

Wednesday, February 20, 2019



## **UTA MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **Community Leaders Partner to Sponsor Free Fare Days on UTA**

Today UTA joined Salt Lake County, Intermountain Healthcare, the Salt Lake City Mayor's Office and Davis County in offering the public free rides on all modes of transportation all day on Thursday, February 28 as well as Friday, March 1. These community and business leaders are joining forces to sponsor the two Free Fare Days to introduce more people to the benefits of using public transportation.



Representatives of all the sponsors officially announced the sponsored Free Fare Days at a news conference on Wednesday, February 20, 2019.

“This year, we would especially like to encourage people to try riding the bus,” stated Carlton Christensen, Chairman of the UTA Board of Trustees.” We have increased bus route coverage and frequency on many routes, are increasing the use of natural gas and electric vehicles in our fleet, and are working with Salt Lake City on improving bus service.”

According to Salt Lake City Mayor Jackie Biskupski, “big things are coming to Salt Lake City this year when it comes to transit improvements—and announcing two Free Ride Days are just the beginning! We encourage all members of the Salt Lake City community to take the opportunity next week to explore transit and leave the car at home.”

The Salt Lake City Mayor's Office will be encouraging residents to take a pledge to “Ride Free” on February 28th and March 1st. The mayor's office will then follow-up with tips on how to find the best route, remind constituents of the upcoming Free Ride Days, and solicit feedback on their experiences.

## UTA MEDIA RELEASE - FREE FARE DAYS



Salt Lake County Mayor Jenny Wilson said “there isn’t a person in the county who doesn’t understand the importance of clean air and the critical role TRAX, FrontRunner, the S-Line and UTA’s buses play in tackling our air quality challenges. We appreciate the leadership of UTA and other partners for allowing our citizens to do their part and ride for free.”

The medical community is also playing a prominent role in Free Fare Days on UTA. Lisa Nichols of Intermountain Healthcare added, “Intermountain recognizes poor air quality influences both health behaviors and health outcomes. Our mission to help people live the healthiest lives possible requires supporting solutions to improve air quality and thus the health and well-being of our community.”

In Davis County, Commissioner Bob Stevenson recognizes “Davis County residents boarded the train nearly 800,000 times last year, moving us closer to our goals of cleaner air, more jobs and affordable access to all that our growing community has to offer. The need for public transit is only increasing, and the Davis County Commission is proud to be a sponsor of this initiative to provide two days of free fare across all of UTA’s systems.”

On December 22, 2017 there was a “Free Fare Friday” sponsored by Salt Lake County and the Salt Lake City Council. More than 22,000 **additional** riders took advantage of this opportunity. As a result thousands of cars were taken off the road saving several tons of pollution from entering the atmosphere during a critical time for air quality.

FrontRunner experienced the largest increase in 2017. UTA’s commuter rail system had an additional 11,982 boardings. Taking into account an average of 18,034 riders during each of the previous 5 weekdays, FrontRunner accommodated a total of 30,016 passengers on *Free Fare Friday, 2017* a **66% increase**.

TRAX, which averaged 60,363 boardings during the previous 5 weekdays in 2017 saw an additional 19,462 riders for a total of 79,825 passengers, a **32% increase**.

After factoring in a modest ridership bump on UTA buses (61,735 riders) *Free Fare Friday 2017* produced a **23% overall increase** in system usage with a combined total of approximately 31,732 additional boardings, the equivalent of 22,829 more passengers.

## UTA MEDIA RELEASE - FREE FARE DAYS

According to local business leaders *Free Fare Friday 2017* was also a boost for the economy throughout the service community.

According to Linda Wardell, General Manager of City Creek Center, businesses in the Center saw an increase in foot traffic and sales.

“Free Fare Friday was a tremendous success and very impactful for our retailers and eateries,” she said. “The size of the crowds streaming off TRAX trains and into the Center throughout the day and evening was amazing. Stores were packed and some of our restaurants stayed open late to serve hungry shoppers and visitors.”



The increase in ridership equated to removing 17,560 vehicles from Utah roads, saving more than 3 tons of criteria pollution and more than 200 tons of Greenhouse gas.



Surveys indicated 21 year olds comprised the largest demographic group taking advantage of this opportunity in 2017 to take a free ride on UTA.

In the future UTA hopes to continue partnering with more elected officials and communities in the six counties UTA serves to encourage the use of public transportation and improve the air quality and quality of life on the Wasatch Front.

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