that are drawn from but also beyond government
2. Governance identifies the blurring of boundaries and responsibilities for tackling social and economic issues.
3. Governance identifies the power dependence involved in the relationships between institutions involved in collective action
4. Governance is about autonomous self-governing networks of actors
5. Governance recognizes the capacity to get things done which does not rest on the power of government to command or use its authority. It sees government as able to use new tools and techniques to steer and guide."

Baked into these propositions are the ideas of governance as coordinating networks of actors, the role of civic sectors, public sector, and private sector in decision-making, and the move away from a central authority as the rule maker. The need for coordination and collaboration is inherent to the shift from central level government to dispersed governance.

In the governance literature, network governance and collaborative governance both detail interactions between actors in the policy sphere and how those interactions and formal and informal connections change and shape policy and decision-making. Both Network Governance

and Collaborative Governance scholarship explores themes of “resource dependency, leadership, trust, power, accountability, and network/collaborative performance (Wang and Ran 2023, p. 1192).” Network governance research differs from collaborative governance with more of a focus on network properties, network management, and network development rather than sharing (of information, resources, power, motivations, etc), deliberation and dialogue, joint efforts to reach goals, and institutional design (Wang and Ran, 2023).

Collaborative governance is seen by some as a specific subset of network governance that has a specific type of interaction that is, “deliberative, multilateral, consensus-seeking, and oriented toward joint production of results and solutions” (Ansell and Gash, 2008). Ansell and Gash (2008) combine two definitions of governance from Lynn, Heinrich, and Hill (2001) and Stoker (1998) to create the following definition:

“Collaborative governance is therefore a type of governance in which public and private actors work collectively in distinctive ways, using particular processes, to establish laws and rules for the provision of public goods” (p. 545).

From Lynn, Heinrich, and Hill (2001) is the idea that governance applies to provision of public goods. And from Stoker is the component about collective decision making between public and private actors. Ansel and Gash’s theoretical framework of collaborative governance is widely used, however a slightly different conception will be used for the analysis. Emerson’s definition describes collaborative governance regimes and unlike Ansell and Gash does not require that collaboration be between government and nongovernmental stakeholders but can also encompass “multipartner governance” (Emerson et al. 2012).

“We define collaborative governance broadly as the processes and structures of public policy decision making and management that engage people constructively across the boundaries of public agencies, levels of government, and/or the public, private and civic spheres in order to carry out a public purpose that could not otherwise be accomplished (Emerson et al. 2012 p. 2)”

The benefit of this definition is both an easier merging with ideas of collaborative planning that exist in the transportation literature and a less constrained starting point to evaluate the governance of low-income transit rider discounts.

In order to more fully understand the role of collaborative governance in the outcomes of specific policies, previous theoretical inquiries have defined starting conditions that may dictate the unfolding of collaboration. Ansell and Gash (2008) identify power-resource-knowledge asymmetries, incentives for and constraints on participation, and a prehistory of cooperation or conflict as starting conditions that influence the outcomes of collaborative governance. Power-resource knowledge asymmetries are rampant between different transit agencies and power imbalances can shape the debate of how equity problems are framed at the regional scale (Lester and Reckhow, 2012). In regional transit networks, some agencies may be small local bus-only providers with limited routes and service while others may span multiple cities and counties with several different modes. The varying ridership needs, funding opportunities, and amount of local oversight can create power and resource disparities between neighboring agencies in a region. The provision of discounts is an equity problem, a fare problem, and a funding problem for transit agencies and brings into light varying goals, priorities, abilities, and

resources at transit agencies. Incentives can be internal (such as resource needs and problems) or external (threats and opportunities) and are a necessary precursor to collaboration (Emerson et al., 2012). The starting conditions for collaboration will be compared between the two cases to link starting conditions to policy outcomes and evaluate Ansell and Gash's model of collaborative governance.

In addition to starting conditions, Ansell and Gash identified pieces of the collaborative process that influence outcomes including: trust building, commitment to process, shared understanding, intermediate outcomes, and face-to-face dialogue. While not all of the process variables will be explored in the cases central to this analysis, a more limited subset will be used to help describe the role of collaborative governance in the outcomes of low-income transit rider discounts. Starting conditions are critical to the outcomes of collaborative governance and the facilitation or hampering of cooperation (Ansell and Gash, 2008), and will be focused on more than process variables. Figure 1 below shows Ansell and Gash's model of collaborative governance.

Figure 1
A Model of Collaborative Governance

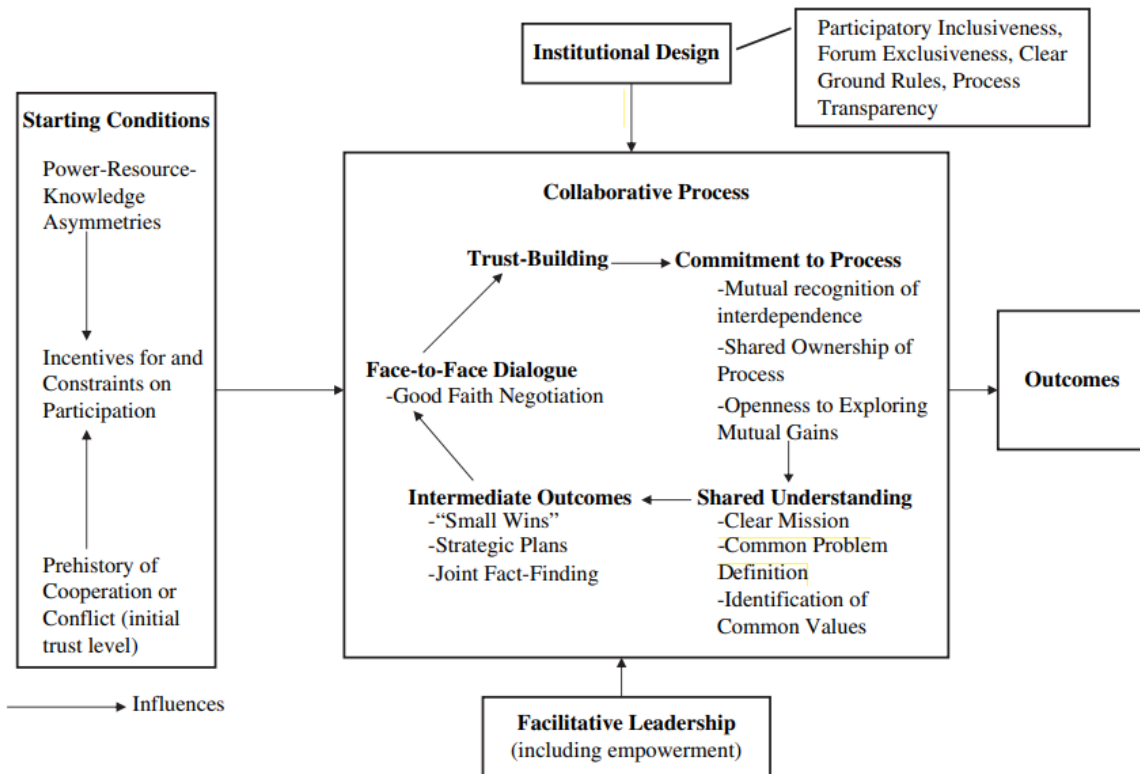


Figure 1. Model of Collaborative Governance (Ansell and Gash, 2008)

The effectiveness of collaborative governance can be assessed from multiple angles, including, “the degree of the intended network-level outcomes achieved by collaborative efforts (Ran and Qi, 2018),” which will be the most relevant evaluation for the cases. For simplicity, the effectiveness of collaborative governance in the two cases will be evaluated based on the outcome of whether they improve the affordability of transit for low-income riders in the region. Further insight into effectiveness will be provided by assessing the goals and outcomes of the respective policies in each case to decipher whether intended network-level outcomes were achieved. Investigating the previous collaboration, power disparities, and region-level outcomes will uncover insights both about the governance structure (whether or not

collaborative governance is the dominant mode of policymaking) and what the role of collaborative governance is in the provisioning of low-income transit rider discounts. The governance structure of each program will be investigated as an input to the intended outcome of improving transit affordability, rather than the main outcome under consideration.

While collaborative governance is seen as one “solution” to governing at the metropolitan scale (and across scales and jurisdictions), it is not the only theoretical inquiry. Polycentrism, hierarchical governance, and multi-level governance all detail the ways in which different scales and jurisdictions of government interact with each other in pursuit of governance. Ostrom, Tiebout, and Warren (1961) describe the state of polycentricity at the metropolitan level not as a menace, but as an opportunity to correctly scale to internalize externalities, serve at an appropriate economy of scale and control, and allow competition to incentivize better service. Hooghe and Marks (2003) detail two types of governance in a system of multi-level governance that serve specific functions. Type I falls more into a traditional central government at a higher scale and serves a general purpose role, with nonintersection memberships (coterminous boundaries), and a limited number of levels of jurisdictions. Type II exists for task specific jurisdictions with intersection memberships - transit would fall into this category in Hooghe and Marks’ conception as a task-specific jurisdiction. While research specifically on the ability of transit agencies in the Bay Area to cooperate in a polycentric system have been conducted and confirmed that this was a working arrangement (Chisholm, 1989), others in the field argue that horizontal collaboration and coordination alone will not create an effective regional system of transportation (Weir et al. 2009). Evers and De Vries (2013) identified three arrangements for

collective action in a study comparing regional governance in five different cities: hierarchy, competition, and joint-decision making. These are not in practice discrete options, but label the categories of governance types in regions; and relationships in regions can occupy multiple arrangements. Collaborative governance is thus not a default mode of operation for regional governance, but one option with sustained interest from the public policy sector that shows promise for governing complex problems. The regional scale of transportation is not unique in the planning sector, but metropolitan planning agencies - and the role they play as dictated by the federal government, is somewhat unique.

Metropolitan Planning Organizations have been proposed as the appropriate organization to advance equity in a region, in line with ideas about a stronger regional power to overcome fragmentation, but in practice their role is limited by constraints faced from above and below. Since MPOs cross jurisdictional boundaries, they can be a “critical venue for equity-related conversations that cross regional boundaries” (Karner and Levine, 2021, p. 1437). A discount program for low-income transit riders that is available at all transit agencies in a region would seem to be a good example of an equity-related program that crosses jurisdictional boundaries. However, the power of MPOs is rather limited and they are unable to serve a role in transportation policy without the ability to exert power in the political arenas above (state and federal) and below (local) the region (Weir et al., 2009). Lester and Reckhow (2012) argued that network governance will not work to advance regional equity because of the constantly shifting political venues that decisions are made at and the power disparities that exist between different actors with varying motivations (such as business groups versus advocacy

organizations). In addition to the specific discussion around how to advance equity in the region, debates about the best method of governing a metropolitan region have proliferated for decades in the policy and planning sectors. Regionalists generally push back on the streams of inquiry branching from Ostrom et al.'s (1961) proposition that polycentrism can be useful or at least not inherently bad and argue for stronger regional government to wrangle the region into compliance.

The varying ideas about how to govern the metropolitan region come into sharp focus with the case of low-income transit rider discounts. Both cases, ORCA LIFT and Clipper START, were preceded by discount programs at single agencies in the region, but because of the limited scale of many transit agencies and the scope of travel that people conduct, these programs were insufficient to meet regional equity and affordability goals. Implementing a regional discount program can enhance access and affordability for low-income transit riders throughout the region, but requires significant collaboration between agencies of different size, power levels, and resource availability. While some of the literature touts the benefits of collaborative governance in solving problems such as fare policy, others advocate for more power at the regional level (MPOs) and the role of hierarchical decision making in advancing equity at the regional level. Comparing the cases of ORCA LIFT (in the Puget Sound region) and Clipper START (in the Bay Area) can begin to untangle the role of multi-level hierarchical governance and collaborative governance in the implementation of low-income transit rider discounts. Identifying and analyzing the starting conditions of collaboration from Ansell and Gash (2008) and looking for indicators of other collective action arrangement types from Evers and de Vries

(2013) will help first categorize the governance of the two fare policies, then outcomes of the two programs related to affordability, regional reach of the programs, and ease of understanding will be compared. Assessing how the governance of the policies relates to the outcomes will provide insights for other regions looking to implement similar policies either through their MPOs (as the Bay Area did) or through direct transit agency collaboration (as the Puget Sound region did).

The metropolitan region is an awkward scale to govern based on the current set up of primarily local and state power in the United States, but it is the scale people live at (for the most part) and remains a continued line of inquiry for both public policy and transportation scholarship. While solutions to decision-making at a scale that lacks a natural electoral geography (Lester and Reckhow, 2012) vary from offshoots of Tiebout et al.'s idea that polycentrism is good and natural to calls for stronger metropolitan governance or redrawing of jurisdictional boundaries (Wallis, 1994 cited in Weinreich et al, 2018), the idea that the metropolitan region is a valid scale for decision-making is generally agreed upon. This case study seeks to further illuminate the role of MPOs in regional collaborative governance of transit policy by evaluating a specific equity-advancing policy: low-income transit rider discounts. Fare policies cross jurisdictional boundaries and are a complex, or "wicked" policy problem. Each transit agency relies on fares to a different degree to maintain operations, and fares impact riders and their ability to traverse and access the city. While some of the literature touts the benefits of collaborative governance in solving problems such as fare policy, others advocate for more power at the regional level (MPOs) and the role of hierarchical decision making in advancing equity at the

regional level. Comparing the cases of ORCA LIFT (in the Puget Sound region) and Clipper START (in the Bay Area) can begin to untangle the role of multi-level hierarchical governance and collaborative governance in the implementation of low-income transit rider discounts.

Literature Review

Transit Affordability, Access, and Discounts

There are underlying implicit justice-oriented and disoriented decisions that impact the interactions people have with public transportation in their day-to-day lives. The fare recovery burden on transit agencies combined with devolution of funding and decision-making to lower levels has led to a crisis in public transportation. And whenever there are budget shortfalls, transit agencies are at risk of losing funding sources and often resort to raising fares or cutting service to remain financially solvent. Fare increases most directly impact the lowest-income riders of transit and revoke full access to the city.

Transit agencies often face conflicting goals and this holds true in fare policy. Agencies are faced with balancing affordability for riders and cost recovery. Farebox recovery refers to the percentage of operating expenses that are covered by fares and this ratio is often used to evaluate agency performance and determine funding allocations. In California, agencies that receive funding from the Transportation Development Act are required to have a farebox recovery of 20% (urban agencies) or 10% (rural agencies) (Caltrans, 2018). In Washington, agencies are required to establish a farebox recovery policy but the ratio is not prescribed (RCW 81.104.130). Some cities, states, and agencies have altered or removed farebox recovery ratio

requirements in recent years under the justification that a goal and success metric of transit should be to provide service for a large number of people at low cost rather than meet an arbitrary farebox recovery ratio (RTD, 2021). High farebox recovery ratios can lead to service cuts and other cost decreasing measures as well as fare increases when ridership drops - which has been of particular concern in the last few years due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Harmony (2018) describes the conflict between meeting affordability goals for low-income riders and meeting fare recovery ratio goals as “the trade-off problem”. Farebox recovery goals are often set at the state or local level while affordability and equity goals are more likely to be set by the transit agencies themselves. The reliance on both fares and subsidies among transit agencies means agencies face difficult decisions when state, local, or federal budgets are redesigned and may lead to reduced service or fare increases - both of which impact riders.

Existing fare structures are largely inequitable. Garrett and Taylor (1999) stated that, “fare structures promote cross-subsidization of wealthier riders by poorer ones” (page 20). Brown AE (2018) evaluated the relative equity of five different common fare structures: flat, distance-based, time-based, mode-based, and discounted based on rider characteristics. Flat fares are the most common structures for bus systems while rail systems tend to be more distance-based or zone-based. Flat fares do not reflect variations in cost, riders, or trips and are the least equitable based on benefit criterion, cost criterion, and ability to pay. Brown AE (2018) found that in Los Angeles low-income riders pay higher per mile transit fares compared to high-income riders because they travel shorter distances, travel more on local buses, and travel more during off-peak hours. When deciding on fare structure, agencies must balance fare recovery and the cost of providing service with the price riders are willing to pay. Fare structure

can influence demand, revenue, use of cash, administrative costs, and rider convenience (Harmony, 2018). Some agencies have policies governing fare-related decisions, while others make changes based on factors such as new modes, routes, schedule changes, budget shortfalls, etc. (TCRP 94, 2002). Improving the equity of fare structures has gained prominence as a fare goal in recent years.

Several solutions have been identified to improve the equity of fare structures including implementing distance-based fares, subsidizing fares for certain groups, fare capping, and fare-free transit. Evaluations of fare equity use different metrics to measure equity, but a method developed by Cervero (1981) is relatively widespread (Brown AE, 2018; Nuworsoo, 2009) and evaluates fares along three equity criteria:

- 1) Benefits received criterion: people should pay for the amount of transit they use and the benefit they receive from the service
- 2) Cost criterion: fares should reflect the cost of transit service
- 3) Ability to pay criterion: fares should be charged based on income of rider

Fares can be evaluated based on all three criteria. In addition to the equity evaluation developed by Cervero (1981), Harmony (2018) evaluated specific subsidy programs based on inclusion or exclusion problems, where inclusion problems indicate that not everyone who qualifies for the subsidy may be from low-income households and exclusion problems indicate that low-income riders may not be included in the group that is subsidized. The table below briefly summarizes fare policies in general categories with existing equity-improving policies and considerations for transit riders and transit agencies.

Table 1. Fare policies and equity considerations

Fare Policy	Description	Equity metrics met and Evaluation	Benefits or Burdens for Riders	Considerations for Transit Agencies
<i>Common Fare Structures</i>				
Flat fare	Flat fare	None, do not reflect variations in distance traveled, ability to pay,	Because of travel patterns, high-income long-distance riders can be subsidized by lower income riders (Brown AE, 2018)	Easier to collect
Zone or distance based fare	Cost varies based on distance traveled, sometimes agencies break up areas into zones	Ability-to-pay criterion Benefits received Cost criterion	Fares more accurately reflect the cost of service, benefit received and ability-to-pay depending on geography (Brown AE, 2018)	More accurately reflects cost to run service, but agencies fear could lead to ridership loss (Yoh et al., 2015)
<i>Subsidy Programs</i>				

Demographic based discount (eg half off for K-12, discount for seniors and disabled people)	Different fares for people in certain groups, student discounts are common and discounts for elderly people, disabled people, and those using Medicare are required	Ability-to-pay criterion Inclusion problem: may subsidize fares for riders who can afford the cost of transit	Excludes low-income riders who fall outside the specified demographics and may include riders who can afford the full fare (Harmony, 2018)	Half-off Discounts for disabled or elderly riders or riders with Medicare are required in order for agencies to receive federal transit funding (FTA, n.d.)
Income-based discounts	Subsidized fares for transit riders who fall under a certain income specification	Ability-to-pay criterion	Improves affordability and decreases cost as barrier to travel	Decreases revenue for transit agencies and can be difficult to administer
Fully Subsidized Fares for Low-Income Riders	Free passes for transit riders under a certain income specification	Ability-to-pay criterion	Increases transit use even more than discounts (Brough et al., 2022)	Decreases revenue for transit agencies and can be difficult to administer
Fare-Capping or subsidized transfers	Fare is capped for multi-modal trips	Ability-to-pay criterion Inclusion problem: may subsidize fares for riders who can afford the cost of transit	With low-income households often being located farther away, this can decrease costs (Harmony, 2018)	Can be difficult to implement with multiple transit agencies

Fare Free Transit	Transit is free for all	Inclusion problem: may subsidize fares for riders who can afford the cost of transit	Removes cost as a barrier to access through transit	Will increase ridership but removes all revenue from fares May be less beneficial than improving service (King and Taylor, 2023)
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Access is another important component of transportation equity to consider in addition to the internal equity evaluation of transit fares. One measure of spatial equity is related to access to opportunity that people have when using specific types of transportation. Integrating cost - transit fares - into existing accessibility measures creates a more accurate measure of accessibility than measures that do not account for fares (Da Silva et al., 2022; El-Geneidy et al., 2016). Fares present a barrier to access and impacts which destinations can be reached through public transit (Da Silva et al., 2022). In an experiment comparing the King County ORCA LIFT \$1.50 discount for low-income riders with fully subsidized transit for low-income riders it was found that fully-subsidized passes doubled transit use among participants. However, once the subsidy was removed travel returned to baseline levels, indicating that a short-term subsidy does not change habits of riders long term (Brough et al., 2022). In addition, in the absence of affordable fares, low-income riders may forego other necessities, borrow passes from friends, exploit free transfers, and evade the fare (risking fines in the process) (Perrotta, 2017). The increased travel incited by fully subsidized passes in addition to qualitative data indicating that people either skip other necessities to pay for transit or forgo necessary travel indicates that

cost is a very real barrier to access. Since subsidies increase travel and cost is a barrier to access, means-based fare discounts can improve access for low-income transit riders.

Despite presenting a viable option for improving the equity of fare policies, discounts for low-income riders remain relatively uncommon in the transit landscape. Darling et al. (2021) found that only 17 of the largest 50 transit agencies in the United States had discount programs for low-income riders. And in a survey of California transit agencies, 8 of 59 agencies reported offering free or reduced transit passes to low-income riders in 2018-2019 (Saphores et al., 2020). Understanding what these programs look like at agencies where they have been implemented may help future agencies evaluate the possibility of instituting their own fare discount programs.

Transit Governance

Transit discount studies have primarily focused on whether and how much they improve access and affordability for low-income transit riders. Less attention overall has been paid to the governance of transit and how that relates to equity-promoting policies and regional fare integration. Research on transportation policy is limited and focuses more on quantitative analyses and does not evaluate real-world policies or utilize qualitative methods (Marsden and Reardon 2017). Research on the governance of transit has focused on fragmentation of transit as a result of devolution of funding to lower levels (Weinreich 2018, Wachs 2003, Goldman and Wachs 2003), collaboration to overcome this fragmentation with respect to service decisions, and the role of MPOs in regional transit governance.

As detailed in the theoretical framework, transit funding, and therefore governance, has devolved to lower and lower levels. The regionalization of the urban environment along with fragmentation of public transportation governance has implications for access, service provision, and efficiency. Job location and home location are often not aligned, and this is particularly true for low-income individuals (Blumenberg and King 2021; Soja, 2006). The cost of public transit creates a barrier to accessing necessary goods and services throughout the region. This issue is exacerbated by the proliferation of transit agencies with different fare structures, payment mechanisms, and transfer fees to move between them. In addition, the governance scale of public transport provision is not always aligned correctly with the regional transit shed - which can create service gaps and inefficiencies. More research on fare policies have been done at the agency level or specific fare policy level (as described in the transit affordability section), rather than the regional level, but studies of coordination of service, fares, and collaborative planning have detailed the importance of collaboration between transit agencies in a region.

Existing research on collaboration in transit has focused more on planning and service coordination than specific policies. While there are not many studies explicitly using the framework of collaborative governance to analyze regional transit governance, lessons can be drawn from related fields such as evaluations of transit planning coordination and service decisions. Even though planning and service decisions may come from a more techno-rational background, transit service decisions are policy decisions and research about service coordination and planning detail pieces of collaborative governance theory implicitly - such as the positive benefits of horizontal collaboration in promoting effective regional governance.

Regional and local coordination is critical for transit service integration (Rivasplata, 2012). Transit agency employees agree that collaboration “improves route coverage, ridership, and access to facilities (Ugboro and Obeng, 1997, p. 75).” And lack of collaboration and political competition between agencies can limit the competitiveness of transit versus private vehicle transportation (Skartland, 2023). In the collaborative governance literature, Clarke’s comparison of two “placed-based, cross-sector collaborations in Denver”, found that the successful project (FasTracks) had all four of the determined elements for “collaborative resilience”: “(1) the initial efforts to develop a common agenda and shared vision for change, (2) the presence and role of intermediaries or backbone support organizations, (3) coordination strategies for mutually reinforcing activities across political scales, and (4) integration with multilevel governance structures. (Clarke 2016, p. 585),” and was able to outlast the Children’s corridor and scale vertically and horizontally and adapt to changing local and regional governance pressures and structures. Collaboration (generally) and collaborative governance (specifically) has been shown to improve transit at the regional level.

In addition to improving service efficiency and project outcomes collaborative planning can be used to involve community members and increase participation and equity in transportation planning. Goodspeed et al. (2023) designed and evaluated a collaborative process for scenario planning at small transit agencies. Their process and outcome primarily focused on involving community members in a collaborative manner in the planning process of transit. Blumenberg (2002) explicitly described the relationship between the shift from welfare to “workfare” based social programs and the need for more explicit collaboration between transportation providers and other social service organizations. Blumenberg’s work found that social service providers

and transportation agencies enter into collaboration with very different ideas of solutions and have trouble collaborating because of power differentials. This aligns with the governance literature that finds horizontal networks with weak ties to power on the vertical scale have trouble implementing innovative ideas for reforming regional transportation (Weir et al., 2009), indicating that horizontal ties alone may not be enough to overcome fragmentation and solve equity issues at the regional scale (Lester and Reckhow, 2012). Above the transit agencies themselves and the local scale lie Metropolitan Planning Organizations, state agencies, and federal agencies. While state and federal agencies are critical for funding and policy implementation of transportation they do not serve a role at the regional level, which is the scale of interest.

In addition to the transit agencies themselves, Metropolitan Planning Organizations, or MPOs, play a role in regional transit governance. MPOs were created by federal transportation law in order to establish long-range transportation plans for regions. MPOs are required in urbanized areas with populations of 50,000 or more and were also established to create near-term transportation improvement plans (Sciara and Wachs, 2007). MPOs can be a critical venue for equity-related policies and decisions because of their regional scope that crosses jurisdictional boundaries (Karner and Levine, 2021; Handy and Sciara, 2017). However, Evers and De Vries 2013 echo previous research that indicates more governmental powers at the regional level, “is not the most effective way to deal with collective action problems in urban regions” (p. 551). The role of collaboration, collaborative planning, and collaborative decision-making has been more thoroughly explored at the regional/MPO level than at the direct transit agency level—particularly in the wake of ISTEA and TEA-21—two federal transportation funding packages

passed in the 1990s. ISTEA, The Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991, changed the funding stream of transportation from the federal level and sought to enhance the role of Metropolitan Planning Organizations at the regional level (Lee and Rivasplata, 2001). Strengthening the MPOs as an institutional solution to regional transportation issues will not work effectively when decisions can be undermined by actions taken at the local level or in other arenas (Weir et al., 2009). However, in cases where there are large numbers of actors and limited coordination, a hierarchical approach can be necessary to create effective regional transportation policy (Evers and de Vries, 2013). Research about MPOs and regional governance explore both collaborative planning and governance and the role of hierarchy and multi-level governance.

The study of transportation policy from the public policy perspective, rather than the technological perspective remains somewhat limited and underexplored compared to other questions of regional governance (such as resource management). Marsden and Reardon (2017) reviewed 100 papers on transportation policy and found that overwhelmingly they did not evaluate real-world policies, engage with policy makers, or use qualitative methods. A systematic literature review of public transportation governance conducted by Hrelja (2020) found 27 relevant papers grouped into the topics of governance challenges for a sustainable transport system, governance of public transport systems, and integrated transport and land use planning. Funding of public transportation and the role of MPOs in regional governance have been more extensively explored in the literature than questions of collaborative governance. The theoretical framework of collaborative governance defined above will be the

main theoretical framework to analyze the cases to help answer questions about both fare equity and regional governance.

The metropolitan region has been proposed as an appropriate scale to provide equity-advancing policies, which would include low-income transit discounts, but the existing governance structure of transit in a region does not always promote regional policies and collaboration. Exploring collaborative governance through the lens of low-income transit rider discounts can provide insights both to regions looking to implement similar policies and answer questions about collaborative governance of transit in general. Existing studies of collaborative governance of transit have focused more on service integration and efficiency rather than questions of equity. Comparing the governance and fare discount implementation strategies of two regions adds to the existing literature by providing insights about transit discount implementation and expanding the literature on governance of transportation systems at the regional level.

Methodology, Questions, and Case Selection

Case studies are useful to evaluate a contemporary set of events when a how or why question is being asked over something the investigator has little or no control over (Yin, 2003). Case studies are also “useful for studying the links between regions and other scales” (Harrison 2006). Comparative case studies provide additional insights over single case studies which is why both ORCA LIFT in the Puget Sound region in Washington state and Clipper START in the San Francisco Bay Area region in California are assessed.

Understanding transit governance at the regional level and how it relates to discount provision can provide insights about regional policy, recommendations for other regional transit sheds, and a deeper understanding of the importance of regional coordination - especially for fare policy. The primary question is, how does governance impact the provision of low-income rider discounts?

Case Selection

Since the scale of the metropolitan region was of interest, it was important to pick cases that would align with this scale. In order to be effective, fare policies should be regional and cross jurisdictional boundaries of transit agencies. The organization of regional transit varies significantly, but common players tend to be transit agencies, MPOs, and local governments. For the cases of interest, the region is defined as the counties located under the jurisdiction of the local Metropolitan Planning Organization. This may differ from the Metropolitan Statistical Area, but since MPOs conduct long term regional transportation planning this cohort aligns generally with the state and federal designation of the transportation region.

The Puget Sound Region in Washington State and the Bay Area in California have similar political environments, geographic constraints, and levels of fragmentation and regionalism in the transit environment (Weinreich et al., 2018). Both regions were also early proponents of transit service integration (Miller et al., 2005).

Figure 2 and Figure 3 show the counties of the Metropolitan Transportation Commission, the MPO of the San Francisco Bay Area, California and the location of the nine-county region within the state of California.

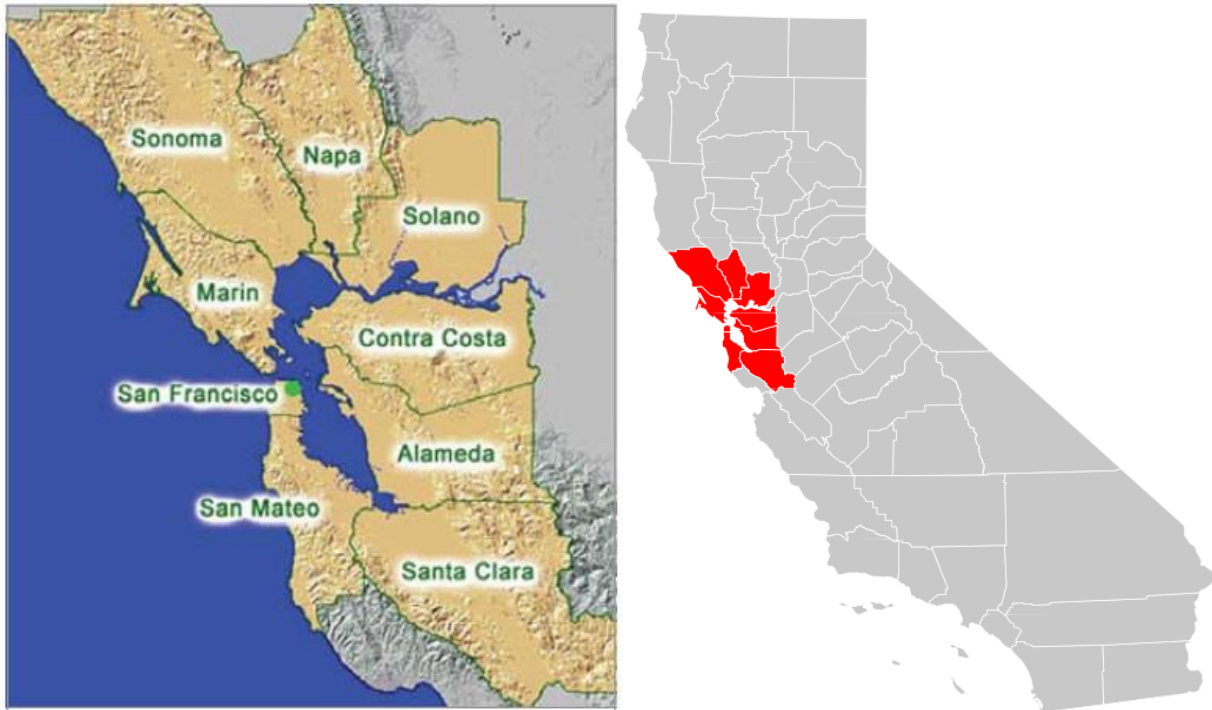


Figure 2. Bay Area Metropolitan Transportation Commission Jurisdiction (FHWA, 2009) (Left)

Figure 3. California with Bay Area Counties in Red (GEreikat, n.d.) (Right)

The Puget Sound region contains four counties and ten transit agencies. Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC) is the relevant MPO. Figure 4 below shows the location of the four counties of PSRC and Figure 5 shows all of the MPOs in Washington state, with PSRC located in the western portion of the state.

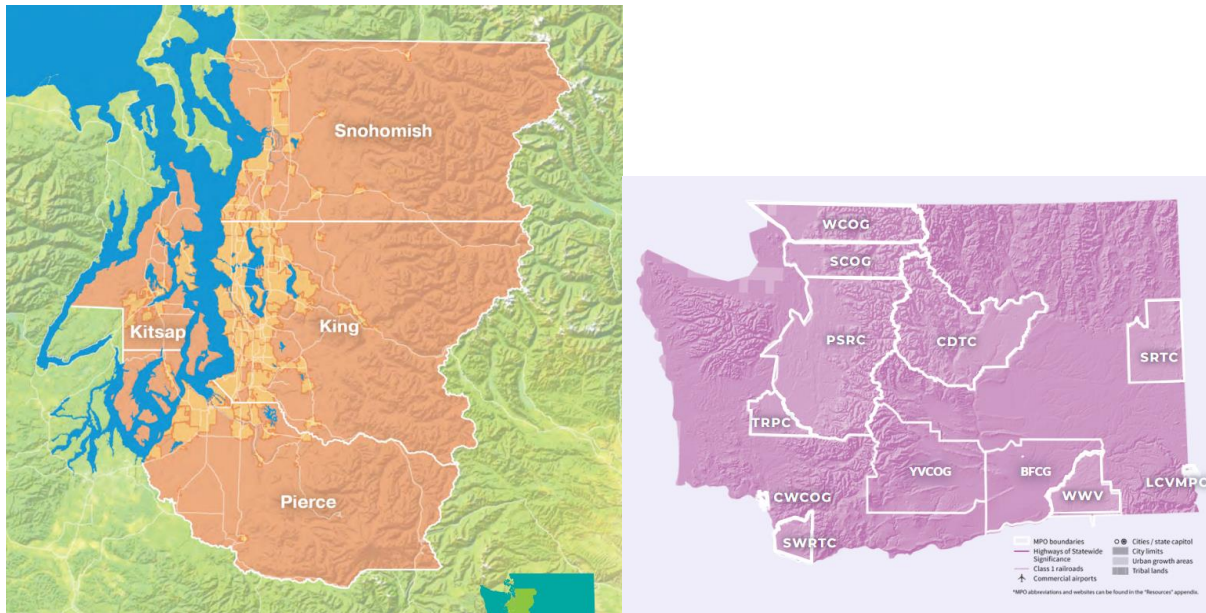


Figure 4. Puget Sound Regional Council Counties (PSRC, 2020) (Left)

Figure 5. Washington State Metropolitan Planning Organizations (Washington State Transportation Commission, n.d.) (Right)

ORCA LIFT is primarily run by King County Metro with some duties taken on by Sound Transit, the regional transit authority in the region. All except one agency in the Puget Sound region offer ORCA LIFT discounted fare of \$1, which provides savings of \$0.50 to \$5.50 depending on agency and distance traveled. The Bay Area contains nine counties and 27 transit agencies.

Clipper START, the low-income transit discount program in the Bay Area, is run by the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC), the MPO. For most of the evaluation period, 21 of 27 agencies in the Bay Area were participating in Clipper START and 14 were offering 20% off base fares while 7 were offering 50% off base fares. As of January 2024, all agencies that accept Clipper (22 of 27) are offering 50% off base fares for Clipper START. Despite similar start dates for investigating opportunities for low-income transit rider discounts, Clipper START is still

in the pilot phase with a little over 10,000 riders participating whereas ORCA LIFT was one of the earlier transit discount programs in the United States and is used as a blueprint for other regions. ORCA LIFT being administered and designed by King County Metro in conjunction with various other relevant policy actors in the region is an example of collaborative governance in a polycentric region, while Clipper START being administered and designed by MTC and adopted by the transit agencies follows more of a hierarchical or multi-level design because MTC's role in regional planning and funding places it at a higher level of government than the local and semi-regional transit agencies.

The administrative differences—transit agency oversight versus MPO oversight—provide a useful comparison to evaluate how the governance structures of regional transit sheds impact the provision of low-income transit discounts. While the transportation literature has promoted the region and the MPOs as the more appropriate venue for equity related conversations (Karner and Levine 2021) their relative lack of power compared to local and state governments can make policy implementation and decision-making more difficult. Collaborative governance, which has also been proposed as a useful method of regional governance, can be hampered by weak vertical ties (Weir et al. 2009) and success is driven partially by the starting point of collaboration (Ansell and Gash, 2008). Comparing ORCA LIFT and Clipper START will allow deeper insights about the role of hierarchical power from the MPO run program versus horizontal collaboration in the case of ORCA LIFT.

Analysis Framework

Various plans and documents from project conception to current updates were analyzed to identify governance and outcomes of Clipper START and ORCA LIFT. The original feasibility studies for both policies are included along with available evaluation reports and board meetings discussing implementation. For the Bay Area, plans and meeting notes were pulled from MTC and for Puget Sound plans and meeting notes were pulled from King County Metro and Sound Transit. This was to capture the decision-making and key policy points from the agencies leading the programs.

The two policies were compared along several measures assessing both governance and outcomes. The governance of the policies was assessed through identifying which agency or agencies were responsible for feasibility research, implementation, funding, and administrative oversight. Collaborative governance of the programs was reviewed by identifying a history of collaboration between the agencies and incentives to participate in the programs. The collaborative governance variables were largely pulled from existing research and news articles.

Policy lifespan and uptake were assessed to compare length between initial feasibility report and program implementation along with program uptake from eligible transit riders and transit agencies. Transit agency uptake was identified through news reports, board meetings, and agency announcements. Rider uptake was a key outcome to assess whether agencies were meeting goals of improving transit affordability for low-income riders in the region. Other outcomes included network reach, identified with GTFS data and document analysis, and fare

structure and affordability. While outcomes identified by program users would be helpful to assess whether program goals of access and equity were met, these were only assessed from the evaluation reports provided by the agencies, and no direct interfacing with riders was conducted. This limits the usefulness of this outcome component for the analysis and would be worth delving into in further depth.

A brief description of additional programs was included to make sure the full discount landscape in each region was included.

Table 2 shows documents that were analyzed, a summary of their content, which case they corresponded to, and a link to the source. Feasibility studies, official transit board motions related to Clipper START and ORCA LIFT, and fare policy changes at transit agencies related to the programs were all included in the analysis. The feasibility documents and early studies define the decision-making process and governance structure of the program (who is funding the program, who is making the decisions about implementation timeline, metrics of success, scope of the program, etc.). The board documents and transit agency motions for approval detailed when other regional agencies began participating in the program to uncover information about the timeline and regional spread of the discount program. And finally, agency-run evaluations of the program provided information about rider uptake, agency-dictated metrics of success, and future directions of the program.

Table 2. Primary Documents used in Analysis

Documents	Purpose	Region	Source
MTC Regional Means-Based Transit Fare Pricing Study: Technical: Memorandum #1: Policies and Conditions	Regional Means Based Transit Fare Pricing Study Study that precipitated Clipper START and provides insight into decision-making processes at MTC	Bay Area	https://mtc.ca.gov/sites/default/files/1_MTC_Means_Based_TM_1_DRAFT_FINAL.pdf
MTC Regional Means-Based Transit Fare Pricing Study: Technical: Memorandum #2: Alternative Fare Scenarios	Regional Means Based Transit Fare Pricing Study	Bay Area	https://mtc.ca.gov/sites/default/files/2_MTC_Means_Based_TM_2_Draft_Final.pdf
MTC Regional Means-Based Transit Fare Pricing Study: Technical: Memorandum #3: Evaluation of Alternative Means Based Transit Fare Scenarios	Regional Means Based Transit Fare Pricing Study	Bay Area	https://mtc.ca.gov/sites/default/files/3_MTC_Means_Based_TM_3_DRAFT_FINAL.pdf
MTC Regional Means-Based Transit Fare Pricing Study: Technical: Memorandum #4: Alternatives Evaluation and Recommended Actions	Regional Means Based Transit Fare Pricing Study	Bay Area	https://mtc.ca.gov/sites/default/files/4_MTC_Means_Based_TM_4_DRAFT_FINAL.pdf

MTC Technical Memo of First Two Years of the Pilot (July 2020-July 2022)	Regional Means Based Transit Fare Pilot Program Evaluation Clipper START pilot evaluation with data from first two years of the program	Bay Area	https://mtc.ca.gov/sites/default/files/documents/2023-06/Draft_Clipper_Start_Evaluation_Technical_Memo_July_2020_July_2022.pdf
Puget Sound document on affordability- King County Low Income Fare Options Advisory Committee	Feasibility/needs review for ORCA LIFT King County Metro initiated review of fare affordability implementation measures for low-income riders in their region	Puget Sound	https://kingcounty.gov/en/legacy/depts/transportation/low-income-options
Resolution No R2014-28	Sound transit set fares for low-income adult fare category	Puget Sound	https://www.soundtransit.org/sites/default/files/documents/appendixg-resolution-r2014-28-20210325.pdf
Resolution R2023-05	Sound Transit changing ORCA LIFT fare to \$1	Puget Sound	https://www.soundtransit.org/st_sharepoint/download/sites/P RDA/FinalRecords/2023/Resolution%20R2023-05.pdf
Resolution R2015-29	Sound Transit changing sounder fares to coordinate with KCM more	Puget Sound	https://www.soundtransit.org/st_sharepoint/download/sites/P RDA/FinalRecords/2015/Resolution%20R2015-29.pdf
Resolution R2020-28	Established flat ORCA LIFT fare of 1.50 on	Puget Sound	https://www.scribd.com/document/48855

	Sounder		5327/Resolution-R2020-28
Resolution No. R2014-27	Amended previous resolution to establish low income adult as a new reduced fare category	Puget Sound	https://www.soundtransit.org/st_sharepoint/download/sites/P RDA/FinalRecords/2014/Resolution%20R2014-27.pdf
Motion N. M2022-27	Sound Transit Motion to reduce ORCA Lift to \$1 for six month period	Puget Sound	https://www.soundtransit.org/st_sharepoint/download/sites/P RDA/ActiveDocuments/Motion%20M2022-27.pdf
MTC April 24, 2023 meeting	Update of Clipper START from fare integration task force	Bay Area	https://mtc.ca.gov/sites/default/files/documents/2023-04/_00_2023_04_24_Final%20Agenda%20Packet%20FITF_v3.pdf
2019 title VI report King County Metro	Has Q1 report on Orca LIFT from King County Metro	Puget Sound	https://kingcounty.gov/~media/depts/metro/accountability/reports/2019/title-vi-program.pdf
M2003-24	Sound Transit regional fare coordination/smart card project Interlocal agreement with Community transit, everett transit, kitsap transit, KCM, Pierce transit, washington state ferries	Puget Sound	https://www.soundtransit.org/st_sharepoint/download/sites/P RDA/FinalRecords/2003/Motion%20M2003-26.pdf
KCMC fare structure	“King County Metro	Puget Sound	https://irp-

needs assessment	was the first transit agency within the United States to offer a reduced fare (ORCA LIFT) for low-income adults and free Youth ORCAs for children of LIFT cardholders. (p. 25)”		cdn.multiscreensite.com/c86a044e/files/uploaded/KCMC_Fare_Structure_Needs_Assessment_Feb_2018_FINAL.pdf
Pierce Board agenda from Feb 13, 2023	Pierce Transit board decision to participate in ORCA LIFT	Puget Sound	https://www.piercetransit.org/meeting-archive/
Sound Move 1996	Ten Year Regional Transit System plan that describes origins of Sound Transit as regional transit operator in the Puget Sound region	Puget Sound	https://www.soundtransit.org/sites/default/files/documents/199605-sound-move-ten-year-regional-transit-system-plan.pdf
King County Metro Motion M13746, M13806	Motion to create Low-Income Fare Options Advisory Committee in October 2012 by King County Metro	Puget Sound	https://aqua.kingcounty.gov/council/clerk/OldOrdsMotions/Motion%2013806.pdf
Proposed Clipper Memorandum of Understanding	Describes roles of Bay Area transit agencies and MTC in running Clipper	Bay Area	https://www.caltrain.com/media/22264/download

Case 1: Clipper START

Governance Background, Context and Overview

The success of collaborative governance is influenced by prior history of collaboration, power disparities, and incentives to participate in collaboration (Ansell and Gash, 2008). Both ABAG, the Association of Bay Area Governments, and MTC, the Metropolitan Transportation Commission, exist on paper as regional forms of government. ABAG, the Association of Bay Area Governments, was created by local governments in 1961 to create a regional government body while still keeping local control in practice (Orman, 1972). MTC was created in 1970 by the California Legislature as work started on the Bay Area Rapid Transit System (BART) and was envisioned to help coordinate regional transit and integrate existing systems with the new BART infrastructure. In practice, the governance of transit in the Bay Area region is more complex.

The Bay Area does not have a designated regional network manager, an organization that can coordinate fares, schedules, and service among agencies. An evaluation of opportunities to create a regional network manager in the Bay Area, or formally designate MTC as the regional network manager (or create another agency for this role) was conducted recently, but evaluation and limited implementation are ongoing and in even earlier phases than Clipper START (Blue Ribbon Transit Recovery Task Force, 2021; Griffiths, 2023; MTC, 2024d). In addition to MTC's internal report about regional network coordination, both Seamless Bay Area and SPUR, local transportation advocacy and research groups, have drafted reports about regional

integration of transit in the Bay Area (SPUR, 2020; Seamless Bay Area, 2021). In these reports, the organization of transit in Puget Sound and the regional transit coordinator role of Sound Transit is mentioned as an example of good regional coordination and transit governance. MTC and several organizations in the Bay Area are clearly interested in improving regional collaboration and coordination of transit, but this is an ongoing process in the early phases.

There is no transit agency in the Bay Area that covers the entire region; however, a few agencies in the Bay Area operate semi-regional services that spread beyond a single jurisdiction. BART, Caltrain, ACE, SMART, and Capitol Corridor all operate rail service across more than one county in the Bay Area. ACE, Caltrain, and Capitol Corridor are all joint powers authorities (ACE, n.d.; Barz, 2019). A joint powers authority allows two or more existing public agencies to create a new independent agency and these new agencies are generally governed by a board made of constituent member agency representatives and/or local representatives. BART and SMART are special transit districts created by the state, which means they are governed by board members from their areas of operation (BART, 2017) and can issue sales tax revenue bonds, utilize eminent domain (in some cases), and exercise other powers granted by special district creation (BART, 2017). BART was the earliest regional rail transit in the Bay Area, and its history overlaps considerably with that of early regional planning efforts in the region. In addition to the multi-county semi-regional rail agencies in the Bay Area, there are many local bus agencies. The figure below shows the governance type (special districts created by the state, joint powers authority, or municipal/county transit operators) of each of the MTC recognized transit agencies in the Bay Area. About half of the agencies have boards, generally the agencies that are special districts and cross counties or ones that were created by joint

power authority have boards and city or county transit operators do not.

Prepared by MTC
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Bay Area Transit Operators

	Transit Operator	Special District/Transit District (created by state)	Municipal/County Transit Operator	Joint Powers Authority
1	AC Transit (Alameda-Contra Costa Transit District)	✓		
2	ACE (Altamont Corridor Express) <i>[not on Clipper]</i>			✓
3	BART (Bay Area Rapid Transit District)	✓		
4	Caltrain (Peninsula Corridor Joint Powers Board)			✓
5	City of Dixon Redit-Ride <i>[not on Clipper]</i>		✓	
6	County Connection (Central Contra Costa Transit Authority)			✓
7	FAST (Fairfield and Suisun Transit)		✓	
8	Golden Gate Transit (Golden Gate Bridge, Highway and Transportation District)	✓		
9	LAVTA (Livermore-Amador Valley Transit Authority / Wheels)			✓
10	Marin Transit (Marin County Transit District)	✓		
11	Petaluma Transit		✓	
12	Rio Vista Delta Breeze <i>[not on Clipper]</i>		✓	
13	SamTrans (San Mateo County Transit District)	✓		
14	San Francisco Bay Ferry (WETA/Water Emergency Transportation Authority)	✓		
15	Santa Rosa CityBus		✓	
16	SFMTA (San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency)		✓	
17	SMART (Sonoma Marin Area Rail Transit)	✓		
18	SolTrans (Solano County Transit)			✓
19	Sonoma County Transit		✓	
20	Tri Delta (Eastern Contra Costa Transit Authority)			✓
21	Union City Transit		✓	
22	Vacaville City Coach		✓	
23	VINE (Napa Valley Transportation Authority)			✓
24	VTA (Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority)	✓		
25	WestCAT (Western Contra Costa Transit Authority)			✓
	Interregional Rail Operators (with Bay Area representation on JPA)			
26	Capitol Corridor (Capitol Corridor Joint Powers Authority)			✓
27	San Joaquin (San Joaquin Joint Powers Authority)			✓

Figure 6. Bay Area Transit Operators (Barz, 2019)

In the absence of a regional transit agency that serves the entire region, MTC has taken on some coordination and administrative efforts. Despite the official role as a regional government, MPOs often support county and local decisions and are not always set up to promote regional integration efforts. In a previous evaluation of collaborative planning efforts between MTC and other transportation decision-makers throughout the region (such as transit agencies, congestion management agencies, etc.), collaboration was so limited that the study focus was shifted from assessing regional collaboration versus parochial decision-making to focusing on different planning styles. During that time, the committee for regional system management was disbanded due to low attendance (Innes and Gruber, 2001). More recent

evaluations have proposed that the board makeup of MTC that consists of local representatives from throughout the region, incentivizes promotion of locally beneficial solutions over region-wide collaboration and problem-solving (Seamless Bay Area, 2021). Despite institutional constraints imposed by balancing local needs and representation with regional integration and coordination, MTC is the agency in the Bay Area that initiates and maintains regional coordination efforts. MTC disburses funding to transit agencies in the nine county Bay Area region for certain state and federal programs and makes the determination of whether or not Bay Area transit operators are adhering to coordination-based policy requirements in the Transportation Development Act (Caltrans, 2018). MTC also disburses funds from bridge tolling and through the various funding mechanisms distributes over \$1 billion per year to Bay Area transit agencies (MTC, 2021b). The funding distribution role of MTC incentivizes transit agencies to work with MTC on regional policies (such as Clipper and Clipper START) and creates a more hierarchical relationship between the transit agencies and MTC.

Clipper, the regional smart card, was originally introduced as a pilot program by MTC in 2002 and was called Translink at the time. Today, 22 agencies in the Bay Area accept Clipper and, despite varying fare policies at different agencies, the card allows riders to travel throughout the region using one card. Clipper has its own executive board with members from MTC, AC Transit, BART, Golden Gate Transit, Muni, SamTrans, and VTA. The figure below shows the organization of Clipper and indicates the role MTC serves in the region.

Clipper is delivered by Transit Operators and MTC

Item #9.
8/22/2022

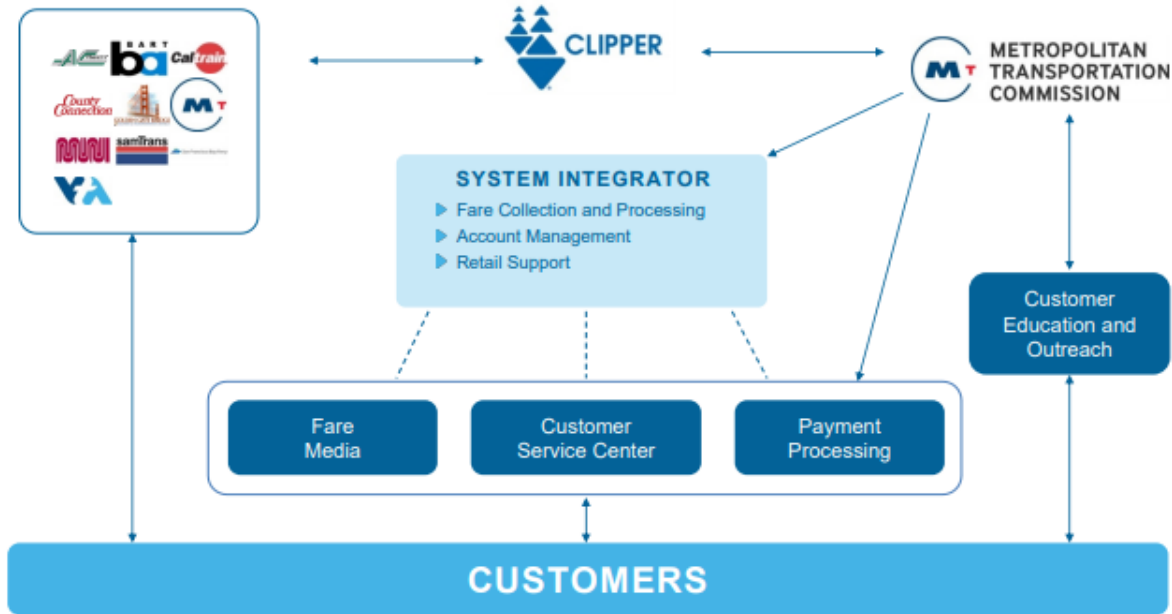


Figure 7. Clipper Organization (Caltrain, 2022)

Regional transit decisions, such as fare integration policies, are generally made by MTC and adopted by agencies in the region rather than coming from a transit agency and—through horizontal collaboration—spreading into the surrounding agencies. This is a simplification of the governance structure, and many agencies in the Bay Area collaborate with each other (particularly neighboring agencies in the same county); however, as will be detailed further below, the origin of Clipper START and uptake by agencies aligns more with a hierarchical implementation pattern rather than horizontal collaboration alone. Despite the funding powers and coordination efforts undertaken by MTC, service and fare decisions and policies are generally made on an individual agency basis, and they operate mostly independently. This

contrasts with the organizational structure of transit in the Puget Sound region - which is detailed in the next section.

Program Overview and Administration

Clipper START is a single-ride discount program for low-income transit riders in the Bay Area. As of January 2024, all of the agencies in the Bay Area that accept Clipper are offering 50% off single-ride fares through Clipper START. Until January, the program was active at 21 of the 27 agencies in the region and offered either a 20% or 50% discount off the fare depending on the agency. MTC initiated the program, provides administrative support, and subsidizes 10% of the lost fares from the discounts for participating agencies.

The initial feasibility study for Clipper START was conducted in 2014 and the official goals for Clipper START are listed below (MTC, 2023).

Goals

- Make transit more affordable to individuals earning low incomes
- Develop implementation options that are financially viable and administratively feasible
- Move towards a more consistent regional standard for fare discounts

Any individuals who make 200% or less of the federal poverty level (\$27,180 for one individual) are eligible for Clipper START. This aligns with the eligibility for toll penalty waivers and payment plans in the Bay Area. Applicants can provide a copy of their EBT card, Medi-Cal card,

county benefits eligibility letter, Muni Lifeline card number, or copy of their last federal tax return (ABAG and MTC, 2023).

Agency Adoption and Network Coverage

Figure 8 below shows the network coverage and agency adoption of Clipper START for agencies in the Bay Area. Emery Go-Round and MV/go Mountain View are fare free. Rio Vista Delta Breeze, Altamont Corridor Express, Angel Island Tiburon Ferry, and Capitol Corridor do not accept Clipper as a payment method and are not participating in Clipper START. VTA in Santa Clara County accepts Clipper and was the final agency to begin participating in Clipper START in January 2024. The routes and fare information were taken from the GTFS data and mapped using R. The map accurately represents the program status of June 2023, but agency discount levels and participation have continued shifting and changing as the pilot program evolves. As of January 2024, all of the agencies in the Bay Area that accept Clipper are offering a 50% discount through Clipper START.

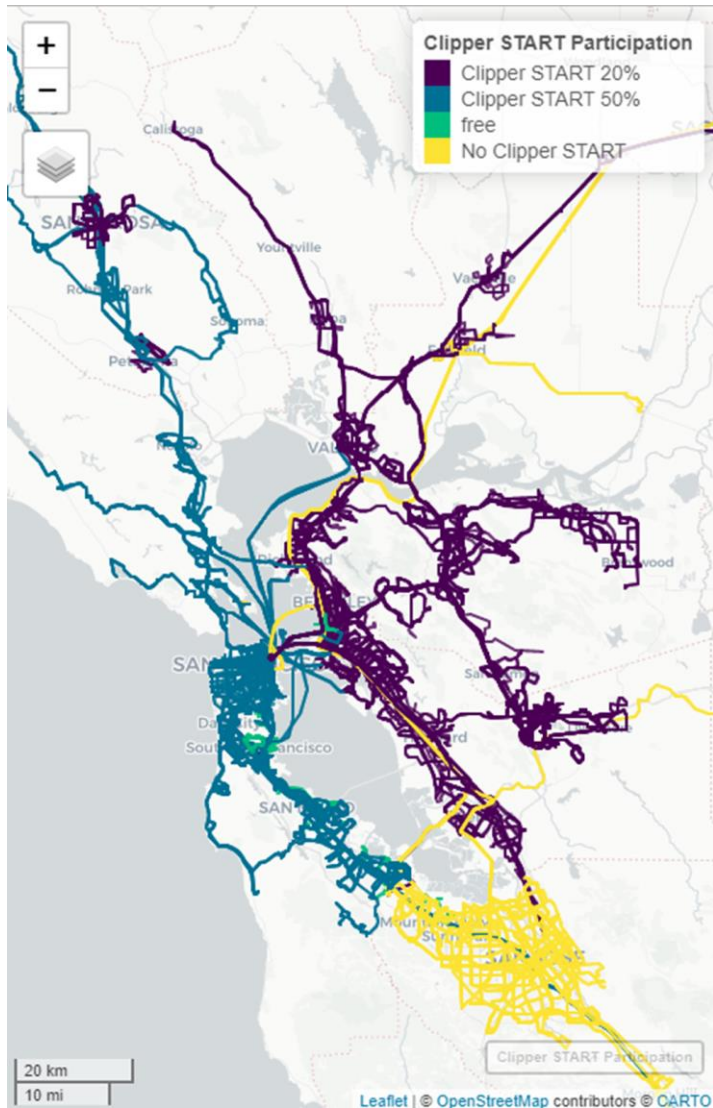


Figure 8. Bay Area Transit Agencies Participation in Clipper START (June 2023)

For the first three years of the pilot program transit agencies could offer either 20% off base fares or 50% off base fares. However, MTC only subsidizes 10%, so agencies offering the 50% discount must be able to cover the remaining 40% revenue loss. Prior to January 2024, Twenty-one of the 22 agencies in the region that accept Clipper (the regional smart card) were participating in Clipper START. Eight agencies were offering a 50% single-ride discount and 13 agencies were offering a 20% single-ride discount. Table 3 below shows the participation in

Clipper START by agencies in the Bay Area during the first two years of the program. However, as of January 2024 all agencies in the area are participating and offering 50% off single-ride fares (as shown in table 4). The original discount offerings are included to show the program as it existed for the majority of the pilot during the analysis period this report is based on. The addition of VTA in Santa Clara County (shown in the figure above in yellow) significantly expanded the network reach of the Clipper START discount program.

Table 3. Participation in Clipper, Clipper START among Bay Area Agencies (June 2023)

No Clipper		Clipper		
Other Payment	Free	No Clipper START	50% Discount	20% Discount
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Rio Vista Delta Breeze •Altamont Corridor Express •Angel Island Tiburon Ferry (private) •Capitol Corridor •Tideline water taxi (on demand) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •City of South San Francisco •Emery Go-Round •MVGo commute.org 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •VTA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Golden Gate Ferry + Golden Gate Transit •Sonoma County Transit •San Francisco Bay Ferry •Marin Transit •Muni •SMART •Caltrain 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •VINE •BART •AC Transit •FAST •Petaluma Transit •Tri Delta Transit •County Connection •LAVTA/Wheels •Santa Rosa CityBus •Westcat •Vacaville City Coach •Soltrans •Union City Transit

Table 4. Participation in Clipper, Clipper START among Bay Area Agencies (January 2024)

No Clipper		Clipper		
Other Payment	Free	Clipper START 50% Discount		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Rio Vista Delta Breeze •Altamont Corridor Express •Angel Island Tiburon Ferry (private) •Capitol Corridor •Tideline water taxi (on demand) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •City of South San Francisco •Emery Go-Round •MVGo commute.org 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •VTA •Westcat •Vacaville City Coach •Soltrans •Union City Transit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Golden Gate Ferry + Golden Gate Transit •Sonoma County Transit •San Francisco Bay Ferry •Marin Transit •Muni •SMART •Caltrain 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •VINE •BART •AC Transit •FAST •Petaluma Transit •Tri Delta Transit •County Connection •LAVTA/Wheels •Santa Rosa CityBus

Timeline of Clipper START

Figure 9 below shows the timeline of Clipper START. MTC’s means-based pricing study ran during 2014 and the final report was released in 2015. The pilot program began in 2020 and was scheduled to end in July 2023. However the board voted to extend the pilot program to July 2025. As of January 2024, all agencies that accept Clipper are offering 50% off single-ride fares through Clipper START.

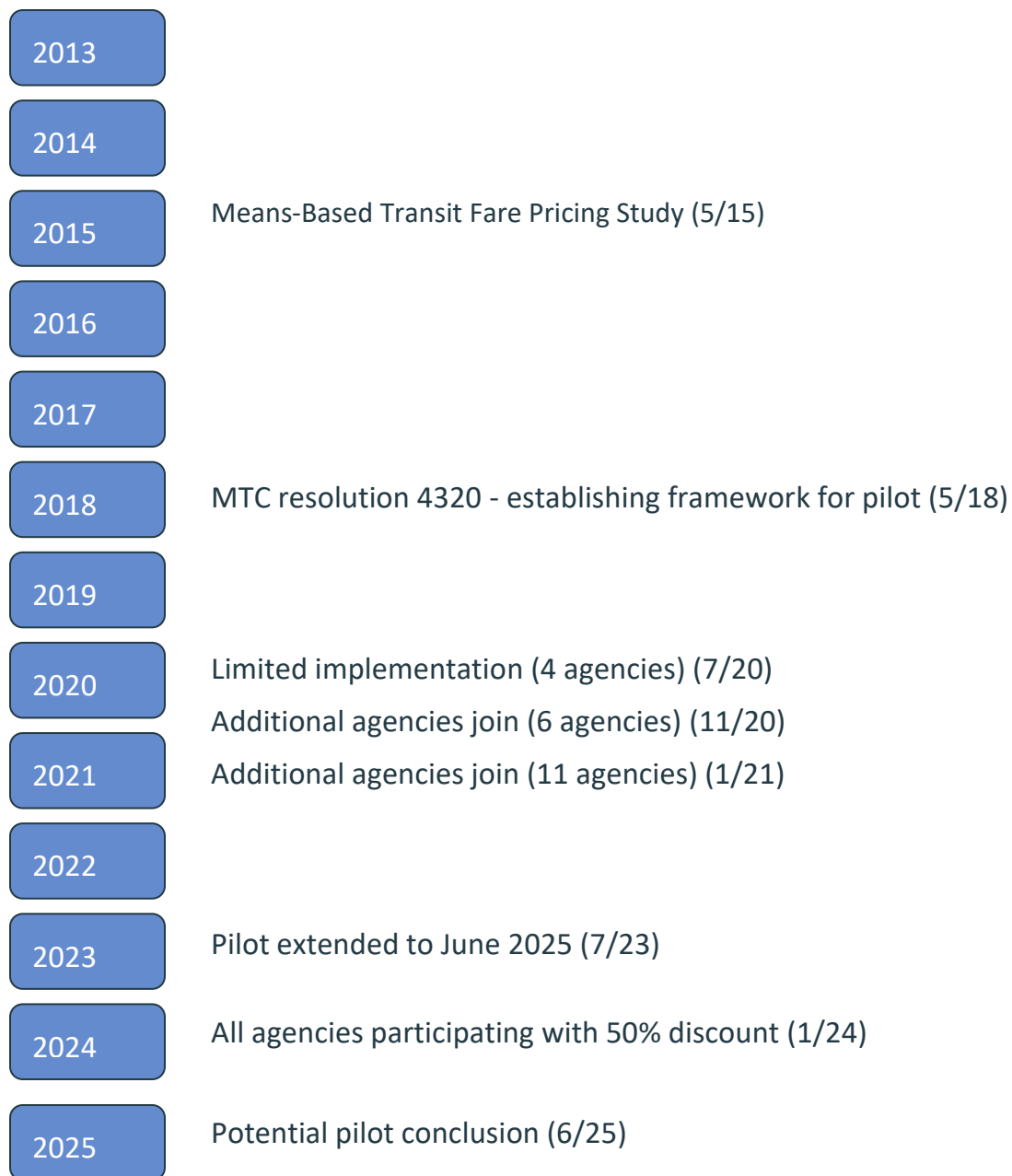


Figure 9. Clipper START Timeline

Decision-makers

MTC hired CH2M as the lead technical consultant for the means-based fare study conducted in 2014. A technical advisory committee provided initial input and feedback on each technical memorandum and consisted of:

- AC Transit representatives
- Alameda County Social Services Agency Workforce and Benefits Administration
- BART
- Marin Transit
- Contra Costa County Employment and Human Services Department
- Petaluma Transit
- Muni
- San Jose State Mineta Transportation Institute
- Urban Habitat
- VTA

The advisory committee met four times to review each of the four technical memorandums and helped conduct data collection and served primarily an advisory role with MTC making the final decisions based on CH2M's report.

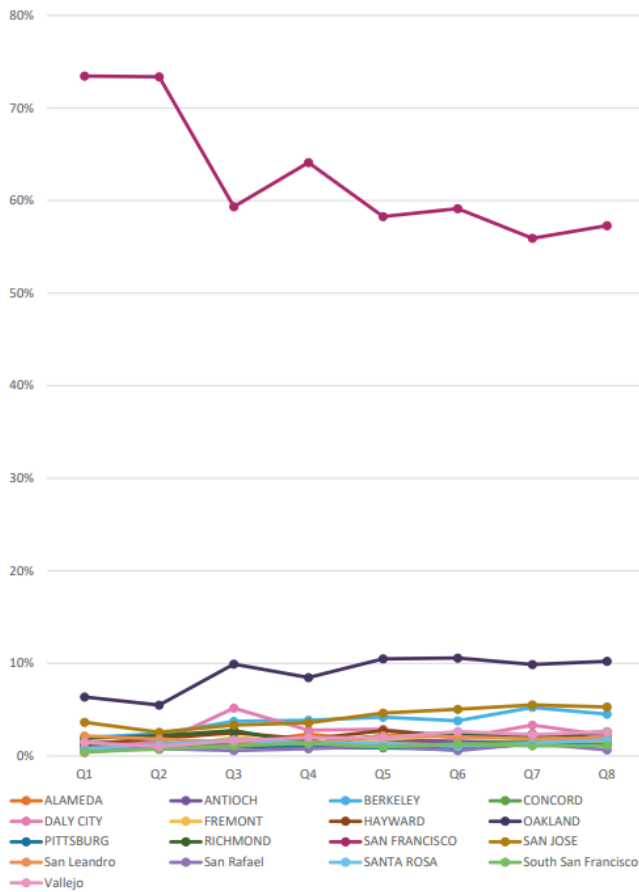
Rider Uptake and Outreach

Uptake by eligible riders for Clipper START has been slow thus far and agency justification for this was initiating the program during 2020, which was a time of depleted ridership overall. In

March 2023 there were 13,800 active users (ABAG and MTC, 2023). MTC has plans to improve uptake by increasing marketing and outreach for Clipper START. Of the 1.6 million eligible people in the Bay Area, 19,000 have enrolled and 13,800 are active users of Clipper START. Over the first two years of the pilot program, Clipper START riders never accounted for more than 1% of Clipper riders (MTC, 2023). In January 2024 the discount was changed to 50% at all agencies that accept Clipper in the Bay Area. This change, in addition to increased marketing is expected to increase rider uptake (MTC, 2024).

As shown in Figure 10 below, most of the applications for Clipper START have been from San Francisco residents, shown in pink on the graph below. BART, Muni, Caltrain, and Golden Gate Transit were the first four agencies to be included in the pilot program. All of these agencies operate in San Francisco city-county which may partially explain the overrepresentation of San Francisco residents in Clipper START applications through 2022.

Figure 12 Completed Applications by Applicant City of Residence by Period



*Includes cities with more than 40 total applications each.
 Source: Clipper START Application Survey Data, July 15, 2020 – July 31, 2022

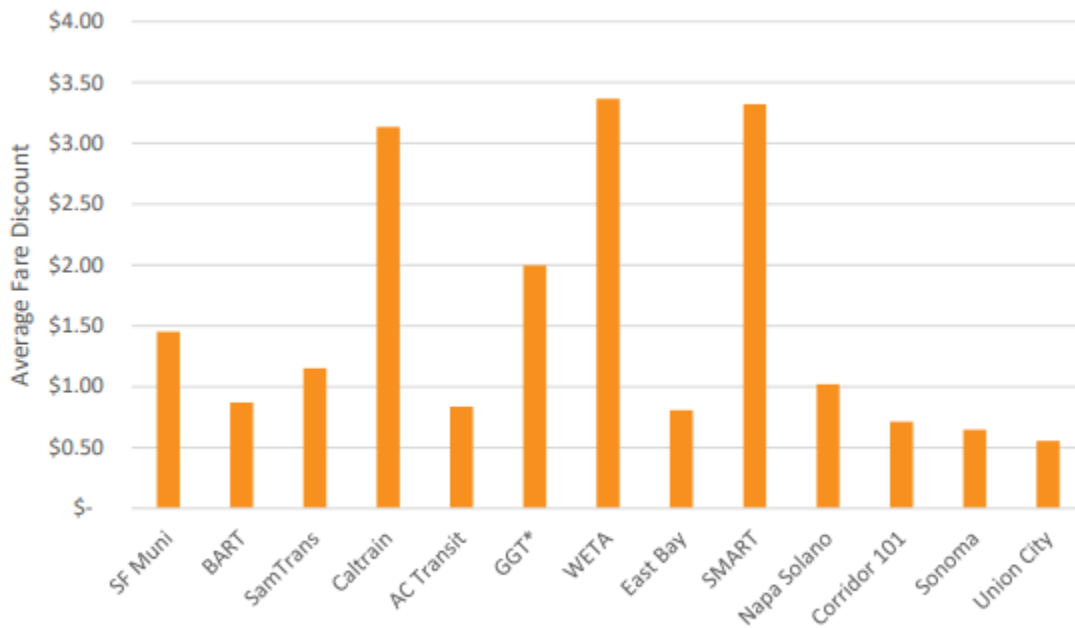
Figure 10. Completed applications by applicant residence city (MTC Draft Clipper Start Evaluation Technical Memo, 2023)

Fare Structure and Affordability

For Clipper START, 13 agencies offer a 20% single-ride discount and 8 agencies offer a 50% single-ride discount. Some agencies in the Bay Area have flat fares, some have zone-based fares, and some have distance-based fares, so the cost with Clipper START varies from agency to agency and ride to ride. The pilot program evaluation conducted by MTC found that the

average savings per ride was \$1.20 across agencies. The figure below, from the report, shows the average fare discount for several agencies in the Bay Area.

Figure 32 Average Fare Discount per Trip by Operator



Source: Clipper START Reimbursement Data

*Golden Gate Transit includes discounts from Golden Gate Ferry and Marin Transit

Figure 11. Average fare discount per trip by operator (MTC Draft Clipper Start Evaluation Technical Memo, 2023)

In the evaluation report, 44% of respondents indicated they use transit more regularly than before Clipper START because of increased affordability and said that they could afford transit more frequently and travel to more destinations. Survey respondents also indicated that the program made it easier to cover all expenses (61%) and that they take more trips on public transit than previously (64%). These preliminary results from the pilot evaluation indicate that Clipper START is able to improve affordability and increase transit use for riders.

Additional Programs

While Clipper START is the program of interest for the analysis, there are other discount programs in the Bay Area that may supplement Clipper START and provide additional discounts to improve transit affordability. Exploring, briefly, additional discount and fare coordination programs can shed additional light on the regional fare policy landscape in the region. And in the case of discount programs run separately by transit agencies, this may create added complexity or disincentivize rider adoption of the new program.

Clipper BayPass is a pilot program assessing the impact of more integrated fare policy on ridership throughout the Bay Area. BayPass provides unlimited transit access through prepaid cards to participants and is assessing frictionless transit in the region through more integrated fares. BayPass initially rolled out for students at San Francisco State University, San Jose State University, UC Berkeley, and Santa Rosa Junior College. Residents of the MidPen affordable housing residences in Alameda, San Mateo, and Santa Clara County were offered BayPasses as well (BART, 2022). The BayPass program has different goals than Clipper START but is aimed at improving coordination and ridership through more integrated fares and is interesting to note as an additional example of MTC led fare coordination. The results from the pilot may lead to changes in multi-agency passes or fare capping (an affordability tool).

SFMTA, the transportation department in San Francisco which operates the transit agency Muni, provides several discount programs for low-income riders and unhoused riders. Muni Lifeline is a monthly pass for low-income riders on Muni (SFMTA, 2017). The Muni Access Pass

provides free access to Muni for 12 months for unhoused individuals (Nelson, n.d.). Muni is also participating in Clipper START, so low-income riders have the option for the monthly discounted pass or the single-ride discount. At the time that the MTC means-based study was conducted (2015), Muni Lifeline was a free transit program for low-income people with disabilities and seniors (MTC, 2016).

VTA in Santa Clara County provides UPLIFT, the universal pass for life improvement from transportation program, which provides quarterly passes, “for adults experiencing homelessness or who are at risk of losing their housing due to lack of transportation (Santa Clara County, n.d.).” In addition to programs run by the agencies themselves, when MTC conducted the means-based transit fare pricing study they found that some agencies sold bulk tickets at a discount to social service agencies that then distribute tickets. In the report, MTC indicated that, “while these programs are fairly straightforward to the operator and riders already familiar with fare products of a particular system, these policies are complex and confusing when considered regionally” (p. 23). As each agency sold bulk tickets in different quantities, some did not provide discounts, and some did not offer bulk purchases, there was no uniformity among the programs. Bulk discount sales to social service agencies is another format transit agencies use to improve fare affordability and access for low-income residents, but it is indirect, complex, and when done agency by agency creates a patchwork of discounts that may not meet the needs of riders in a complex region like the Bay Area.

Case 2: ORCA LIFT

Governance Background, Context and Overview

Washington State has both Regional Transportation Planning Organizations and Metropolitan Planning Organizations providing regional transportation planning in the state. RTPOs exist in areas that are too small for MPOs and cover the rural areas of the state (Lorenzo et al., 2011). For ease of comparison with the Bay Area, the region is defined as that of the Puget Sound Regional Council (PRSC) MPO: Kitsap, Snohomish, King, and Pierce County. PRSC participates in collaborative efforts with Sound Transit and King County Metro. However, the setup of regional transit in the Puget Sound region and the long history of coordination between agencies means there is a stronger role for Sound Transit and King County Metro in most collaborative efforts and fare policies across agencies with PRSC playing a more limited role compared with MTC in the Bay Area. The history of regional transit planning in the Puget Sound area began in earnest with the creation of Sound Transit, the regional transit authority, in 1993. In order to describe and categorize the governance structure of regional transit in the Puget Sound area, the history of Sound Transit and to a lesser degree King County Metro will be more thoroughly documented than that of PRSC.

In 1993, Pierce, Snohomish, and King County formed Sound Transit, which is responsible for regional planning, operation, and coordination of transit in the area. In 1996, the Sound Move ballot initiative established the regional commuter rail system and created a single regional fare system that allowed interoperability and fare sharing between agencies (Thesseling, 2021).

From the origin of Sound Transit, the boards of Everett Transit, King County Metro, Pierce Transit, and Community Transit met to discuss fare integration – a key priority. In 1999, the boards adopted joint policies regarding fares including accepting transfers as payment of base fare. And, to cover reduced revenue, Sound Transit uses some tax revenue to compensate fare loss of other agencies from transfers (Miller et al. 2005). In 2003, Community Transit, Everett Transit, Kitsap Transit, King County Metro, Pierce Transit, and Washington State Ferries entered an agreement with Sound Transit to oversee the contract and execute an interlocal agreement regarding smart card-based fare collection. As shown below, funds from the Regional Fund/Fare Integration program covered costs associated with smart card adoption for Sound Transit and parts of the costs for the other agencies.

Total Requested Project Cost		Current Budget	
<i>Sound Transit Costs: \$8.27 M</i>			
◆ Fare Integration fund:	\$7.95 M	◆ Fare Integration fund:	\$13.56 M
◆ Research & Technology fund:	\$0.32 M	◆ Research & Technology	\$ 3.00 M
<i>Costs to support other agencies: \$8.29 M</i>			
◆ Fare Integration fund:	\$5.61 M		
◆ Research & Technology fund:	\$2.68 M		
Total Project Cost	\$16.56 M	Total Current Budget	\$16.56

* \$1.26 M will be provided from federal and Boeing grant funds.

Figure 12. Table from MOTION NOS. M2003-24, M2003-25, M2003-26 Showing Cost Breakdown and Sound Transit Obligation for Smart Card Implementation

The ORCA card began operation in 2009 and now has board members from and is accepted by King County Metro, Sound Transit, Community Transit, Kitsap Transit, Pierce Transit, Everett Transit, and Washington State Ferries (ORCA, n.d.). Sound Transit and King County Metro work

to ensure consistent fares across their agencies, and other regional agencies align their fare policies as well. In addition to fare coordination, agency coordination and integration in the Puget Sound region have been promoted through Sound Transit's contracting with King County Metro, Pierce Transit, and Community transit to operate express buses and light rail and formal efforts to continue improving coordination. In 2014, King County Metro and Sound Transit began an initiative to further integrate transit in the Puget Sound area. PRSC evaluated the integration efforts a year after Sound Transit's initial report. Sound Transit's transit integration report from these efforts states, "there is always more room at the table, and we invite our partners to pull up a chair" (Sound Transit, 2014, p. 7). In alignment with this sentiment, it was not Sound Transit who developed the ORCA LIFT discount program. Rather, it was King County Metro, the public transit agency of King County, Washington, the county where Seattle is located.

Although Sound Transit serves the role of regional network coordinator, King County Metro initiated the low-income fare options advisory committee (M13806 King County Metro). The Sound Transit board voted to join ORCA LIFT a year after King County Metro began the program. The origin of Sound Transit and examples of coordination efforts for fare policy demonstrate concerted efforts towards collaboration among transit agencies in the region occurring for the past two decades. While Sound Transit is the regional network coordinator, the origins of ORCA LIFT from King County Metro and subsequent joining of the program by Sound Transit indicates a region with polycentrism and high levels of horizontal collaboration.

Program Overview and Administration

ORCA LIFT is the low-income transit rider discount in the Puget Sound region in Washington State. Currently, ORCA LIFT offers \$1 flat fares at participating agencies. Fares at agencies in Puget Sound range from \$2 at Kitsap Transit to \$5.75 for the King County Water Taxi. The goal provided by the 2013 study on low-income fares for the region was, “Providing all people and communities with transportation choices.” King County Metro set the eligibility for ORCA LIFT at 200% of the federal poverty level. This level was recommended in the original study because of how much lower 100% FPL in 2013 (\$23,550 for a family of four) was than the King County median income (\$86,700 for a family of four) (King County Metro, 2014). In addition, this aligned with an existing discount program that was being run by Kitsap Transit at the time. And in Sound Transit’s Resolution 2014-27 Amending the Board Fare Policy to Establish a Low Income Discount Fare Category they indicated that eligibility would be based on the Kitsap Transit Low Income Pass Program, the King County low-income program, or other programs established by partner agencies. The ORCA LIFT program also offers discounts on the monthly pass (ORCA team, 2023).

Agency Adoption and Network Coverage

All agencies in the Puget Sound region accept ORCA LIFT except Washington State Ferries. Pierce Transit only recently started participating in ORCA LIFT and offering the \$1 fare on April 1, 2023 (Pierce Transit, 2023). Intercity Transit provides free transit service. The routes and fare information were taken from the GTFS data and mapped using R. Network coverage of ORCA LIFT in the Puget Sound region is almost identical to overall transit network coverage.

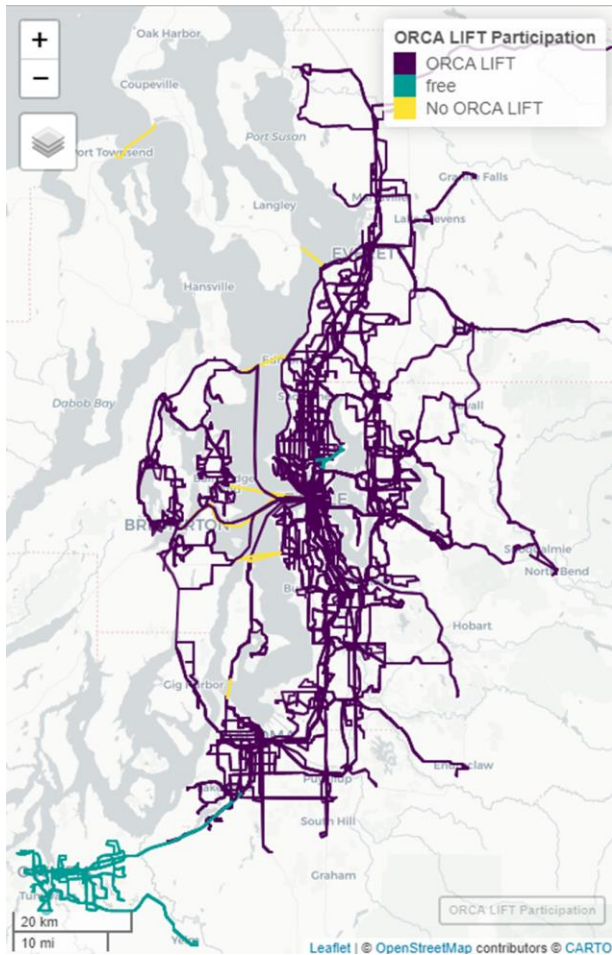


Figure 13. Map of Transit Agencies Participating in ORCA LIFT

Table 5 shows which agencies are participating in ORCA LIFT and what the cost of fares is with the discount.

Table 5. ORCA LIFT Participation

Orca	ORCA LIFT \$1	ORCA LIFT other \$
Sound Transit Community Transit Everett Transit King County Metro	Sound Transit Everett Transit Kitsap Transit Pierce Transit	Community Transit (\$1.25) King County Water Taxi (\$4.50) Seattle center Monorail (\$1.75)

Orca	ORCA LIFT \$1	ORCA LIFT other \$
Kitsap Transit Pierce Transit Seattle Streetcar Seattle Monorail King County Water Taxi Washington State Ferries	King County Metro	

Timeline of ORCA LIFT

Figure 14 below shows the timeline of ORCA LIFT. Not all relevant events are included and some previous events of note include the Sound Transit motion for ORCA card, interlocal agreement, and creation of a joint board to govern ORCA (2003). In addition, the motion to establish a low-income fare options advisory committee (by King County Metro) occurred in 2012. ORCA LIFT became a permanent program relatively soon after the low-income fare options advisory committee released their initial report. Many agencies have been participating in the program for several years and Pierce transit was the latest to join, starting to participate in ORCA LIFT only this past April.



Figure 14. ORCA LIFT Timeline

Decision-makers

The low-income fare options advisory committee drafted the recommendations that led to ORCA LIFT over a series of meetings in 2013. The committee was established by King County Metro in 2012. The 21-member committee consisted of:

- 4 Human Services representatives from different organizations and subregions
- 3 low-income transit riders

- 4 local jurisdiction representatives
- 2 business representatives
- 4 King County designees
- 1 Washington State Department of Social and Health Services
- 3 King County government organization members (Health Services, Public Health, King County Metro Transit)

The final report from the low-income advisory committee contained suggestions that were unanimously approved by committee members while still “reflecting the diversity of perspectives on some topics.” The inclusion of multiple constituent types (public health agencies, transit riders, business representatives, county representatives) paid dividends during implementation when King County Metro was able to leverage these partnerships to effectively spread the word and encourage rider uptake of the program.

Rider Uptake and Outreach

Riders who qualify for ORCA LIFT can enroll online or at various in-person locations throughout the four counties. At the start of the program, King County Metro detailed an implementation plan for partners in the community, access points for acquiring the new cards, and goals for rider uptake. They estimated the eligible market to be 105,000 riders and had an uptake goal of 80% or 84,000 riders (M2022 - 27). The eligible market was estimated by Sound Transit as the number of riders who qualified based on income and were not seniors, disabled, or participating in other programs.

King County Metro estimated 54,000 eligible people in the startup year based on enrollment in six state benefit programs (King County Metro, 2019). The 2019 Q1 report from King County Metro showed relatively fast uptake quarter over quarter and also documented which organizations were registering LIFT customers, where customers lived, which routes were most used, etc. Metro and Sound Transit allocated funding and resources to train public health officials to enroll eligible riders in ORCA LIFT at various public health locations throughout the region. On their website they list upcoming in-person enrollment events. These outreach efforts, combined with an ORCA LIFT fare decrease to incentivize uptake led to a 22% increase in ORCA LIFT enrollments between August 2022 and December 2022.

Fare Structure and Affordability

The cost of transit with ORCA LIFT has continued to decrease over the program lifespan. While originally, fares with an ORCA LIFT card were \$1.50 at all agencies, they are now \$1.00 at most participating agencies. Table 5, in the agency adoption and network reach section shows the fares at participating agencies. As a result of recommendations made by the low-income fare committee, ORCA LIFT has had a consistent flat fare across agencies since initiation, even though participating agencies operate with different fare structures. This consistent flat rate across all agencies in the region makes the program much simpler to understand than Clipper START.

However, an in-depth evaluation of ORCA LIFT compared with fully subsidized transit passes found that fully subsidized passes doubled transit use among participants (Brough et al., 2022). King County Metro is currently running a pilot program offering fully subsidized transit passes to community members making less than 80% FPL who are enrolled in existing state or county benefit programs.

Additional Programs

In 2022 the Washington State Legislature passed statewide free youth fares funded by new carbon taxes. A sales tax passed in 2020 previously funded free youth fares for ORCA but was transitioned to free fare ORCA cards for Seattle Housing Authority residents with the new state initiative covering youth fares. During the pandemic, 2200 free ORCA recovery cards were provided to essential workers (Lindblom, 2023). As previously noted, Kitsap Transit has had a low-income discount program since its inception.

Residents in Pierce, King, and Snohomish Counties enrolled in any of six qualifying state benefit programs can receive a fully subsidized annual pass for King County Metro, Sound Transit, and Everett Transit. The annual pass originated in 2021 partially motivated by a comparative study between ORCA LIFT and fully subsidized passes which found that transit use increased with the fully subsidized passes over the ORCA LIFT passes (Brough et al., 2022). Similar to ORCA LIFT, the implementation plan and recommendations for the new subsidized annual pass were informed by community members, human service agencies, and community-based

organizations and collaborators were compensated for their time and expertise (King County Metro, 2019). Sound Transit and Everett Transit also accept the annual pass.

Comparison Overview and Analysis

Table 6 below summarizes some key similarities and differences between the two regions and programs.

Table 6. Comparison of Clipper START and ORCA LIFT

	Clipper START	Both	ORCA Lift
Policy		Single ride transit fare discount for low-income riders	
Jurisdiction	MPO and transit agencies	Multi-county region within single state	Transit agencies
Geography	San Francisco Bay Area, California	West Coast US	Puget Sound, Washington
Governance		Highly fragmented and highly regionalized ¹	
Population	7.56 million ²		4.3 million ³
Eligibility	Threshold based on the high cost of living in the Bay Area	200% FPL ⁴	Threshold based on existing Kitsap Transit low-income pass

¹ Weinreich et al. 2018

² Bay Area Council, 2023

³ Puget Sound Trends, 2021

⁴ MTC, 2015; King County Metro, 2013

	relative to the rest of the United States.		eligibility and recommendation from advisory committee.
Policy lifespan	Pilot phase - started 2020	Original feasibility report 8-10 years old	King County Metro and Sound Transit added ORCA LIFT in 2015, all agencies in region participating since 2019
Uptake	13,000 in Summer 2022 ⁵ 19,000 program enrollees March 2023 ⁶ 13,800 active users in March 2023		53,000 in December 2022 ⁷
Potential Market	1.6 million people ⁸		105,000 people ⁹

While both Puget Sound and the Bay Area are large metropolitan regions with multiple transit agencies and geographic constraints imposed by a bay, the administration of ORCA LIFT and Clipper START illustrates a tale of two governance regimes: polycentricity with high levels of horizontal collaboration and a regional transit coordinator and polycentricity with the regional government as the arbiter of joint-decision making. In Puget Sound, Sound Transit serves as the regional network coordinator and works closely with King County Metro and other transit

⁵ MTC 2023c
⁶ Hursh et al. 2023
⁷ Sound Transit R2023-05
⁸ MTC 2023b
⁹ Lindblom 2023; Sound Transit M2022-27

agencies in the area to coordinate fares and service and improve coordination efforts. In the Bay Area, there is no equivalent regional network coordinator and the agencies make fare and service decisions relatively autonomously. However, MTC, as the region's MPO, has conducted evaluations of creating a regional network manager and currently serves some limited coordination roles (MTC, 2023d). Both regions implemented discounts for low-income transit riders, but the geographic spread, affordability provided by the discount program, and program uptake by eligible riders varied significantly.

The collaborative governance illustrated by agencies in the Puget Sound region improved the implementation of the discount program and created better outcomes for riders by incentivizing participation of all agencies, leveraging partnerships with social service agencies, and improving on and iterating the program to meet affordability and equity goals. In the Bay Area, the necessary starting conditions for collaborative governance were not met, and a more hierarchically oriented program was implemented by MTC. Elements of collaboration were still visible in the Bay Area and as of January 2024 all of the agencies that had previously implemented Clipper (the regional fare card) implemented Clipper START.

Collaborative Governance Starting Conditions

History of Collaboration, Power Disparities, and Incentives to Participate

A key difference between the two programs is the administrative oversight over the programs. King County Metro largely initiated ORCA LIFT and the other agencies in the area chose to participate to maintain fare consistency. Agencies in the Puget Sound region have a more

established history of collaboration over fare medium, pricing, and transfers than agencies in the Bay Area which may have facilitated an agency-run program over an MPO-run program. No agency serves the role of regional network manager in the Bay Area, although interjurisdictional endeavors (such as Clipper and Clipper START) are usually initiated by MTC.

Exploring the history of regional transit governance in both regions highlighted the role of a history of collaboration as a starting condition for successful collaborative governance. Sound Transit, as previously described, was created to coordinate regional transit in Puget Sound and create a regional rail system in the 1990s. Since inception, Sound Transit has coordinated with neighboring agencies on schedules, fare integration, and infrastructure. However, it was King County Metro who initiated the study for ORCA LIFT and did much of the administrative legwork to bring the program to fruition. From the earliest stages, collaboration with Sound Transit and other transit agencies in the region was conceived as part of the process and implementation plan for ORCA LIFT. In addition, the fully subsidized annual pass for community members making less than 80% of the federal poverty level was distributed to applicable participants for the pilot program by community partners who helped with ORCA LIFT. The King County Department of Public Health was part of the committee for assessing feasibility of low-income transit discounts in 2013 and came up with some of the earliest recommendations and helped distribute ORCA LIFT passes. While not the main policy of interest, the uptake of the subsidized annual pass by other transit agencies and quick enrollment of the program demonstrates the importance of ongoing collaborations with community partners. As noted in the collaborative governance literature, collaborative governance is not always quick, but

investments in effective collaboration can pay off with time savings in downstream implementation (Ansell and Gash, 2008). The rapid uptake of ORCA LIFT by neighboring agencies, creation of a new fare category in governing documents, iteration of ORCA LIFT, and creation of a new program to further improve affordability demonstrates the power of collaborative governance for effective downstream implementation and policy iteration.

In the case of Clipper START, a more hierarchical solution was used to implement the policy and through a series of negotiations and compromises more agencies started to buy in. This aligns with the literature that finds hierarchical solutions from regional agencies to be helpful when there are large numbers of actors and limited coordination (Evers and de Vries, 2013), as the Bay Area contains at least 27 transit agencies of varying sizes, organization structures, and interaction levels with other agencies. Participation from the agencies was largely voluntary, but the MTC controls and funnels some funding and long-term regional plans, so maintaining a relationship with the agency is important for local transit agencies. Because of the history of power disparities, funding competition, and general parochialism, it is unlikely that horizontal collaboration among the transit agencies would have yielded a similar program. As demonstrated in the history of the Bay Area, MTC was envisioned to be the regional coordinator of transit, so there is neither incentive nor ability for transit agencies to play that role. And MTC has “statutory authority to promote regional transit fare coordination” (Regional Means Based Transit Fare Pricing Study, 2015), although not the power to determine fare policies of transit agencies.

The starting conditions for collaborative governance impacted the administrative organization of the two programs. MTC has historically served as a regional coordinator in the Bay Area, at least on paper, but has not always been able to prioritize regional needs over local wants. However, as the agency that oversees Clipper, they are best positioned to implement fare policy changes.

Despite the differences in institutional structure and collaboration history, the initiating factor for interest in the two policies was the same: financial concerns leading to fare increases and equity concerns about the fare increases. As indicated in the literature review, transit agencies must play a delicate balancing act between fare recovery ratios and equity. Lowered revenue from decreased fares can lead to service cuts and impacts riders significantly, but increasing fares can make transit unaffordable. Discounts for low-income transit riders were identified by both regions as methods to meet goals of fare recovery and financial stability and equity. Both the MTC evaluation of means-based discounts and the King County low-income discount evaluation mentioned the use of income-based transit discounts to mitigate the impact of fare increases at agencies. The need to meet both fare recovery goals and equity goals is an example of an incentive to participate, which in the collaborative governance literature is a necessary precursor to collaborative governance (Ansell and Gash, 2008; Emerson et al., 2012). In both cases the external economic conditions after the 2008 recession incentivized agencies to identify ways to improve equity and affordability. Rising interest in equity and regional coordination served as an incentive for Bay Area agencies to participate in the program run by MTC, in addition to the previously mentioned role MTC has in the region as a coordinator. The

10% of the discount covered by MTC served as another participation incentive for the agencies and helped mitigate concerns about lost revenue as a result of participating in the program. In the Puget Sound region, agencies were motivated to join in order to maintain consistent fare policies with neighboring regions. In both cases, regional fare coordination and equity served as incentives to participate.

The two cases illustrate the conflicting viewpoints of how to best govern a region identified in the theoretical framework and literature review. Proponents of regionalism argue for a strong regional government to oversee the transit agencies and hierarchically implement regional initiatives while proponents of polycentrism and collaborative governance argue that collaboration can lead to better outcomes. The review of outcomes below will demonstrate the pros and cons of hierarchical policy implementation versus collaborative implementation and the role collaborative governance plays in discount provision throughout a region.

Collaborative Process

The commitment to including relevant stakeholders demonstrated by ORCA LIFT created strong partnerships that are still being leveraged for new fare equity policies that build on the success of ORCA LIFT. As indicated in the theoretical framework, stakeholder participation is a critical component of successful collaborations (Ansell and Gash, 2008). In the case of ORCA LIFT, the inclusion of social service organizations in the planning and decision-making process facilitated shared ownership of the enrollment process and relatively quick and widespread adoption by eligible riders in the region.

The decision-makers and planners that led the study for ORCA LIFT included community members, county representatives, and health agency representatives. In contrast, the use of an engineering consultant to evaluate and design what would eventually become Clipper START indicates that the technical planning style identified by Innes and Gruber (2005) is still a dominant planning mode at MTC. The use of a Technical Advisory Committee to review technical reports after does not demonstrate true inclusion and participation. The techno-rational planning style is prevalent in transportation, and does not necessarily mesh with more collaborative, qualitative, or community-oriented approaches that are necessary for successful collaborative governance.

The rollout of ORCA LIFT leveraged King County Metro's partnership with the Department of Public Health to verify eligibility and distribute passes. This distribution method successfully enrolled over 50% of eligible community members and was revamped with more enrolling partners for the new annual subsidized pass program. These partnerships between not only the multiple transit agencies in the Puget Sound region, but also religious organizations, other government entities, and community-based organizations illustrate the premise of collaborative governance as a viable mode of regional governance of complex problems.

Discussion

Outcomes

As discussed above, the partnerships created during the planning process for ORCA LIFT helped with enrollment and rider uptake, a key outcome to ensure the program is available to those who will benefit from it. In addition to rider adoption, geographic reach, timeline, and affordability are outcome measures that were assessed.

Regional Integration

As mentioned in the literature review, people live regionally and use multiple transit agencies to reach their destinations, which is why a regional discount program is important. One potential disbenefit of collaborative governance is slow implementation, which was evident with ORCA LIFT more so than Clipper START.

While ORCA LIFT started in 2015 at King County Metro, Everett Transit and Seattle Monorail did not offer ORCA LIFT until 2019 and Pierce transit only recently joined ORCA LIFT in 2023, nine years after the program began. Washington State Ferries still do not offer ORCA LIFT but the rest of the agencies in the region are all participating.

Three years into the Clipper START pilot program, all of the agencies that accept Clipper are participating in the program. The regional uptake of Clipper START was comparatively much faster than ORCA LIFT which does highlight a potential benefit of more hierarchical regional

governance over collaborative governance. After MTC initiated Clipper START, the number of agencies providing discounts based on income to transit riders rose from 1 to 21 over a six-month period, a dramatic increase in offerings across the region and a clear indication that agencies are interested in improving affordability and equity with their fare policies. While collaborative governance can yield good outcomes long term, it is not a quick process, as demonstrated by the slow filtering of the program into the Puget Sound’s regional transit agencies.

In addition, while a couple of agencies in the Bay Area had existing low-income transit rider discount programs prior to Clipper START, the programs had not spread to any neighboring agencies. Muni Lifeline is still a Muni specific program and so is VTA UPLIFT—neither were created specifically with regional integration or spread in mind and work only within their specified agencies. In contrast, King County Metro listed one of the themes informing ORCA LIFT development as “Regional integration is critical for good customer experience,” and went on to expand that customers do not always distinguish between different transit agencies and use multiple to travel regionally (King County Metro, 2014). From program inception, the need for regional adoption was platformed and prioritized. Since agencies in the Puget Sound region have a history of collaboration regarding fare policy, prioritizing regional integration was a clear need whereas in the Bay Area, since MTC serves the regional governance role, individual agencies do not typically create fare policies with regional integration in mind.

Rider Uptake

The rider uptake for ORCA LIFT was quicker and has reached more eligible customers so far.

This can partly be attributed to the earlier start of the program and Clipper START's unfortunate timing of starting during the COVID-19 pandemic. The 2019 Q1 report from King County Metro showed relatively fast uptake quarter over quarter and also documented which organizations were registering LIFT customers, where customers lived, which routes were most used, etc.

Metro and Sound transit allocated funding and resources to train public health officials to enroll eligible riders in ORCA LIFT at various public health locations throughout the region. On their website they list upcoming in-person enrollment events. These outreach efforts, combined with an ORCA LIFT fare decrease to incentive uptake led to a 22% increase in ORCA LIFT enrollments between August 2022 and December 2022.

Affordability and Equity

The ORCA LIFT fare is a flat fare of \$1 at almost all agencies while Clipper START offers either 20% discount on single ride fare or 50% discount on single ride fare depending on agency choice. Both programs improved affordability for participants by lowering the cost of transit; however, the cost savings from ORCA LIFT slightly outpace those from Clipper START. All agencies in Puget Sound have fares greater than \$2, so the \$1 flat fare serves as a discount of at least 50%. For Clipper START, 13 agencies offer a 20% single ride discount and 8 agencies offer a 50% single ride discount. Some agencies in the Bay Area have flat fares, some have zone-based fares, and some have distance-based fares, so the cost with Clipper START varies from agency

to agency and ride to ride. However, the recent change to 50% off at all discounts through Clipper START does make the program more consistent and improve fare affordability.

The fully subsidized annual pass program from King County Metro is being evaluated after Brough et al. (2022) found that transit use doubled with fully subsidized transit versus the discount from ORCA LIFT. The implementation of a fully subsidized fare indicates a further commitment to affordability for low-income transit riders in the Puget Sound region. The flat fare was suggested by the low-income fare options advisory committee.

The program implementation differences can be traced back to the decision-making structure. King County Metro followed the recommendations from the low-income fare options advisory committee made up of low-income transit riders, social service agencies, and other invested individuals which exemplifies collaborative governance as a process of decision-making and policy management that works with people within and outside of public agencies. The decision to increase the Clipper START discount to 50% was partially to draw in more users and was made primarily by MTC staff (MTC, 2024). The original 20% and 50% discount offerings were proposed to balance transit agency budget concerns with transit affordability and highlights the perhaps conflicting program goals of making “transit more affordable to individuals earning low-income” and developing “implementation options that are financially viable and administratively feasible”. The new consistent discount will improve transit affordability for program users and demonstrates the decision-making considerations of MTC.

Pilot or Permanence

Currently, Clipper START is still a pilot program that has been extended to summer 2025. In contrast, ORCA LIFT (and the ability to provide discounts to low-income riders) has been voted into the guiding documents for Puget Sound transit agencies. After King County Metro added a new fare category for low-income transit riders, Sound Transit voted to add the same category to maintain consistency. For the newest fare decrease of ORCA LIFT, a six-month pilot was run and then formally put into place at the conclusion of the pilot. Formalizing low-income fare categories by putting them in the governing documents for transit agencies creates permanence for the programs and security for users. The agencies in the Puget Sound region have previously voted in fare policy changes related to the fares of other regional agencies to maintain consistency and work together collaboratively. The previous examples of changing policies to maintain fare consistency throughout the region exemplifies how horizontal collaboration can create effective regional transit systems in regions with multiple transit agencies and create a framework for future policy collaboration. In the Bay Area, the trend of piloting multiple programs and running evaluations for multiple years is consistent with other regional fare policies. The BayPass pilot program, described previously, is running concurrently with Clipper START to evaluate ridership changes with better fare integration. Running pilot programs rather than implementing policy changes into guiding documents may be tied to confounding governance factors (more actors, higher complexity, less consensus) aside from the direct hierarchical versus collaborative governance difference. However, previous collaboration surrounding the ORCA card meant the agencies in the Puget Sound region have created fare policy changes together previously and have a foundation of collaborative

governance to work from when considering how new policies can or will be adopted into neighboring agencies. The permanence of adding new fare categories and codifying the discount program can add security for users and may incentivize more uptake than a pilot program and should be considered for other regions hoping to make permanent changes to improve fare affordability.

Takeaways for other regions

Certain commonalities among the regions were discovered and may provide helpful insights to other regions hoping to implement similar programs. As discussed above, the programs varied in their governance structures, so the commonalities identified may be relevant for transit agencies hoping to implement programs in conjunction with neighboring agencies or for MPOs looking to implement a program throughout their region.

Prior to establishing a regional program, both areas had at least one agency in the region that was already providing low-income fares. Kitsap Transit in the Puget Sound region had been offering low-income riders discounts since their inception in 1985. In the Bay Area, Muni had an existing low-income fare policy (Muni Lifeline, a monthly pass) and a program for unhoused riders (SFMTA, 2017). Both of these programs in the Bay Area are still active and differ from Clipper START. In Puget Sound, the eligibility criteria for ORCA LIFT was based on Kitsap Transit's program. The Muni discount program was a monthly pass, so adding the per ride discount program supplemented the existing discount offerings in San Francisco. Leveraging existing expertise in the region can help create a program that seamlessly integrates with

existing programs (in the case of Puget Sound) or supplements similar, but not the same programs (in the case of the Bay Area). The prior existence of discount programs in the region provided proof of concept and regional expertise to help design the new regional programs.

In order to reach rider uptake goals, outreach and marketing is critical. King County Metro highlighted the importance of outreach from the initial conception of ORCA LIFT and worked with partners to develop appropriate marketing strategies. MTC has identified marketing and outreach as a critical goal for future iterations of Clipper START based on the evaluation of the first two years of the program. For agencies looking to implement similar programs, meeting riders where they are at by providing enrollment capabilities to other social service organizations, religious organizations, and community-based organizations can foster uptake and create an easier process for riders interested in the program.

Limitations

The previous collaboration between agencies in the Puget Sound region created a foundation to build on for ORCA LIFT. However, the finding that a long history of successful collaboration helps implementation of low-income transit rider discounts may not help regions that have struggled with collaboration in the past and because of power and resource imbalances, lack of participation incentives, or other limitations may not have the institutional support to initiate a collaboratively led discount program.

The review of power disparities was very limited and largely focused on the role of MPOs in regions. This is not relevant for regions with smaller populations that do not have MPOs and does not shed light on how power disparities between transit agencies in a region hamper collaborative efforts. In a similar vein, a deeper dive into funding sources would have provided more insight and evidence about the role of power disparities in hampering or promoting collaborative efforts in regions.

Interviews or surveys of both transit agencies and program users would be beneficial. While both regions conducted internal evaluations of their programs and those results informed the analysis, it is not possible to evaluate the success of a program for low-income transit riders without talking with riders and asking about how the program suits their needs.

Comparing more regions with different governance structures (monocentric, less regionalized, etc.) would have provided more insight. Although the two programs were administered differently, at the end of the day both programs provided discounts at most agencies across their respective regions. Rider uptake and usage of the programs varied dramatically between the two programs during the analysis period, but as Clipper START evolves and becomes more uniform across the region this may incentivize additional uptake.

Transit discounts represent a specific policy that benefits from regional interaction and collaboration in areas where multiple transit agency jurisdictions exist in close geographic proximity. Discounts are not the only method for improving the equity of fares and are often

not the number one priority of riders. However, when fares are raised at agencies to improve farebox recovery and remain financially stable, discounts can be a method of mitigating disparate impacts to low-income riders.

Conclusion

Collaborative governance improves regional fare equity by incentivizing joint action on implementation of low-income transit rider discounts, looping in additional constituents with greater understanding of the problem, and creating partnerships that can be leveraged for additional programs. Starting conditions for collaboration such as a history of collaboration and incentives to participate dictate that success of collaboration and impact the outcomes of the policy at hand—transit discounts. When agencies work together among themselves and with outside service providers better outcomes for riders can be achieved without sacrificing financial viability. However, in regions without a strong foundation for horizontal collaboration alone, hierarchical implementation by the MPO can serve as an efficient and useful method of administering regional transit discounts when agencies buy into the program. For transit agencies looking to improve the equity of their fare structures, income-based discounts are a viable option proven to increase mobility and opportunities. Even in regions with large numbers of transit agencies and high complexity it is possible to create a discount program that reaches most of the region and provides cost savings for riders.

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