Executive Summary

In a pilot project beginning in June 2008, the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) partnered with the Alameda-Contra Costa Transit District (AC Transit) to provide free electronic transit passes to residents of select transit-oriented development (TOD) communities in the East Bay. About 1,500 residents received free, personalized TransLink® cards, allowing unlimited free access on the AC Transit bus system for six months to one year. Participants also received customized information about transit services in their area.

MTC intended the TransLink for TOD (T4T) pilot project to serve as "proof of concept" to promote further implementation of transit pass programs at transit-oriented developments in the region. This report assesses program impacts on:

- Automobile trips and greenhouse gases;
- Mobility or quality of life of low-income households; and
- Customer satisfaction with the TransLink electronic pass.

Program results are based on a survey of about 500 program participants. Key findings include:

- **T4T affected the travel behavior of about one-half of respondents.** About one-half of survey respondents reported using AC Transit more during the free pass period than they had before.
- **T4T reduced automobile trips.** The T4T program reduced automobile trips among respondents by approximately one trip per person per week.
- **T4T introduced new participants to transit.** Among survey respondents in market rate developments, there was a 23 percent increase in people who had tried AC Transit.
- **T4T resulted in greater public transit use after the free pass period ended.** One of the top reasons cited for higher public transit usage was convenience and a greater level of familiarity with AC Transit's routes and schedules.
- **T4T reduced greenhouse gases.** T4T reduced an estimated five to 13 pounds of CO_2 per week per participant, equating to approximately 47 cents per pound of CO_2 reduced, which is in the middle range of cost-effectiveness based on comparison to a selection of strategies included in national studies.
- **Overall satisfaction rates with the program were high** – 73 percent of respondents rated satisfaction with the program as very high or excellent.
- **A significant share of respondents indicated purchasing their own TransLink passes.** About 23 percent of participants in market-rate developments added their own funds to the TransLink card after the expiration of the

free program. These individuals cited the convenience of using an electronic pass rather than having to have exact change.

Key suggestions to support future implementation of similar programs include:

Overall

- Cities and other agencies seeking to maximize reductions of greenhouse gasses should focus the program on vehicle owners.
- Consider using short-term pass promotions as a marketing tool.
- Consider targeting "priority development areas" with unused transit capacity.
- Ensure programs are priced appropriately.

For MTC

- Consider developing a monitoring and analysis program to support implementation of transit pass programs in the Bay Area.
- Consider opportunities to offer transit pass promotions in conjunction with Clipper card distribution.

For Cities, Developers, and Educational Institutions

- Transit agencies can consider developing and marketing standardized pricing schemes for universal pass programs.
- Cities and developers can work together to implement pass programs.
- Congestion management agencies can consider working with multiple jurisdictions to implement transit pass programs along a corridor.
- Educational institutions can consider implementation of universal transit pass programs along with complementary travel demand management strategies.

Conclusion

The TransLink® for Transit-Oriented Development pilot project has demonstrated that a combination of free convenient transit passes and custom marketing has positive short- and longer-term impacts on travel behavior. A number of specific strategies can be pursued to build on this pilot project, engaging the efforts of various public and private sector entities, including the regional agencies, transit agencies, cities, developers, employers, and schools. When implemented in the right places with the right policies and procedures, a refined program of this nature can be a useful tool in the campaign for higher use of transit and reduced vehicle miles traveled and greenhouse gases.