

Date of Hearing: April 22, 2025

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Mike Fong, Chair

AB 861 (Solache) – As Introduced February 19, 2025

[Note: This bill is double referred to the Assembly Committee on Transportation, where the Committee will hear it as it relates to the issues under its jurisdiction.]

SUBJECT: Community colleges: students: public transportation: Los Angeles Community College District

SUMMARY: Establishes the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority Los Angeles Community College GoPass and student ambassador program. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Defines the following:
 - a) “Community college district” means the Los Angeles Community College District (LACCD);
 - b) “GoPass” means a free transit pass that grants the user access to the Los Angeles County Metro at no cost. The pass is to be given to student enrolled at a community college located in LACCD.
 - c) “LA Metro” means the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority.
- 2) Authorizes LACCD to issue students a GoPass if the students are enrolled in coursework at a LACCD college campus and opts in to receive a GoPass upon enrollment. The GoPass will be distributed to students on the LACCD college campus when the student is enrolled and the GoPass will be valid for the academic term.
- 3) Authorizes the LA Metro to partner with LACCD to create a student ambassador program for job opportunities for LACCD students. Permits LA Metro to select students who apply to be student ambassadors, if the student is in good standing with the LACCD and authorizes student ambassadors to do the following:
 - a) Maintain safety and security of the LA Metro system;
 - b) Assist passengers by providing information, including directions and connections;
 - c) Report on the maintenance, cleanliness, or safety issues on the LA Metro system; and,
 - d) Support public outreach initiatives to promote student use of the LA Metro.
- 4) Requires each community college in LACCD to establish a coordinator to encourage students to apply to be student ambassadors.

- 5) Requires LA Metro to develop guidelines for the student ambassadors to ensure consistency and effectiveness and to train the student ambassadors on transit operations, conflict resolution, and public engagement.
- 6) Requires LACCD to compensate the student ambassadors at a minimum rate of \$25 an hour.
- 7) Requires LACCD by an unknown date, and annually thereafter, to submit a report to the Department of Finance, the Assembly Committee on Budget, and the Senate Committee on Budget with the following details:
 - a) The number of students who received a GoPass in the last year;
 - b) The average annual number of rides per campus of the community college district;
 - c) The number of students participating in the student ambassador program;
 - d) The outcomes of the student ambassador program, including participant feedback and safety metrics;
 - e) Recommendations for improving the GoPass and student ambassador programs.
- 8) Stipulates the Legislature finds and declares a special statute for the LA Metro Go Pass and student ambassador program is necessary and therefore, a general statute cannot be made applicable within the meaning of the California State Constitution because of existing programs within the LA Metro to facilitate LACCD involvement.
- 9) Clarifies that if the Commission on State Mandates determines that this bill contains costs mandated by the state, the state shall reimburse the applicable entities.
- 10) Appropriates the sum of \$2.5 million from the General Fund for the LA Metro Go Pass and student ambassador program. Of the \$2.5 million, \$1 million will be given LACCD and \$1.5 million will be given to LA Metro to implement the LA Metro Go Pass and student ambassador program. The funding provided to LACCD will be included in the calculation for Proposition 98 funds to community college districts and school districts as part of the 2025-2026 fiscal year.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Establishes the California Community Colleges (CCC) under the administration of the Board of Governors of the CCC, as one of the segments of public postsecondary education in California. The CCC shall be comprised of community college districts (Education Code (EDC) Section 70900).
- 2) Establishes that community college districts are under the control of a board of trustees, known as the governing board, who has the authority to establish, maintain, operate, and govern one or more community colleges, within its district as specified. Permits districts to establish policies for and the approval of courses of instruction and educational programs (EDC Section 70902).

- 3) Establishes by July 1, 2022 Basic Needs Centers and the position of a Basic Needs Coordinator at CCC campuses to provide students with single point of contact for on-and off-campus basic needs services, as defined (EDC Section 66023.5).

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown.

COMMENTS: *Author's intent.* As stated by the author, “transportation remains a significant barrier for students, especially in large metropolitan cities like Los Angeles. Financial obstacles should never be a barrier to education and opportunity. The GoPass Pilot Program has transformed the lives of over one hundred thousand young people by providing access to public transit. This bill alleviates financial strain for students, empowering them to pursue jobs and complete their education. Investing in this program is an investment in the future of our youth and our communities.”

Los Angeles Community College District (LACCD). Established in 1969, the Los Angeles Community College District (LACCD) is the largest community college district in the State of California.¹ Nine community colleges reside within the 882 square mile district boundary.² In October 2024, LACCD reported enrolling 194,000 students.³ In the 2023-2024 academic year, LACCD conferred 14,292 certificates, 11,807 associate degrees, 5,423 degrees for transfer, and 68 baccalaureate degrees.⁴ LACCD reported that nearly half of their student population identify as low-income, with over 42,000 students receiving the federal Pell Grant in the 2023-2024 academic year.⁵

Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (LA Metro). The LA Metro is the transportation agency that oversees the public transportation system servicing Los Angeles County. The LA Metro also connects the LA community to the adjacent counties of San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, Ventura, San Bernardino, Orange, San Diego, and Riverside. The LA Metro system is comprised of six rail lines and 118 different buses and shuttles. In 2024, the estimated weekday ridership of the LA Metro was 951,502 and the estimated weekend ridership fluctuated between 673,216 on Saturdays and 563,136 on Sundays. The total estimated ridership for 2024 was 311,253,565 with a total of 1,286,245,694 miles traveled.⁶ The fare for a regular rider is \$1.75 per ride and according to the LA Metro, all K-12 students and community college students in the LA region ride for free, if their school or college participates in GoPass.⁷

The LA Metro is overseen by a 13-member Board of Directors who set policy, coordinate, plan, fund, build, and manage the transit services and transportation programs throughout Los Angeles County.⁸ The Board of Directors is comprised the Mayor of Los Angeles, the Mayor's three appointees, representatives from the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors from each of the five county districts, and four members nominated by the subcommittees of the Los Angeles

¹ <https://www.lacc.edu/about/history>

² <https://www.laccd.edu/offices/epie/research/fast-facts>

³ https://www.laccd.edu/sites/laccd.edu/files/2025-02/LACCD_District_FactSheet_Final-ADA-10.24.24.pdf

⁴ https://datamart.cccco.edu/Outcomes/Program_Awards.aspx

⁵ https://datamart.cccco.edu/Services/FinAid_Summary.aspx and <https://www.laccd.edu/about>

⁶ <https://opa.metro.net/MetroRidership/>

⁷ <https://www.metro.net/riding/fares/>

⁸ <https://boardagendas.metro.net/about/#about-la-metro>

County City Selection Committee.⁸ The operations of the LA Metro are divided in five committees who meet regularly prior to a meeting of the full Board of Directors.⁹ The Board of Directors meet typically meet once a month to review and approve policies, budgets, and programs pertaining to the operations of the LA Metro.¹⁰

GoPass Pilot Program. In September 2021, the LA Metro governing board voted to establish a two-year pilot to provide a free transit pass to K-14 students in the greater Los Angeles region.¹¹ The pilot program was known as GoPass and it provided unlimited bus and train rides for free to students from participating school and community college districts.¹² The program began with only a few K-12 school districts and community colleges, but due to the success it was soon expanded to all 21 community college districts in the LA Region. The current GoPass Pilot Program offers student free transit through: Metro bus and rail, AVTA, Burbank Bus, City of Commerce Transit, Culver CityBus, Foothill Transit, Glendale Beeline, GTrans, LADOT Dash, LA County shuttles, Lawndale Beat, Long Beach Transit, Lynwood Trolley, Montebello Bus, Norwalk Transit, Santa Monica Big Blue Bus, and Torrance Transit.¹³

Prior to the program, it was estimated students were paying \$160 or more per semester for an unlimited pass and the lack of access to transportation was seen as a barrier in accessing higher education. The GoPass Pilot Program included a cost-sharing agreement between participating K-14 districts in the Los Angeles region and the LA Metro. The K-14 districts pay between \$3 and \$7 per participating student for the duration of the contract with the LA Metro and in exchange the students from the K-14 districts receive free LA Metro transit.¹⁴

In September 2022 press release announcing the \$1 million federal grant, Senator Diane Feinstein stated the ““lack of transportation is one of the leading barriers for students seeking to complete their education, and that’s particularly true in large metropolitan areas like Los Angeles. That’s why this program, which will enable up to 500,000 community college students across L.A. County to apply for the GoPass Program, is so important. I was pleased to support this funding and will continue advocating for funding that will allow students throughout California to advance their education.”¹⁵ The grant funded passes for 143,000 students over three years and increased the number of community college participation by 11%. The funding from the grant will last through the end of the 2024-2025 academic year.¹⁶

The GoPass Pilot program continues to date, with the LA Metro providing free rides to K-14 students throughout the LA region.¹⁷ Every community college in the LACCD is on the list of

⁹ <https://boardagendas.metro.net/about/#about-la-metro>

¹⁰ <https://boardagendas.metro.net/events/>

¹¹ <https://metro.legistar1.com/metro/attachments/2ed03ed6-2ed7-4a6c-a99f-a9590a2181a1.pdf>

¹² <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2021-10-01/los-angeles-free-metro-passes>

¹³ <https://www.metro.net/riding/fares/gopass/>

¹⁴ <https://datamade-metro-pdf-merger.s3.amazonaws.com/2023-0760.pdf>

¹⁵ <https://www.metro.net/about/los-angeles-community-college-district-receives-1-million-federal-grant-enabling-all-its-community-college-students-to-participate-in-l-a-metros-gopass-fareless-pass-program/>

¹⁶ <https://datamade-metro-pdf-merger.s3.amazonaws.com/2023-0760.pdf>

¹⁷ <https://www.metro.net/riding/fares/gopass/>

participating schools. Since November 2024, 471,353 students from 1,600 different Los Angeles regional schools have benefited from the Go Pass program for a total of 46 million free rides.¹⁸

In a 2024 GoPass Survey by the LA Metro, found 53% of GoPass students rode the LA Metro daily with 78% reporting an improvement in school attendance. Prior to the creation of the GoPass, 78% of students had to choose between transit expenses and other basic needs.¹³

On April 25, 2024, the LA Metro Board of Directors, approved a motion by City of Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass to make the GoPass Pilot Program permanent.¹⁹ The original motion was to extend the program through fiscal year 2025, which would cost \$22.2 million prior to including the cost-sharing agreements of the school districts.¹³ However, the motion was changed to make the GoPass Pilot program for K-14 students permanent.

With the GoPass program becoming a permanent free transit program within LA Metro, it is unclear why this measure is necessary. The bill currently provides a version of the GoPass program to the nine community colleges within LACCD and does not include any of the cost-sharing conditions of the existing program. Essentially, LA Metro would be providing the program for free to LACCD and its students indefinitely. The measure does contain a one-time fund appropriation from Proposition 98 for both LA Metro and LACCD, but the free transit program would be permanent fixture without a guarantee of ongoing funding.

Committee staff understand it is the intent of the Author to codify the existing Go Pass Program and the Author has indicated his desire to work with LA Metro, LACCD, and the community college districts in the surrounding region to ensure the bill's language matches that intent.

With the understanding the LA Metro Board of Directors has already approved the program to be a permanent part of the LA Metro system fareless program, the Author may wish to instead seek a funding source through the annual budget act for ongoing funding to fund the program for both entities, LA Metro and the partnering K-14 districts.

LA Metro Ambassador Program. In September 2022, the LA Metro established an Ambassador Pilot Program (LMAPP) in response to a directive by Board of Directors to reimagine the management of public safety on transit system. The intention was to “improve riders’ experience and safety by adding more visible staff to the bus and rail system.”²⁰ The LA Metro Ambassadors are located throughout the bus and rail system to help riders with navigating the complex labyrinth of connections and destinations, paying fares, reporting maintenance, cleanliness, addressing health issues, or safety issues as they arise. All LA Metro ambassadors are contracted employees through RMI International INC and Strive Well-Being.¹⁶ The sunset date for the LA Metro Ambassador Pilot Program is unclear but it will either sunset in the current year or in 2027.

Committee staff understand from conversations with LA Metro staff, that the pilot program is in the process of becoming a permanent solution for community enforcement and assistance. LA

¹⁸ <https://www.metro.net/about/facts-glance/>

¹⁹ <https://mayor.lacity.gov/news/metro-board-directors-approves-bass-motion-make-student-gopass-pilot-program-free> and <https://metro.legistar1.com/metro/attachments/9e73d391-85a2-4412-a344-7dd063131b55.pdf>

²⁰ <https://www.metro.net/riding/ambassadors/>

Metro is currently negotiating a collective bargaining agreement to bring the employees in house.

Student programs offered by LA Metro. LA Metro offers various career-building opportunities for recent and current college students. For recent college graduates, LA Metro offers a “Metro Entry Level Trainee Program” designed as a career leader program for recent college graduates to gain work experience and skills necessary prior to seeking a full-time position with LA Metro. The program is one year, offers “temporary” employment with pay, and benefits for up to 40 hours of work to recent graduates.²¹ The temporary employees are provided on the job training by LA Metro and at the end of the year are qualified for upward mobility in specific entry-level job classifications. While not guaranteed a position at the end of the year of onboarding, the Entry Level Training Program was created to establish a “pool of proved performers” for permanent jobs at LA Metro.²¹

The second student program offered by LA Metro is a paid internship program. A qualifying undergraduate or graduate student can participate in the program for up to two years and can work in various departments throughout the transportation system. A qualifying student must be enrolled in at least 12 undergraduate credits or six graduate credits and maintain cumulative GPA of 2.5 (undergraduates) or 3.0 (graduates). Students selected for the program must be US citizens, legal residents, or are eligible to work in the country as determined by the U.S. Immigration Laws and the Department of Homeland Security. If accepted, the intern will earn between \$17.87 per hour (undergraduate) and \$20.49 per hour (graduate).²²

AB 861 (Solache) requires LA Metro to work with LACCD to establish a student ambassador program. The measure would have student ambassadors selected and trained by LA Metro to provide transit operations, conflict resolution, and public engagement in the same manner as the existing LA Metro Ambassador Program. LACCD would be the employer of record for the student ambassadors because the district is the entity compensating the student at a minimum rate of \$25 per hour. The student ambassador program for LACCD students seems duplicative of many of the aforementioned programs offered by LA Metro for community college students in the region.

If the intent of the measure is to provide a student-entry program for the ambassador program similar to the Metro Entry Level Trainee Program, than perhaps, the Author should consider having LA Metro to establish the program through a memorandum of understanding with all the community college districts in the region and not just LACCD.

If the intent of the measure is to provide an internship program for students to be a modified version of the existing LA Metro Ambassador program, then perhaps, the Author should consider having LA Metro expand the existing student internship program to include students as LA Ambassadors.

Arguments in support. As stated by the Faculty Association of the California Community Colleges, “AB 861 addresses transportation insecurity—a major barrier to student success. Free,

²¹ <https://www.metro.net/about/careers/eltp/>

²² <https://www.metro.net/about/careers/internships/>

reliable access to public transit enables students to commute to campus, work, and essential services without added financial strain. For many low-income and working students, transportation costs can determine their ability to stay enrolled and complete their studies. Additionally, the Student Ambassador Program allows students to engage in peer support roles that build leadership experience while improving transit safety and access for the broader campus community.”

Committee comments. As previously mentioned, the LA Metro Board of Directors voted in April 2024 to make the GoPass program a permanent free-transit pass program for K-14 students in the Los Angeles region. Currently, the measure does not codify the existing GoPass program as established by the LA Metro Board of Directors; instead, the measure establishes a program that offers transit passes to student who attend LACCD community colleges free of charge to both the district and the students.

By codifying a program exclusively for LACCD, the Legislature would be requiring LA Metro to continue the GoPass program for LACCD in perpetuity with no ability to recoup any of the costs associated with the program from the district. This measure does not provide one-time funding from Proposition 98 directly to LACCD and LA Metro.

Committee staff note the Proposition 98 funds are allocated to both LACCD and LA Metro. Proposition 98 funds are constitutionally restricted to K-12 schools and community colleges. Providing the funds to LA Metro would be a violation of the California State Constitution.

The measure further suggests the creation of a Student Ambassador Program where students in an employee program authorized and overseen by LA Metro, but compensated by LACCD. This model is inconsistent with internship, work-study, or even employment agreements previously seen by this Committee.

The Author may wish to re-examine the student ambassador program to address concerns regarding the employer of record, the type of work the students will be asked to undertake, and whether the program would qualify as an internship based on the description of interns by the California Department of Industrial Relations.

Committee staff note, the Author, LA Metro, and LACCD have all agreed to continue working on the measure to address the concerns as highlighted in this analysis. To address some of the concerns, the Author has agreed to the following amendments:

- 1) Removes Section 76150, 76151, 76152, and 76153 from the bill.
- 2) *Adds Article 8 (commencing with 72702) is added to Chapter 6 of Part 45 of Division 7 of Title 3 of the Education Code to read as follows:*

Article 8. LA METRO LOS ANGELES COMMUNITY COLLEGE GOPASS AND STUDENT AMBASSADOR PROGRAM

72702. For purposes of this article, the following definitions apply:

(a) “GoPass TAP card” means the card provided as part of the Go Pass program operated by the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority for providing free transit passes to community college students with participating community colleges in the Los Angeles region.

(b) “LA Metro” means the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority.

72703. (a) (1) To promote the use of public transportation by community college students, the Los Angeles community college district shall annually enter into a memorandum of understanding with the LA Metro for the purpose of providing GoPass TAP cards to participating student enrolled at a campus of the Los Angeles Community College district.

(2) A memorandum of understanding entered into pursuant to this subdivision shall provide the cost-sharing rate per student Los Angeles community college district will pay the LA Metro for the provision of the GoPass TAP cards to students.

(c) The Los Angeles community college district, upon agreement to the memorandum established pursuant to subdivision (a), shall permit students to opt into receiving a GoPass TAP card upon registering for classes and shall distribute GoPass TAP cards to students, who opt in, through the registrar’s office at the campus where the student is enrolled.

- 3) Re-numerates Section 76154 of the measure to read as Section 72704.
- 4) Re-numerates Section 76155 of the measure to read as Section 72705.
- 5) Removes SEC 6 subdivision (a) – subdivision (c) from the measure. Removes the language regarding the allocation of \$2.5 million from the general fund.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

California Walks
 Faculty Association of California Community Colleges
 Los Angeles City College (LACC)
 Los Angeles Pierce College
 Rio Hondo College
 Streets are for Everyone (SAFE) (ORG)

Opposition

None on file.

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