

STAFF REPORT

SUBJECT: Wheels School Outreach Program Update

FROM: David Mark, Director of Customer Experience

DATE: Monday, April 28, 2025

Action Requested

None - Informational only.

Background and Discussion

Wheels provides service to schools in two ways: the first is through local or mainline routes that operate near the school; but where no local service is available (primarily in Dublin and Pleasanton), Wheels operates “school tripper” routes. Today, these routes account for approximately 25% of LAVTA’s fixed route ridership, accommodating some 1,400 daily boardings during the month of March 2025. Livermore schools are generally on routes 10R, 30R, 15 and 18, so no specific supplemental service is required.

The supplemental school routes are designated with 3-digit numbers and generally connect a middle or high school with a specific neighborhood or community. Extensive public information is available for trip planning, and relationships are maintained between each school’s administrator and the Operations/Planning and Customer Experience departments. In addition, each school has an Alameda County Student Transit Pass Program (STPP) coordinator to facilitate program applications, and Clipper card issuance and replacement.

School-Focused Routes and Services

Pleasanton Unified School District (PUSD)		
Amador Valley High School	10	Rapid
	605	Fairlands
	611	Ruby Hill, Vintage Hills
Foothill High School	602	Del Prado Park, Pleasanton Middle School
	604	Fairlands
Pleasanton Middle School	601	Ruby Hill
	606	Vintage Hills
Hart Middle School	14	Jack London Blvd. and Stoneridge Drive
	603	Muirwood Park
	607	Laguna Oaks
	609	Del Prado Park
	610	Fairlands
Harvest Park Middle School	608	Amaral Park

Livermore Unified School District (LUSD)		
Livermore High School	14	Jack London Blvd. and Stoneridge Drive
	30R	Rapid
Granada High School	10R	Rapid
	18	South Livermore
Vineyard Alternative School	30R	Rapid
Junction Avenue Middle School	15	Springtown
East Avenue Middle School	30R	Rapid
Del Valle High School	14	Jack London Blvd. and Stoneridge Drive
Christensen Middle School	15	Springtown
Mendenhall Middle School	18	South Livermore

Dublin Unified School District (DUSD)		
Dublin High School	501	Positano Hill
	502	Emerald Glen
	503	Schaefer Ranch, Shannon Park
	504	Dublin Ranch
Emerald High School	201	Fallon & Central
Fallon Middle School	2	Central Parkway, Dublin Ranch, Silvera Ranch, Positano Hill
Wells Middle School	502	Emerald Glen
Del Valle High School	503	Schaefer Ranch, Shannon Park

Bus schedules are written to connect to the school bell times; due to the variable nature of the bell schedules at Tri-Valley's schools, the bus schedule is different depending on day of week. Wheels, unlike many other public transit agencies in California, modifies its school-focused schedules to accommodate early outs, late starts, school special events, finals weeks, etc. Updates are submitted to the Operations and Planning department monthly by school administrators with online schedule updates posted on or about the 20th of the month prior.

Start of School

At the start of the school year LAVTA staff partner with road supervisors and managers to be ambassadors at high ridership schools, or where there are multiple routes serving schools, in order to assist students with finding their route. For many years, LAVTA has run a promotional Try Transit to Schools Campaign where all routes operated free for the first one month of school. That campaign is being folded into the *Summer Youth Ride Free* campaign beginning in 2025, which is further explained below.

At the beginning of school, Customer Experience communicates with parents and student riders using a multi-channel approach. Ongoing communication between school administrators and LAVTA staff is vital to accommodating frequent changes and to alert students and parents of schedule changes or modifications. The Operations and Planning team typically provides Customer Experience school-tripper schedules 6 weeks prior to start of classes. Customer experience using the following outreach and marketing channels to effectively communicate with student riders:

- Press Releases
- Website: listing of all AM/PM and modified schedules
- Seat Drops: flyers placed on each seat of buses alerting students to promotions and service changes.
- Email Notifications” “Peach Jar” or each school districts equivalent for parent communication, facilitated through each school’s communication officer.
- Text Notifications” can be signed up for individual routes. Parents and students are notified when a bus hits a threshold of 10 minutes late adherence.
- Orientations: Outreach for Clipper® education, trip planning, and STPP guidance are offered at all schools. Last year orientation was completed for at Livermore High, Grenada, and Mendenhall Middle. In Dublin the orientation was completed at Dublin High and Emerald High. Wheels staff attend orientations upon request and based on staff availability.
- Transit App: Riders are encouraged to download the Transit App for real-time bus tracking and arrival and departure times.

Programs

Student Transit Pass Program (STPP)

Approved in 2014 as a part of Alameda County’s Measure BB, the Student Transit Pass Program (STPP) supports the traveling needs of Alameda County students with fully subsidized transportation for many youth riders in the Tri-Valley. The program works with Clipper® Youth cards that are provided free of charge to eligible students. In the Wheels service area, Livermore students have universal acceptance into STPP (all students receive the pass), whereas in Dublin and Pleasanton students are registered after a household income evaluation (pass is for low-income households only). When approved, the LAVTA customer service manager supervisor activates a Clipper® Youth card, applies the Wheels pass to the card, and delivers the cards to the schools. This program is extremely active at the beginning of the year, fueled by school student orientation outreach to parents. Anecdotally, this program started out as being viewed by students as a social service subsidy, but its popularity has turned it into an expected amenity as student siblings are now aware of the benefit as they enter eligible grades.

Try Transit to School

For many years, Wheels has run a *Try Transit to School* free ride promotion for the first 3-4 weeks of the new school year. The fare free promotion provides a grace period for students who are still in the process of getting their STPP Clipper® Youth cards and helps students who are trying out the public transit system. The promotion is supported with a marketing and advertising campaign. Typically, ridership on the school-tripper routes grows over 10% during the free promotion – and returns to “normal” levels once the promotion is over.

Because of the limited resources available to operate school-tripper routes, the promotion’s success has unintended consequences, namely, very crowded buses and an uncomfortable riding experience. This year, staff intend to discontinue the specific *Try Transit to School*

promotion and instead offer free rides through the start of school through an extension of the *Summer Youth Ride Free* promotion.

Summer Youth Ride Free

The *Summer Youth Ride Free* promotion was introduced in 2024 as a fare-free promotion for youth riders during the summer months when there is more capacity on buses across the system. The 2024 promotion ran from June 1 until the start of school, after which the free-ride campaign switched to *Try Transit to School* for the first 3-4 weeks of school.

After a brief evaluation, the 2024 program was deemed successful based on the low-risk nature of the program, ridership data, and anecdotal feedback. In 2025, staff intends to run the promotion again, beginning the free ride period June 1 but extending it through August 31. As noted in the *Try Transit to School* section above, staff intend to have the *Summer Youth Ride Free* promotion replace the *Try Transit to School* campaign. The *Summer Youth Ride Free* will allow students to trial the service at the beginning of the school year, as well as allow for the grace period for students to receive their STPP cards, while deemphasizing the back-to-school rush.

Class Pass

A class pass is a free bus ride for up to 35 passengers (children, teachers and adult supervisors) from a school to any Tri-Valley destination that Wheels fixed routes currently serve. Teachers may request up to two (2) class passes per school year. Class Pass makes field trips possible by providing free transportation to local schools on regularly scheduled Wheels buses. Group must use regularly scheduled Wheels transit buses and designated bus stops. Trip must be taken during off-peak hours, Monday – Friday, between 9 AM and 2 PM. Class Pass is good only on Wheels buses. Maximum number of people allowed per Class Pass is 35 + chaperones.

Fiscal Impact

None.

Recommendations

This is an informational item.