

# **News Release**

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## **City and RMTD Announce New Free Ride Programs for Local Post-Secondary Education & Adult GED/HSE Students**

The City of Rockford and the Rockford Mass Transit District announced today that beginning February 01, 2025, any individual in the community enrolled in a local post-secondary education program or in a local adult General Educational Development (GED)/High School Equivalency (HSE) program will now be able to ride RMTD's fixed route service for free.

Individuals who have a valid student photo I.D. for the spring 2025 semester from any of the following local institutions: Rock Valley College (RVC), Rockford Career College (RCC), Rockford University, NIU Rockford, Judson, Rasmussen, U of I College of Medicine, OSF Nursing - can access the free ride program by simply showing their valid student photo I.D. when boarding a RMTD bus. Note: As a result of the new post-secondary education free ride program, RMTD's 30-Day U-Pass for individuals enrolled in post-secondary education programs is being discontinued.

For those individuals currently enrolled in adult GED/HSE programs offered by RVC, Rockford Public Schools (RPS) & Goodwill, RMTD will be coordinating with those providers to distribute free passes to their program participants.

The new free ride programs are being implemented in an effort to help reduce barriers to accessing educational and training opportunities in the community. The City of Rockford is providing additional funding to RMTD to offset the loss of farebox revenue needed to launch this program as well as continue to support the previously implemented Veteran and K-12 student free ride programs on the fixed route system. The city increased RMTD's annual appropriation from \$1,548,000 to \$1,869,000.

In advance of the new free ride programs being offered, RMTD implemented a number of service changes in September 2024, to help improve access to educational and training institutions in the community. The improvements included service changes to provide regular access to the Rockford University campus; a route extension to serve the AAR and RVC Aviation Center at Rockford Airport; a route change to provide regular access to the NIU Rockford facility near East State Street and University Drive; and a route change to provide direct access to the main RVC campus from the eastside of Rockford and the RMTD Eastside Transfer Center. In addition to the improvements above, RMTD also implemented service changes last September to enhance access to several areas of the community as well as employment opportunities to the following: Hard Rock Casino, AMC Movie Theater, Javon Bea Hospital Riverside, PCI on Linden Road, and the UPS & Amazon facilities at the Rockford Airport.

With the launch of the new free ride programs, RMTD will monitor the impacts to ridership on its fixed route system and evaluate opportunities to improve service on the routes serving the various locations over the coming year.

“Whether it’s establishing free college tuition or creating programs for free transportation, reducing barriers for our residents is a cornerstone of our administration,” explains Mayor Tom McNamara. “We’re thrilled to have partnered with RMTD to provide free ride programs for our young students, veterans and now post-secondary students.”

“RMTD is pleased to partner with the City of Rockford to offer the new free ride programs to the community,” states RMTD Executive Director Michael Stubbe. “This is yet another step in RMTD’s effort to help reduce barriers and improve access to employment, education, health care, food sources and other services in our community.”

Last fiscal year, RMTD provided over 35,000 free rides to Veterans and over 12,000 free rides to K-12 students. RMTD’s fixed route ridership totaled over 1.2 million rides and the District’s complimentary ADA paratransit service provided nearly 100,000 rides.