

Working Together for Clean Air



The Utah Transit Authority has actively partnered with state and community clean air advocates for many years, seeking opportunities to include transit in solutions to improve our air quality. Most recently, we have been working with the Utah Division of Air Quality (DAQ), the Utah Clean Air Partnership (UCAIR), the Healthy Environment Alliance of Utah (HEAL Utah), and the Utah State Legislature on the Zero Fare for Clean Air program.

“Riding transit is one of the best ways we can all improve air quality in Utah,” said Carlton Christensen, UTA Board of Trustees Chair. “We encourage the community to take advantage of this Zero Fare promotional opportunity and take transit to your destination. Every personal vehicle we leave at home or at a UTA parking garage makes a difference for everyone, not just those who ride UTA.”

The Zero Fare for Clean Air program is part of a science-driven effort to improve air quality along the Wasatch Front by helping to encourage more people to consider using transit as an alternative to driving. Funding for the Zero Fare days was made possible by House Bill 353 (HB353) sponsored by Representative Joel Briscoe during the 2019 Legislative Session.

“We’re teaching learned behavior — once people realize how easy it can be to take transit, we hope more will make it their routine,” said Rep. Briscoe. “As a legislator, I’m thrilled to see so many organizations partnering to make this happen. Air pollution is a policy problem we can solve when we put our minds together and when we’re all committed.”

HB353 authorized this pilot program where all UTA services will be free on certain qualifying days. The bill provides \$500,000 to fund several Zero Fare for Clean Air days.

“Summertime ozone pollution is not something we can see like our winter inversions, but over the past few years some of our worst air quality days have been in the summer months,” said DEQ Executive Director Kim Shelley. “Vehicles are the largest contributor to Utah’s air quality challenges along the Wasatch Front. We’ve seen that when we remove barriers to using public transit, people will make the choice that reduces pollution and improves quality of life all around.”

When Are Zero Fare Days Announced?

The decision to declare Zero Fare days is coordinated between UTA and DAQ based on science and health risk. The DAQ constantly monitors Utah's air shed to identify when levels of ozone, as well as particulate matter, are unhealthy. When unhealthy pollution levels are forecast, the Division calls a Mandatory Action Day, which indicates critical periods when Utahns should avoid high-emitting activities such as wood burning, operation of gasoline-powered yard equipment, and extensive automobile usage. For more information, visit air.utah.gov.

Ozone is an odorless, colorless gas made up of three oxygen molecules (O₃) and is a natural part of the environment. It occurs both in the Earth's upper atmosphere, or stratosphere (the "good" ozone that protects us from solar radiation), and at ground level in the lower atmosphere, or troposphere (the "bad" ozone that forms during sunny summer days that causes health problems). Reducing trips through riding transit, teleworking, or taking other measures helps reduce emissions of ozone precursors, thereby limiting the formation of ozone.

UTA and the Department of Air Quality communicate regularly to identify optimal time frames to implement Zero Fare days. When air quality is projected to be unhealthy (red or orange on the DAQ index) during those time frames, UTA and DAQ will coordinate to announce one or more Zero Fare days.

Partners Support Efforts to Reduce Emissions

"Over the past year and a half, we have seen what an impact driving less can have on our air quality, revealing that air quality improvements are possible with collective action," said Kim Frost,UCAIR executive director. "We are excited that the legislature funded this program and we encourage everyone to try transit, see how it can work for you, and by keeping your car off the road, reduce your emissions."

"The Healthy Environment Alliance of Utah is excited to continue partnering with the Zero Fare for Clean Air days," said Lexi Tuddenham, executive director of HEAL Utah. "This program has helped gather crucial data that our state policymakers can use to create comprehensive policy solutions for mitigating air pollution and promoting smart growth in the Wasatch front."

All the partners are very excited about this program and the opportunity to increase awareness and engagement with the community about the impact we can have on our air quality by changing our transportation habits.

