



# Allegheny County Fare Discount Pilot Research and Evaluation Plan

## Overview:

This pilot will examine how lowering the cost of public transportation affects individuals' travel patterns, employment and earnings, healthcare utilization, and other socioeconomic outcomes. We will provide discounted public transportation fares to a sample of households in Allegheny County who are currently receiving or have recently received Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits.

## Study Design:

Participants will be randomly assigned to receive one of the following fare discount levels for 12 months. They have a 1/3 chance of receiving each discount level:

- i) **No discount:** This group will receive \$10 on a ConnectCard, but no other fare discount for 12 months.
- ii) **50% discount:** This group will receive \$10 on a ConnectCard plus a 50% discount on all PRT trips (bus, T, and incline) for 12 months
- iii) **Free fares:** This group will receive unlimited free fares on all PRT trips (bus, T and incline) for 12 months

Only one adult (age 18 through 64) per household may participate in this pilot. The adult may choose to include their children ages 6 through 17 in the discount if they wish. Note that children ages birth through 5 already ride for free on PRT.

## Sample:

The pilot will enroll approximately 12,000 current or recent SNAP recipients between the ages of 18 and 64 who reside in Allegheny County. Approximately 4,000 participants will be in each of the three groups.

## Recruitment and Onboarding:

Interested residents will visit a website and complete a short application. We will verify applicants' eligibility by cross-referencing their application with administrative data held by

the Allegheny County Department of Human Services (ACDHS). After their eligibility has been determined, participants will be randomized into one of the three groups and informed of their lottery assignment. ACDHS may attempt to recruit eligible participants via text message outreach and may publicize the pilot using flyers, mailers and posters.

## **Data Collection and Measurement:**

A team of researchers at Carnegie Mellon University and Harvard University will measure participants' outcomes using several forms of data collected over the course of the pilot. Participants may be asked to take part in several data collection activities, including:

- 1) Completing online surveys every 3 to 6 months. These surveys will ask participants about their transportation usage, travel patterns and other dimensions of socioeconomic well-being.
- 2) Downloading a smartphone app that shares their phone's GPS data with the research team.
- 3) Completing short diaries that describe the mode and purpose of their daily travels.
- 4) Engaging in an in-depth interview with the research staff. Interviewees will be asked to describe their use of transportation and their life experiences during their time in the pilot.

Participants may choose not to take part in any of these data collection activities. Those who do take part will be compensated for their time. Participants will not lose access to their fare discounts if they choose not to engage in these data collection activities.

The researchers will also use administrative data from ACDHS and Pittsburgh Regional Transit (PRT) to measure participants' outcomes and experiences. The ACDHS data will include information on earned income, utilization of health care, and involvement in various social services and public assistance programs. This will include data from before, during and after the individual's time in the pilot. PRT will provide data associated with the ConnectCards given to participants. This will include the date, time and location of each bus or train embarkment that used the card.

## **Analysis:**

Researchers will evaluate the effects of the reduced fares using the data collected over the duration of the pilot. The random assignment study design will enable the researchers to estimate the causal effects of the reduced fares by comparing participants' outcomes between the three discount levels.

ACDHS and associated stakeholders will receive periodic reports detailing the research findings, and a final report will be made publicly available.

**To learn more and apply, visit:**  
[discountedfares.alleghenycounty.us](https://discountedfares.alleghenycounty.us)