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Creating Transit Connections: Recommendations for Enhanced Fare Integration and Seamless Transfers in Los Angeles County



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Issue

The intercity and intercounty public transit systems in the Southern California region remain unintegrated, which presents challenges to riders, including paying fares and accessing fare discounts, receiving real-time travel information, and making seamless intermodal transfers. Los Angeles County alone has 26 municipal transit agencies. Los Angeles Metro, the primary and largest transit agency serving Los Angeles, is in the position to lead integration efforts. Outside of Los Angeles County, the Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA), Riverside Transit Agency (RTA), San Diego Metropolitan Transit System (MTS), and Metrolink operate services that provide transit access between L.A. County and destinations in the Southern California region. Yet the lack of organization between these transit providers creates a complex governance structure that limits coordination across operators, resulting in a fragmented regional transit system that can confuse riders and operators.

However, the opportunity to better integrate regional transit systems is timely as new transit services are introduced to Los Angeles, such as the Inglewood Transit Connector that will connect the Metro K Line to entertainment venues like the SoFi Stadium and Kia Forum. Aside from local connections, integration at the state level will need to be considered with the eventual completion of the California High-Speed Rail. To create a more integrated countywide transit system, LA Metro should explore equitable fare integration policies and follow the lead of other cities that have achieved efficient integration by establishing coordinated governance structures and centering the rider's experience in their transit infrastructure.

Study Approach

The researcher conducted interviews with employees at LA Metro, Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG), LOSSAN Rail Corridor Agency, and Caltrans and reviewed quantitative data from the 2022 Metro Customer Survey Study and Metrolink 2022 Rider Survey.

Key Findings

- The two central transit fare payment systems are account- and card-based. Account-based payment systems are linked to external bank accounts and accept contactless bank cards and wearable devices. Card-based fare payments rely on stored value cards issued by transit agencies. Account-based systems often make fare integration easier to implement.
- The Los Angeles County Transit Access Pass (TAP) program is a card-based system used by 26 participating transit agencies, with varying fares (Figure 1). However, the TAP card is not valid on Metrolink, LOSSAN, or other agencies outside of Los Angeles County.
- Transit systems worldwide offer best practices for fare integration and seamless transfers. These systems include East Japan Railway Company, Taipei Mass Rapid Transit (MRT), Transport for London, Swiss Federal Railways, and Monterey-Salinas Transit.
- Fare integration policies must include equity-based solutions to benefit lower-income or cash-paying riders. Nearly one-third of LA Metro's riders pay in cash, over 50% are low income, and roughly 40% receive Senior/Disabled discounts.
- State-level initiatives can guide regional fare integration. At the state level, the California Integrated Travel Program (Cal-

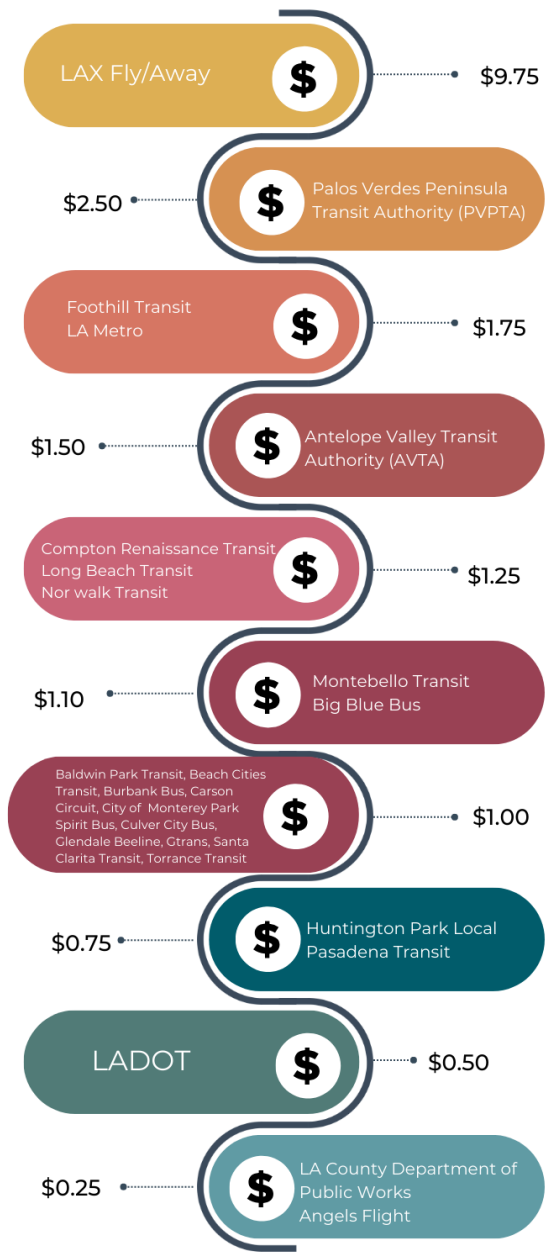


Figure 1. List of fares by TAP agency



Garvanne, I. (2023). A blueprint for connected public transport for Los Angeles County: Best practices and policy reform for integrating transit services, fare policy enhancements, integrated ticketing, and seamless transfers (Master’s Capstone, UCLA). Retrieved from: <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/14p2d8v0>

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ITP) provides guidance and technical assistance for transit agencies to make travel more accessible and cost-effective for riders and transit providers. The three main objectives of Cal-ITP are: enabling contactless payments, automating customer discounts, and standardizing information for easy trip planning.

Conclusions

- Equity-focused solutions are essential to making integration accessible to all riders. LA Metro should consider expanding payment methods on the TAP app to provide underbanked riders with payment options like Venmo, Cash App, or PayPal so they do not have to add a bank card. Working with Caltrans to standardize discounts will also reduce the burden of applying to discount programs. As the first agency on TAP to adopt and implement fare capping, LA Metro should encourage other TAP agencies to do the same.
- Los Angeles’s current transit governance structure limits the expansion of fare integration. It is recommended that LA Metro explore partnering with SCAG to lead fare integration efforts. This could create opportunities for SCAG to lead other efforts like setting data sharing requirements to transit, such as General Transit Feed Specification (GTFS), coordinating eligibility standards, or developing regional customer experience standards. Additionally, LA Metro could support the creation of a Regional Transit Integration Task Force of local and regional transit operators, local officials, and transit justice advocates to collaborate on intercity and intercounty transit integration efforts and strategies to integrate fare payments countywide.
- Enhancing physical infrastructure in and around station areas is necessary to facilitate seamless transfers. First, LA Metro should prioritize first/last-mile improvements at existing stations, especially in anticipation of upcoming events like the 2026 World Cup and 2028 Olympic and Paralympic Games. Investing in first/last-mile connections will increase customer safety, satisfaction, and comfort. Second, LA Metro should create more opportunities for TAP customers to receive discounts and perks at various commercial locations. Since transportation functions as an everyday essential for many riders, there are opportunities to connect transportation seamlessly with other necessary purchases or amenities.