

Data-Informed Bus Fare Compliance Strategy (Resolution 25-479)



Fare Compliance Strategies



Data-informed & safety-conscious fare compliance strategy to address bus fare evasion

- Focus on the CONNECT 1 Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) line

Priorities:

Equitable
access

Rider and
operator
safety

Long-term
sustainability

Background



2022

- Modified policy to no longer request fare (December '22)

2023

- **42% drop in physical assaults** to operators
- BRT Connect 1 launched in June '23 with free rides

2024

- Fare evasion rate estimated at 30%
- BRT CONNECT 1 discontinued free rides in April '24

2025 (thru May)

- Fare evasion rate estimated at 33% system-wide, 43% on CONNECT 1

Prioritize **safety and dignity** for riders, while balancing **fairness and fiscal responsibility**.

Connect 1 BRT



The CONNECT 1 route reports a 2024 fare evasion rate **above the system average** estimated at 62%, largely due to changing rider-behavior since the **CONNECT 1 was free June 2023 – Mid April 2024**.

Beginning March 2024 efforts were made to **educate the public** and **introduce pre-board payment**.

Mid-April 2024, MCTS deployed **fare ambassadors** and **Transit Security Officers (TSO's)** were assigned to validate fare with a combination of on-bus and on-platform checks, which was met with abrasiveness by the public.

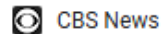
As of May 2025, the CONNECT 1 approximate reported fare evasion average is 43%. The TSO's were then reassigned from CONNECT 1 fare validation to other safety needs of the public May 2025.

Cities across US struggle to address fare evasion



Study Finds 70% of DC Bus Riders Evade Fees

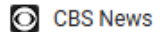
By Arianna Bishop, Special to The Hoya • October 27, 2024



"It's not right": MBTA passengers frustrated by number of fare evaders

BOSTON - The WBZ-TV cameras were in plain sight when a man walked through the MBTA's Back Bay Station and squeezed his body through a tiny...

Jun 9, 2023



SEPTA Transit Police begins crackdown on fare evasion in Philadelphia

New fare evasion enforcement blitzes began Friday morning as SEPTA is attempting to crackdown on people who are evading their fares.

Apr 25, 2025

KING5.com

30% to 40% of Sound Transit riders not paying fare, agency estimates

SEATTLE — The number of riders who aren't paying their fare is on the rise, according to Sound Transit officials.

Jan 28, 2022

Fare Evasion Surges on N.Y.C. Buses, Where 48% of Riders Fail to Pay (Published 2024)

New York's bus system has one of the worst fare evasion problems of any major city in the world. The issue is more pronounced on buses than...

Aug 26, 2024

What are other agencies doing to mitigate?



Agency/System	Bus Fare Evasion Rate (2024)	2025 Enforcement Strategy
New York MTA	50%	Using MTA Police; Pilot AI cameras
Los Angeles Metro	46%	Fare checkers; Pilot fare ambassador program
Seattle (Sound Transit & King County Metro)	33%	Fare Ambassadors (non-police), education-first
Milwaukee (MCTS)	30%	Passive PSO presence; no citations
Washington, D.C. (WMATA)	70%	Decriminalized fare evasion; limited Metro Police role (30% when combine bus and rail)
San Francisco Muni (SFMTA)	20%	Civil citations by fare inspectors + SFPD partnership
Philadelphia (SEPTA)	18%	Police may cite. Focus on deterrence, enforcement & education
Boston MBTA	15% - 22%	Piloting fare ambassadors, moving to all-door boarding

MTA cancels fare evasion study over ethical concerns

Feb 25, 2025 · The MTA has said fare evasion is at a “crisis level” and has tried multiple ways to end the money-stealing scourge, including spiked barriers, anti “back-cocking” methods and private security.

 Street Sense Media

Metro Transit Police target Black youth for fare evasion, report says

The Washington Lawyers Committee recently released a report showing racial disparities in fare evasion enforcement by the Metro Transit...

Oct 3, 2018

After civil rights violation claim, Metro is pressed for more data on fare enforcement

The center claims those agencies have failed to respond to multiple public records requests for data and information about how Metro polices and enforces fares...

Jan 18, 2018

LA Metro Fare Enforcement Faces Backlash

Jun 5, 2024 · A new initiative aimed at reducing fare evasion on Los Angeles Metro trains is facing criticism from transit riders who say having to scan proof ...

Not Worth the Risk: Why US Cities Should Rethink Transit Fare Policing

The policing and punishment of fare evasion is not an effective strategy. These tactics entrench racial disparities and do not generate more resources.

Nov 15, 2024

Cleveland Police Enforcement of Transit "Proof-of-Payment" Ruled Unconstitutional

A Cleveland municipal court judge has ruled that transit police violated passengers' constitutional rights when conducting fare enforcement on the HealthLine.

 The Independent

Protest over police treatment of Black mother handcuffed and wrongly accused of dodging bus fare

Benjamin Clement, 53, who filmed the arrest told The Independent: “I saw just another Black person being abused by the police.”

Jul 25, 2023



Summary of Other Transit Agency Efforts



Most other agencies are not just trying one approach, but rather a combination of tactics including:

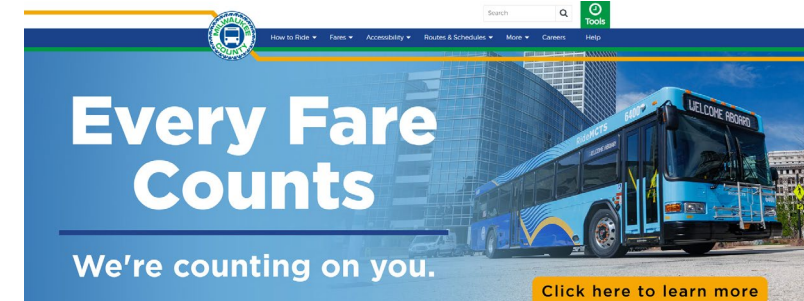
- Passenger education
- Customer engagement
- Targeted deterrence and enforcement

Strategy 1: Public Education Campaign System Wide



Rider Education and equity-focused outreach – **Already in progress!**

- **“Every Fare Counts, We’re Counting on You”**
 - Install signage referencing State Statute 943.225 to reinforce expectations
 - Bus audio messaging rotation
 - Destination signage rotation
 - In bus and printed timetable messaging
 - Social media posts
 - Dedicated webpage with informational video
 - Highlight the benefits of WisGo fare capping and contactless payment
 - Partner with community organizations to amplify the message





On-bus messaging

Strategy 2: Open Loop Payments



- **Additional payment methods accepted to make it easier to pay and further reduce barriers to payment**
 - The current fare collection system accepts payment methods including cash on board, WisGo smart card, WisGo paper token, and the UMO App.
 - Open loop payment offers additional payment methods including apple and google pay, debit and credit card.
 - This technology is in progress and set to launch in 2026.



Strategy 3: Targeted Fare Enforcement



Example: Sound Transit



Additional uniformed presence at high-evasion bus stops and on-bus circulation

This physical presence will serve as a deterrent creating an atmosphere of safety and security.

Duration

If funds are dedicated, this strategy will run weekly with approximately 500 staff hours rotating throughout the system.

Cost \$1.1M (scalable)

Annual estimate includes the full hourly rate and overhead of uniformed security staff to operate this strategy.

Strategy 4: Fare Ambassadors



Example: Sound Transit



MCTS Branded program and staff to educate riders on how to purchase and pay for the bus fare, verify fares are being collected

- Report any defects, or barriers of use with equipment
- Promote rider engagement in a positive manner
- Run weekly, approximately 500 staff hours rotating throughout the system, including CONNECT 1
- Cost est. \$1.2M annually (incl. salary and benefits for 13 Fare Ambassadors)

Strategy 5: Connect 1 Onboard Fare Collection Equipment



- Per FTA BRT grant funding, transit agencies may add fare collection methods to assist in the reduction of fare evasion but may not remove any existing features of the BRT, which include pre-board payment methods.
- **This strategy would require further discussion with bus manufacturer to ensure bus warranty is not impacted by the introduction of new equipment.**
- **If this is viable, then estimated cost is \$303K for equipment, with an additional (currently unknown) cost for installation.**

Strategy 6: Equity Focused Fare Programs



Reduced Fare Program Review

- The current reduced fare program eligibility only includes children ages 6-11, adults aged 65+ or anyone with a qualifying disability.
- It is recommended to review this policy through an income-based perspective and potentially open eligibility to riders who may be evading fare.

Duration

- It will take approximately 4 months to perform a thorough review of current state, analysis of income-based programs and provide recommendation.

Cost – Variable (To be determined)

- The overall cost of a new equity-focused program will be variable based on participation and to be included in the overall analysis.

Strategy	Description	Estimated Incremental Cost	Potential ROI	Key Benefits	Considerations
1. Public Education Campaigns	Messaging via buses, stations, ads (“Every Fare Counts”)	None	Moderate (5% increase in compliance)	Increases public awareness; promotes shared responsibility	Most effective when combined with enforcement
2. Add Open Loop Payment Method	Allows riders to use any payment method including apple pay, google pay, credit/debit cards.	None	Moderate	Allows the public more choices when attempting to pay fare.	Fare evaders are most likely unbanked.
3. Targeted Fare Enforcement	Uniformed presence at high evasion stops; passive deterrent	\$86K annually per officer; Estimating 13 staff, \$1.1M annually	Medium	Effective on BRT/high-ridership lines; prevents repeat behavior	Scalable solution: some additional training required
4. Fare Ambassadors	Non-police staff educate riders, verify fares, and promote rider engagement	\$94K per staff; Estimating 13 staff, \$1.2M annually	Medium	Improves compliance with minimal conflict; boosts rider perception	Scalable solution
5. Connect 1: Add Onboard Fare Collection Equipment	Contactless fare payment added to BRT buses	\$302,000 Equipment front/rear door + Front Door Cash Box	Medium in BRT systems	Reduces boarding delays; supports universal fare media	Must be paired with consistent enforcement
6. Equity-Focused Fare Programs	Free/discounted fare for low-income riders + education	Variable (subsidized fares)	Low (reduced evasion + equity goals)	Improves access; aligns with social goals	Needs policy change and budget alignment

Goal: Reduce Fare Evasion



- Reduce fare evasion from **33% down to 30%** by September 2026, assuming implementation of cost-neutral strategies
 - Based on current fare and service levels, this reduction in the rate of fare evasion is estimated to bring in **\$900K additional revenue annually**.
 - The estimated reduction in fare evasion includes increased targeted fare encouragement with the existing security personnel.
 - Additional investment will lead to add'l fare revenue but amount is difficult to predict.

Transit is a lifeline to some of the most vulnerable populations in Milwaukee County. While achieving the goal of reducing fare evasion, MCTS must balance the safety of all staff, as well as the safety and dignity of our passengers.

Measuring Progress



MCTS will measure progress by tracking the level of fare evasion by month and by route.

- Methodology: cross-referencing the fare box data (cash amounts, Umo transactions, etc.) with the Automatic Passenger Count (APC) data.
- Reducing fare evasion across the MCTS system requires a **balanced, multi-faceted approach grounded in reliable data, operator feedback, and community engagement.**