

Fare Gate Pilot

Motion No. M2026-30

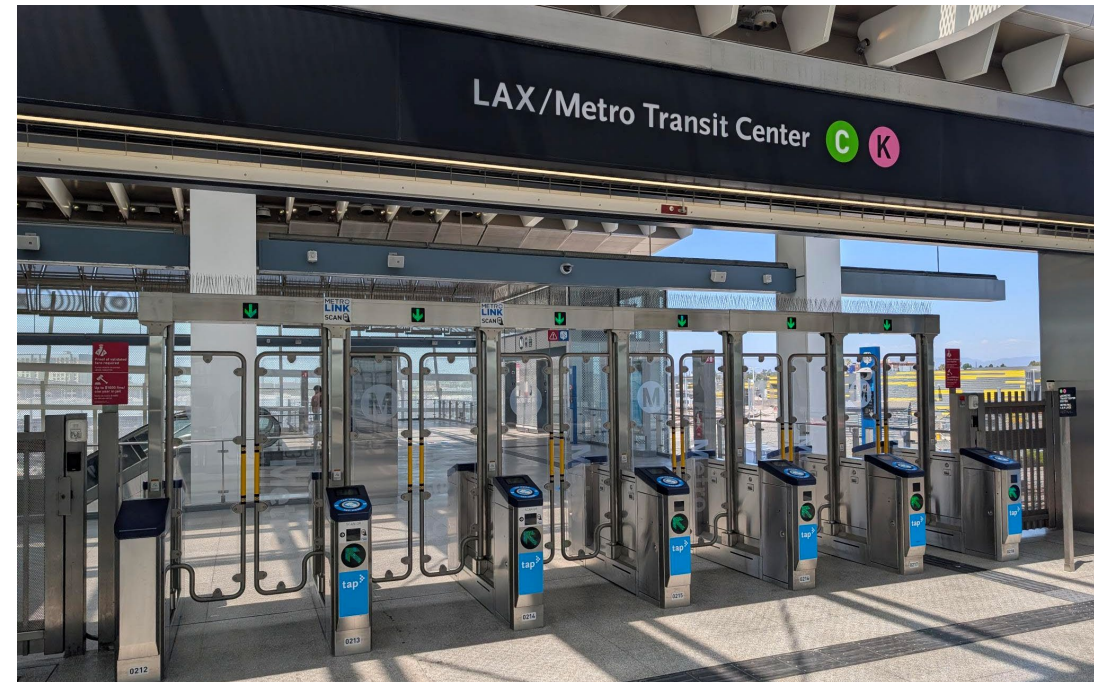
Board of Directors

8/27/2026



Why we are here today

- Request approval of a fare gates pilot of up to 14 stations and to include fare gates in ST3 station designs.
- Discuss our findings from transit agencies and fare gates industry experts that will help guide us to successful implementation.
- Provide details of how we will ensure passenger and operational readiness for the fare gates pilot.

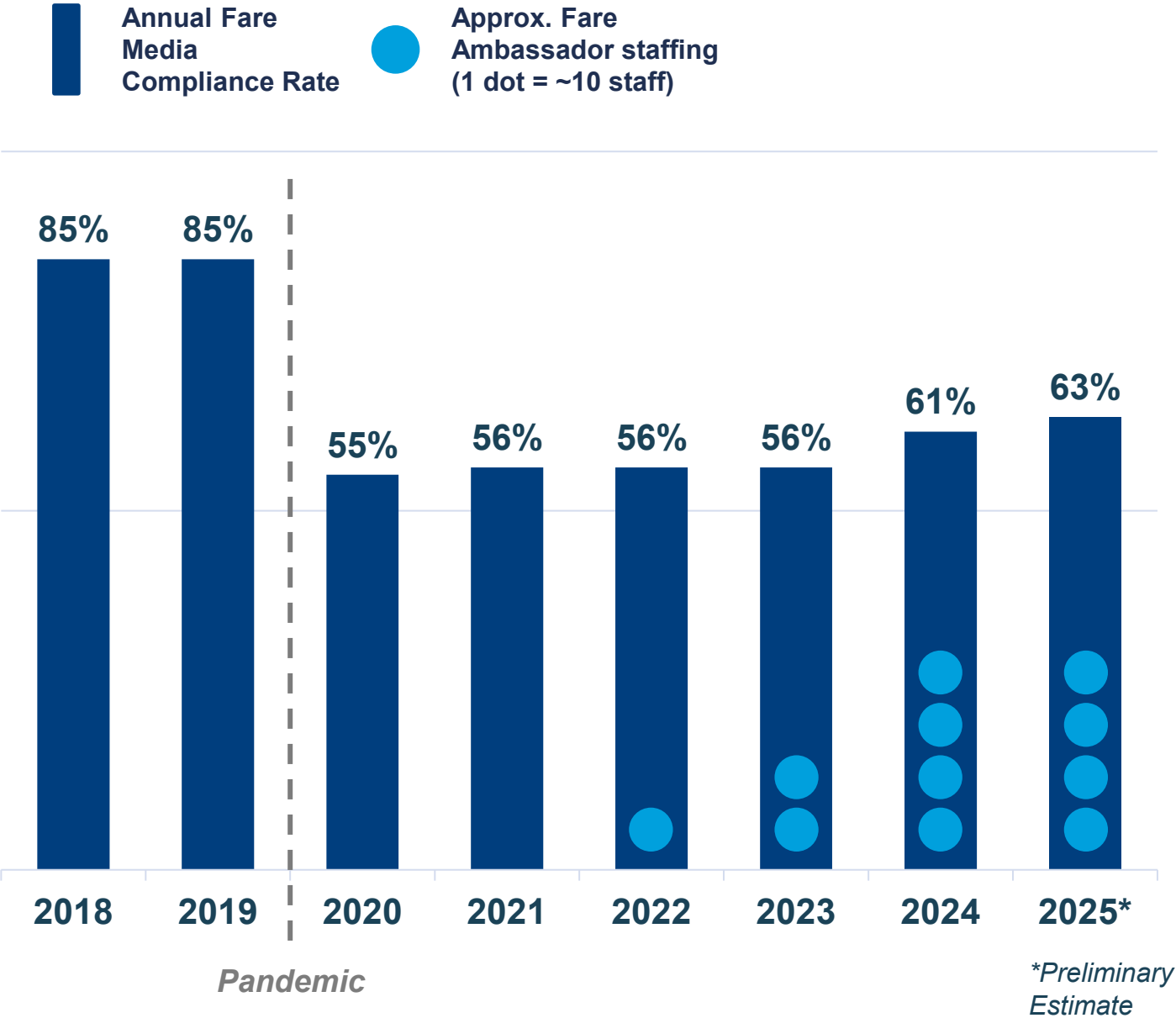


Fare Media Compliance rates on Link have not recovered to pre-pandemic levels

Fare compliance improved with increased Fare Ambassador staffing.

Inspection rates more than doubled since 2023, reaching ~985K+ in 2025.

Free Youth rides began Sep 2022; ~6% of ridership at the time.



Fare gates pilot proposal

Our network has expanded to the point where fare gates make financial sense when balancing ridership and cost.

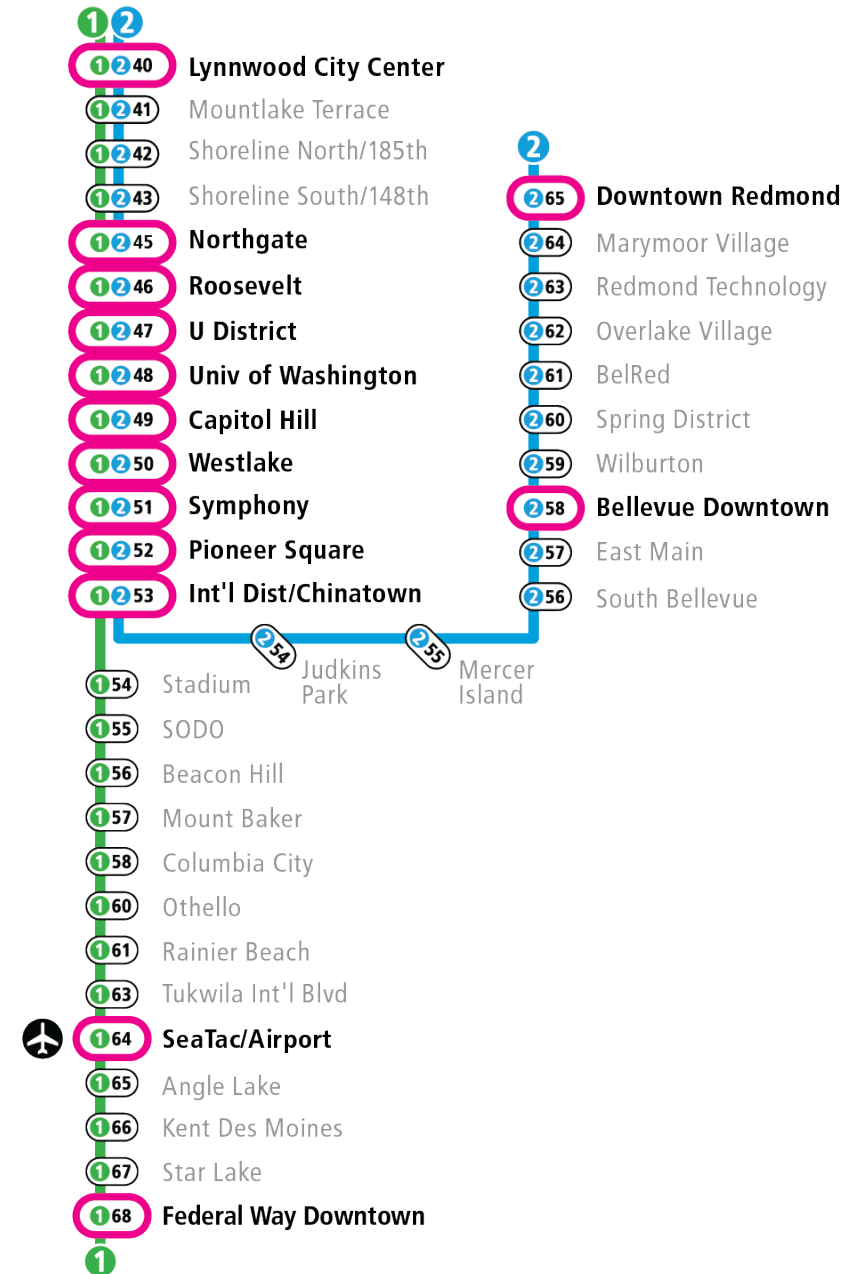
The report recommends:

- A pilot project could focus on up to 14 Link Light Rail stations
- Use bi-directional fare gates (passengers tap out to exit)

These recommendations draw on ridership, industry standards, and financial calculations.

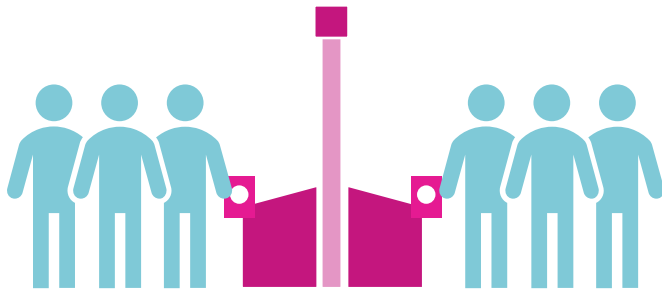
Developing the pilot project will include important equity, safety, and further costing conversations.

Fare gate directionality is adjustable after implementation; uni-directional fare-gating is feasible.



Operating and Revenue Scenarios

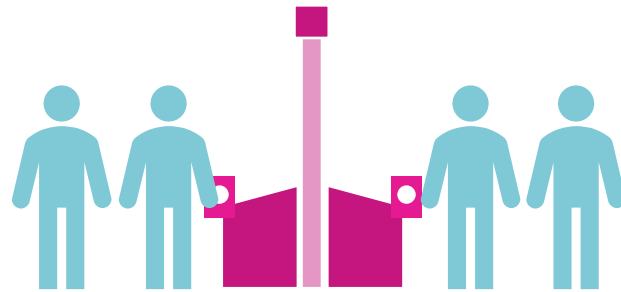
Scenario 1



↑ High Ridership

↔ Bi-Directional Gates

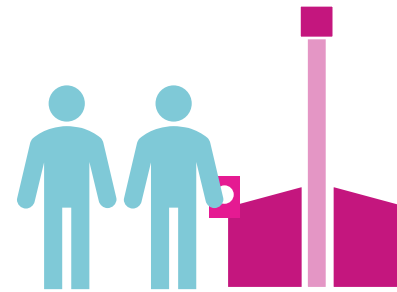
Scenario 2



↓ Low Ridership

↔ Bi-Directional Gates

Scenario 3



↓ Low Ridership

→ Uni-Directional Gates

Most likely pilot scenarios

The study assumed **95% compliance** through gated stations. This is a conservative estimate based on industry data, which identifies 98% compliance rates

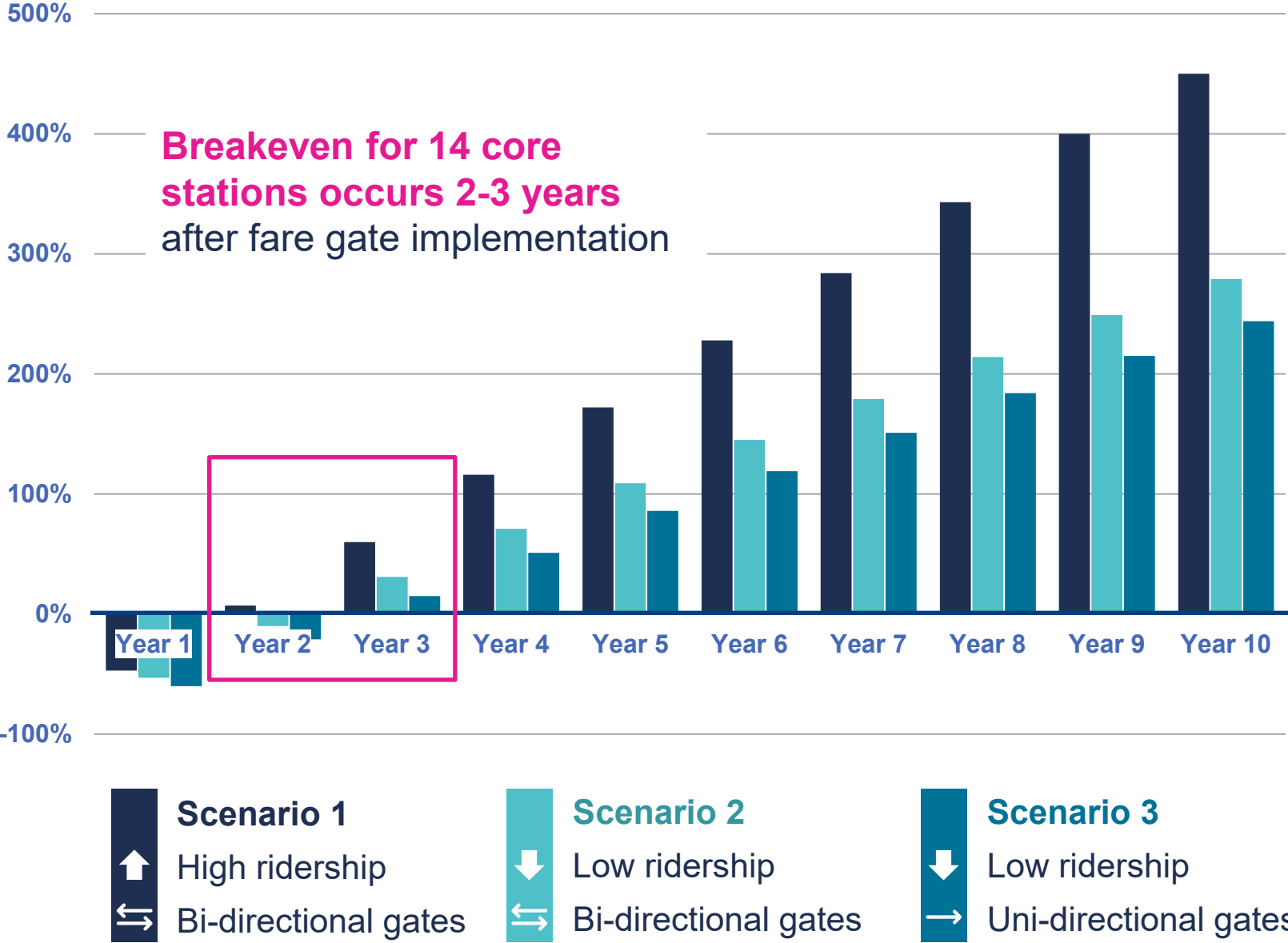
Preliminary ROI Findings*

Return on investment (ROI) accounts for:

- Cost of installation at each recommended station
- Ongoing maintenance costs
- Staffing costs
- Ridership and fare compliance projections

Does not include potential improvements in maintenance and security.

*Estimate only



Learnings from vendors and peer agencies



Timeline

- Develop assumptions for phase durations



Procurement

- Provide a Q&A period for vendors for collaboration
- Vendors can customize some gate operational features (time to close, force protection, etc.)
- Fare gate vendors generally do not want to manage civil station design upgrades
- MTA intentionally utilized multiple vendors to give themselves additional flexibility in the future



Engagement

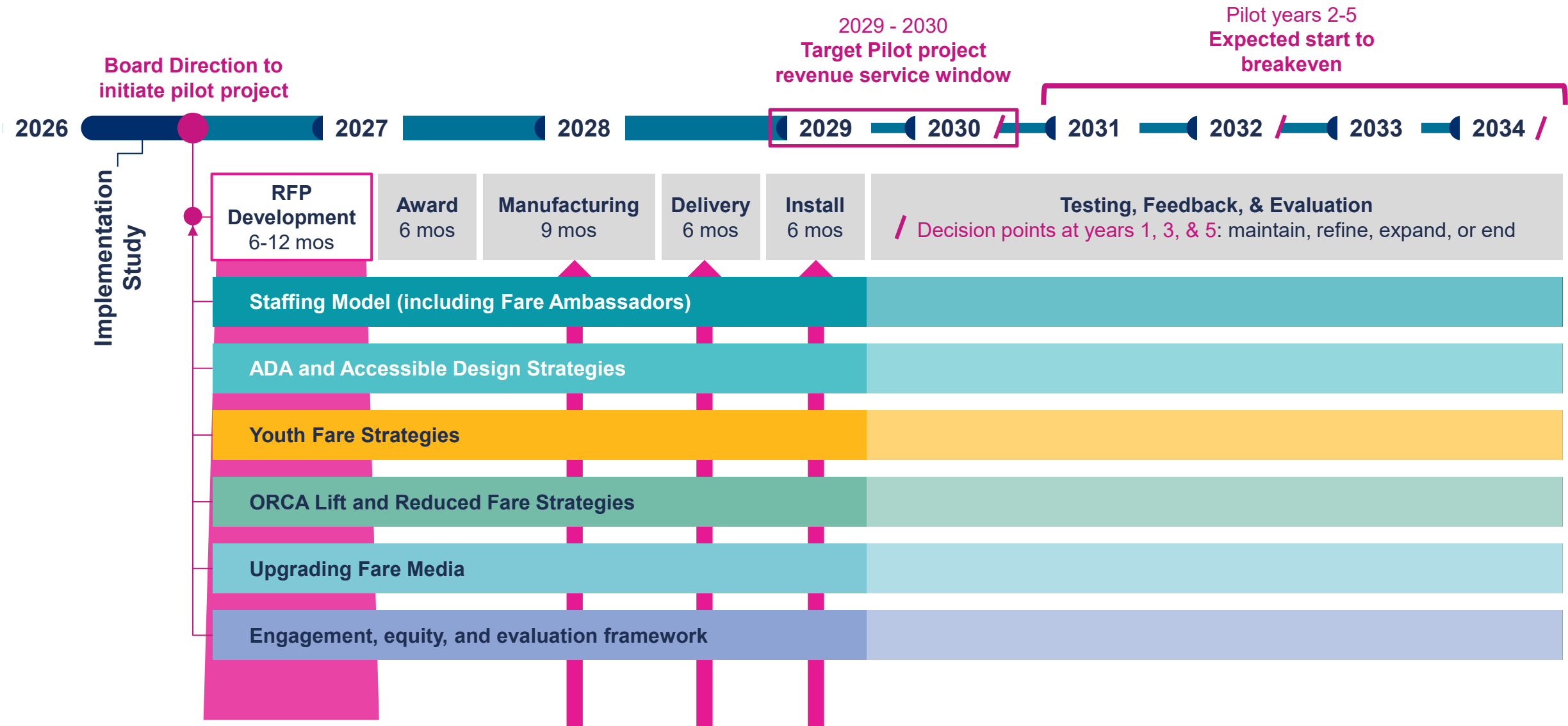
- Develop a proactive and robust passenger educational campaign



System Integration

- Determine maintenance strategy – in-house or through vendor
- Prepare our stations for gates to best realize positive outcomes
- Provide a period of commissioning and testing to better tune the gates to our system
- Develop a rapid response team and a local lab to test corrections

Implementation timeline (Assuming Q3 Start)



M2026-30 authorizes RFP development and launches outreach efforts

Design

- Authorization to advance all work necessary for a fare gates pilot
- Provide an assessment of pilot implementation and criteria for adding gates to further stations
- Include Fare Gates into all ST3 Link station designs

- Stations to be designed
- ADA and Accessible Design Strategies
- Upgrading Fare Media

Engagement and partnerships will inform our design and technology choices as we begin design work.

Evaluation framework

- Clear metrics that capture critical issues

Staffing Model (including Fare Ambassadors)

- Ensure front line passenger-facing support as riders adjust to fare gates

Youth Fare Strategies

- Provide easy and automated ways to get fare media in the hands of youth
- Identify partnership opportunities for youth fare distribution

ORCA Lift and Reduced Fare Strategies

- Determine how to increase reduced fare enrollment by removing barriers, streamlining processes, identify partnership opportunities
- Extend Sound Transit’s participation in the Subsidized Annual Pass program (proposed action today)

Evaluation approach

Regular reporting to REO during the pilot

- Before gates are activated, we will continue accumulating data to set baseline statistics.

Pilot Program Metrics



Fare recovery, ridership, operating expenses, and ROI



Safety and employee experience improvements for frontline staff



Maintenance / facilities impacts



Passenger experience and accessibility findings



Youth and ORCA Lift enrollment

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Establishing Fare-Compliance baseline at gated stations

>85% of riders are coming in and out of the 14 proposed gated stations

Bi-directional Gates will improve compliance system-wide and at non-gated stations

Included fare media:

- ORCA and open payment taps
- Paper tickets purchased from TVMs
- TransitGo mobile tickets

Sample month: May 2026 data

	APCs Count	Total Fare Media	% of Boardings with Fare Media	% Adult Fare Media	% Reduced Fare* Media	% Youth Fare Media
Proposed fare gate pilot stations	2,881,824	1,781,918	62%	89%	10%	1%
Non-gated stations	1,486,936	802,559	54%	85%	14%	1%

*LIFT & Seniors / Disabled

% boardings with fare media = total passengers using valid fare payment methods / overall ridership recorded by Automatic Passenger Counters (APCs).

Youth 18 and under ride for free and are in compliance; data collection only captures riders who use fare media.

Staffing model

Staffing model development

Leverage the Fare Ambassador program's critical passenger-facing support functions:

- Fare ambassadors assist fare gate operations while **increasing share of other critical front-line support activities.**

Determining the optimal maintenance strategy and maintenance staffing.

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Youth fare media and ORCA lift enrollment

Leveraging existing efforts to expand distribution and education prior to fare gate implementation.

Youth: Multi-layered youth access approach for 2026-2027

- Develop personas to understand range of access needs.
- Test assumptions with youth-serving organizations.
- Determine feasibility of direct issuance to mobile devices.
- Pursue partnerships with schools to trial approaches.

ORCA Lift: 2026-2027 Collaboration with Partners

Baseline:

- 91K ORCA Lift
- 11K annual subsidized pass holders
- Identify ways to streamline and auto-enroll eligible passengers.
- Identify feasibility of direct issuance of fare media

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Today's recommendation

Action Requested

- **Approval of Motion No. M2026-30, advancing a fare gates pilot and incorporation of fare gates into ST3 station designs.**

Budget Information

- \$6 million will be included in the 2027 proposed Budget and TIP to advance design, procurement, and implementation planning for the pilot project.
- Estimated project cost of \$87 million, to be requested as part of future Board actions.

Next Steps

- **Staff initiate task order to advance design and procurement documents**
- **Develop equitable engagement strategies** to increase Orca Lift and Youth Fare Media enrollment, ensure passenger readiness
- Continue to update REO on Fare Engagement program and compliance metrics

Thank you.



 *soundtransit.org*

