

# RTA Zero Fare Policy Brief 4: The State of Zero Fare Transit in 2022

## Mid-Size Cities Explore Zero Fare for the First Time; Others Extending Zero Fare Pilot Programs

Since our [initial RTA study](#) in 2020, Zero Fare initiatives have only expanding across the country. What's new?

- City and regional transit authorities all over the United States are taking Zero Fare actions, with an increasing number of multi-year pilot programs emerging. (In parentheses after each description is the percentage of operating costs covered by fares collected at that agency in 2019.)
- In **Haverhill, Massachusetts**, the Merrimack Valley Regional Transit Authority unanimously approved a two-year Zero Fare pilot beginning in March 2022 on all local buses and paratransit. (2019 fares: 16%)
- Starting January 2nd, 2022, **Albuquerque, New Mexico** (pop. 564,000) became the largest city by population in the United States to offer Zero Fare transit through a one-year long pilot program. ABQ Ride operates over 130 buses at rush hour each day, carried 30,000 passengers daily in 2019. The City Council provided \$3 million to fund the pilot program in 2022. (2019 fares: 7.5%)
- In December 2021, **Tucson, Arizona** city council voted unanimously to not re-introduce fares to their bus system, and kept rides free until mid-2022. The council also instructed staff to develop a plan for moving to Zero Fare transit permanently. Mayor Regina Romero has asked staff to explore partnerships with the University of Arizona, school districts, and major employers to be part of the funding discussion. (2019 Fares: 18%)
- In **Richmond, Virginia**, GRTC was awarded a \$8 million grant from the Department of Rail and Public Transportation (DRPT) to conduct a three-year long Zero Fare pilot in Richmond from July 2022 to June 2025. The City of Richmond and Virginia Commonwealth University are contributing matching funds to the state grant in support of the effort. As of November 2021, **ridership on GRTC is 10% higher than it was pre-pandemic** in November 2019. This success is attributed to the 2018 route redesign, and ongoing Zero Fare operations at GRTC. (2019 Fares: 21%)

## Larger Transit Systems Moving More Cautiously on Zero Fare

- At agencies with vast infrastructure, hundreds of millions of annual trips, and annual fare revenue totals that far exceed our region's annual transit sales tax collections, Zero Fare is being explored cautiously in light of the scale of the resources that fares represent.
- In Los Angeles, which went to Zero Fare at the beginning of the pandemic, fares are being re-introduced on buses and trains, with day passes for all modes being discounted by 50% through July 2022. LA Metro collected over \$330 million in fare revenue in 2019. (2019 Fares: 13%)
- In Boston's 2021 election, Mayor Michelle Wu ran with Zero Fare transit at the MBTA as part of her platform. In December, the City Council voted 12-1 in support of a two-year Zero Fare pilot on three routes in some of the city's lowest-income neighborhoods. The MBTA collected \$871 million in fares in 2019. (2019 Fares: 46%)

