

The following memorandum was provided to the CapMetro Board of Directors on August 5, 2022. Subsequent to sending the memo, CapMetro staff continued to collaborate with stakeholders regarding fares and transit access for the unhoused community.

On August 17, 2022 CapMetro staff provided the following updated information: CapMetro is an active partner in ensuring we care for our unhoused community. After extensive conversations with members of our community, we will now provide complimentary rides to cooling centers, effective immediately and through September 30. This is a continuation of our steadfast efforts to care for our community. We understand one of the key challenges in our practice of offering free rides to cooling centers was that the trigger of a “heat advisory” was causing confusion. This extension will be in effect through September regardless of active heat advisories and warnings.

To: CapMetro Board of Directors
From: Kerri Butcher, Chief of Staff
Date: August 5, 2022
Re: Complimentary Rides to Cooling Centers

Central Texas is experiencing unprecedented extreme heat right now, and CapMetro is committed to helping our community get to a safe, cool place as the summer continues. Effective immediately, the agency will expand our complimentary rides to offer complimentary rides to cooling centers in our region when we are under a heat advisory, which is typically put in place when air temperatures reach 103 degrees.

The previous procedures were triggered with a heat warning which is a higher safety risk, so by expanding to an advisory, we can provide more rides to more people seeking shelter. The agency will not let fares stand in the way of transportation to a cool, safe shelter and believes the expansion to include complimentary rides during heat advisories, not just extreme heat warnings, will help keep our community safe. This also removes the pressure on our community partners and advocates from being responsible for distributing passes during an emergency situation.

Customers seeking a complimentary ride to a cooling shelter should inform the operator when boarding the bus that their destination is a cooling center. The CapMetro team is working internally to inform our frontline teams of this change to ensure customers don't experience issues getting to a cooling center. We are also working with our partners at the City of Austin to ensure our community is aware of the available [cooling center locations](#) and transportation services we are providing. The agency is encouraging those looking to get to a cooling center to use our trip planner to find the best route or, in certain areas, our Pickup service.

Additionally, we have heard and are incorporating feedback from our local social service partners about simplifying our public message on this policy. As the agency moves forward, our public messaging will state that CapMetro will offer complimentary rides to customers going to cooling shelters when the city is under a heat advisory, which typically happens when the air temperature reaches 103 degrees or the heat index reaches 108 degrees. We will also explain how to inform the operator of the need for a complimentary ride.

Members may be approached by some of our community partners requesting complete fare waivers. Our intent is to be transparent about this with the community – waiving fares for the unhoused only is operationally infeasible on an individual basis and, we are not in a position to waive fares for all. We understand the purpose of the requests is to help those most in need and are confident that expanding the eligibility to days with a heat advisory will reach a broader group of those in need without creating an additional burden on these organizations to distribute passes. We also believe this approach will reach beyond the unhoused to those who simply need a cool place to be because they don't have access to air conditioning. Going forward, we will be working with our partners in the community, including the Transit Empowerment Fund to reduce barriers to access

to passes and to find ways to leverage our new fare programs such as Equifare to reach more of the community in need of transportation.