

# *Fare Gate Pilot*

## *Results and Recommendations from Retrofit Implementation Study*

*Executive Committee*

*6/4/2026*

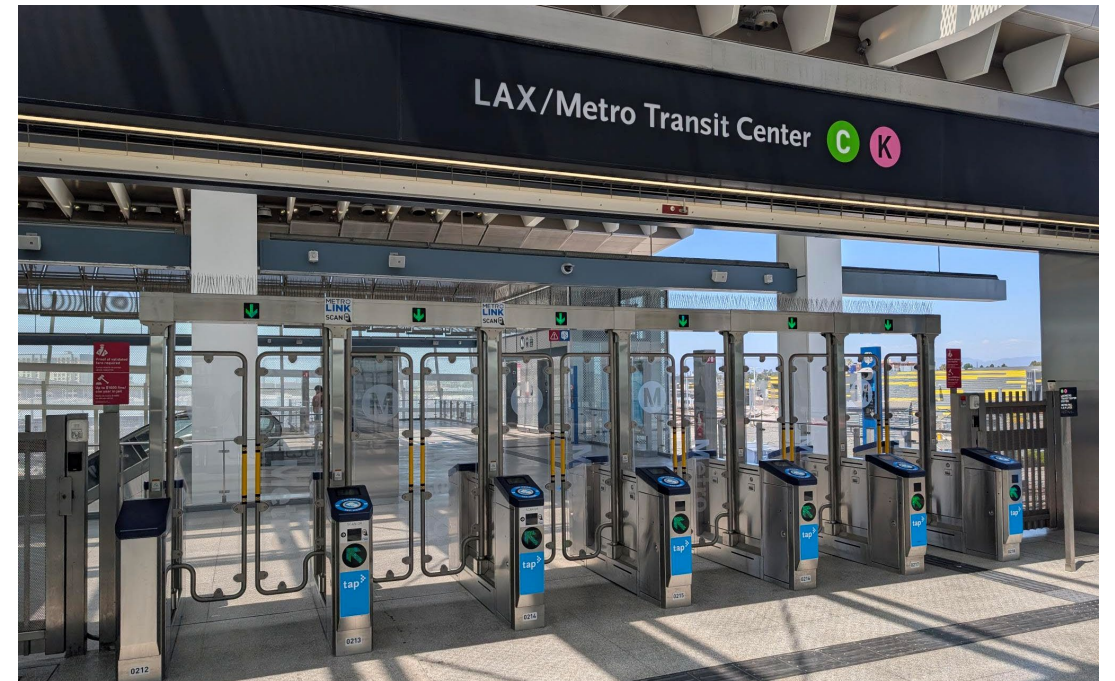


# Why we are here today

*Respond to Board direction in M2025-64 to conduct a fare gate retrofit study and develop a recommended pilot implementation strategy.*

1. **Share findings from fare gates retrofit study**, including initial list of recommended pilot stations and results from a return on investment analysis.
2. **Discuss important considerations** for fare gate pilot implementation.
3. **Review pilot implementation metrics, strategy, and next steps.**

*M2025-64 directs the CEO to report to the Board on the findings of a Fare Gate Retrofit Implementation Study to inform future decisions regarding fare gate deployment across the system.*



# Sound Transit's fare compliance program evolution

## From Enforcement to Engagement

### Compliance Staffing

Fare Enforcement program begins

Inequitable impacts found from enforcement study

Fare Engagement pilot initiated; Fare Ambassadors introduced system-wide

May 28 Board direction R2026-11

Advance the fare gates pilot and make a recommendation about whether, how, and when to implement fare gates on the Link light rail system

We are here



“Barrier Free” system established R2009-02

“Barrier Free” requirement removed R2022-07

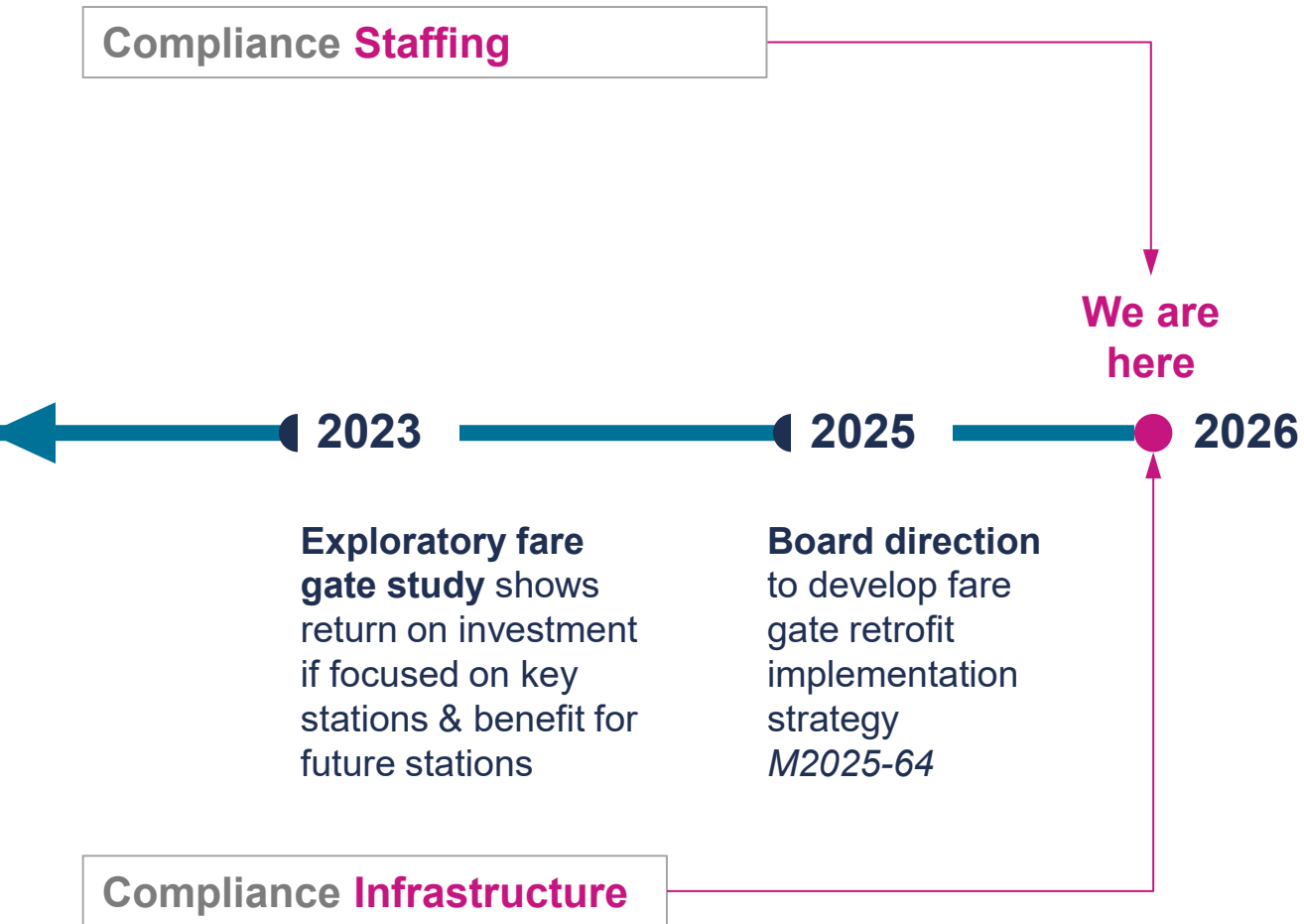
Exploratory fare gate study shows return on investment if focused on key stations & benefit for future stations

Board direction to develop fare gate retrofit implementation strategy M2025-64

### Compliance Infrastructure

# Sound Transit's fare compliance program evolution

## From Enforcement to Engagement

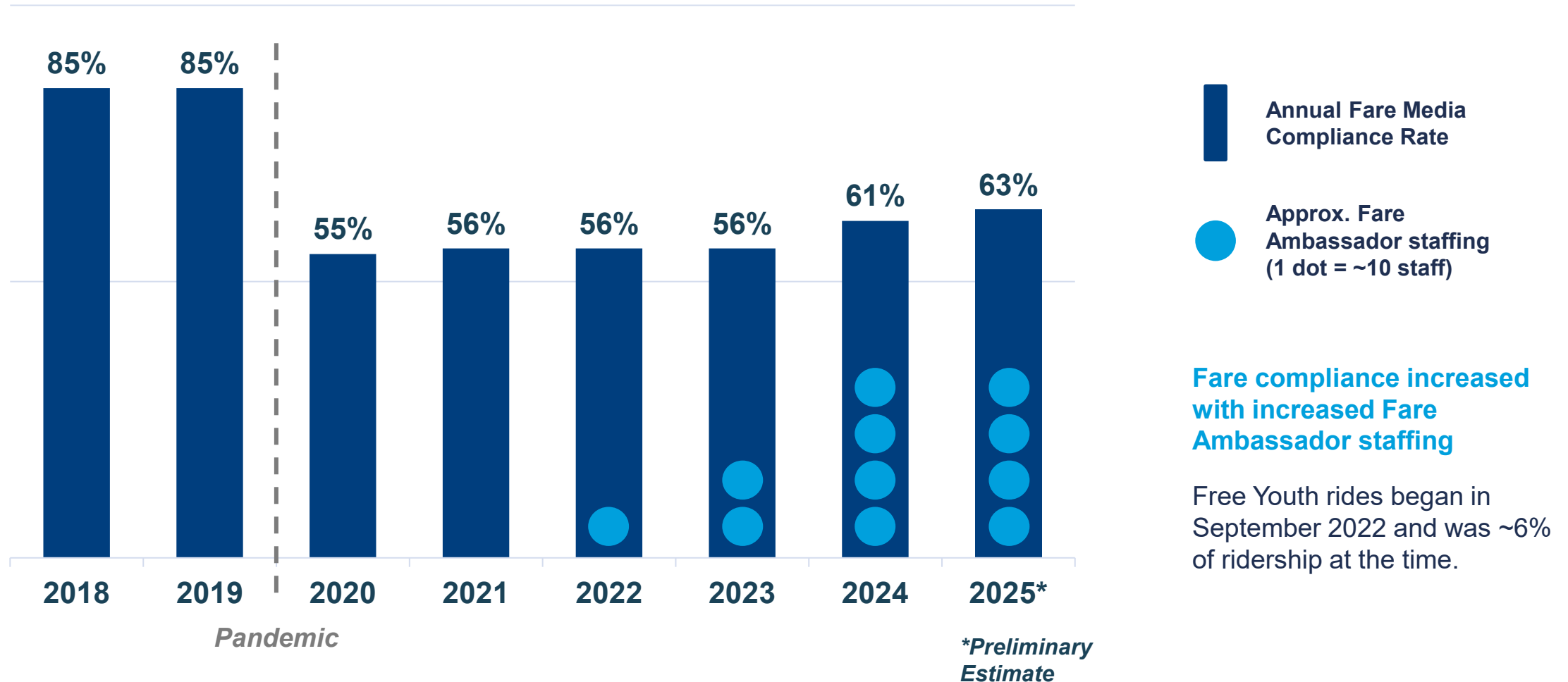


**Fare Engagement program** continues to shift staffing focus from enforcement to education, customer service, and compliance.

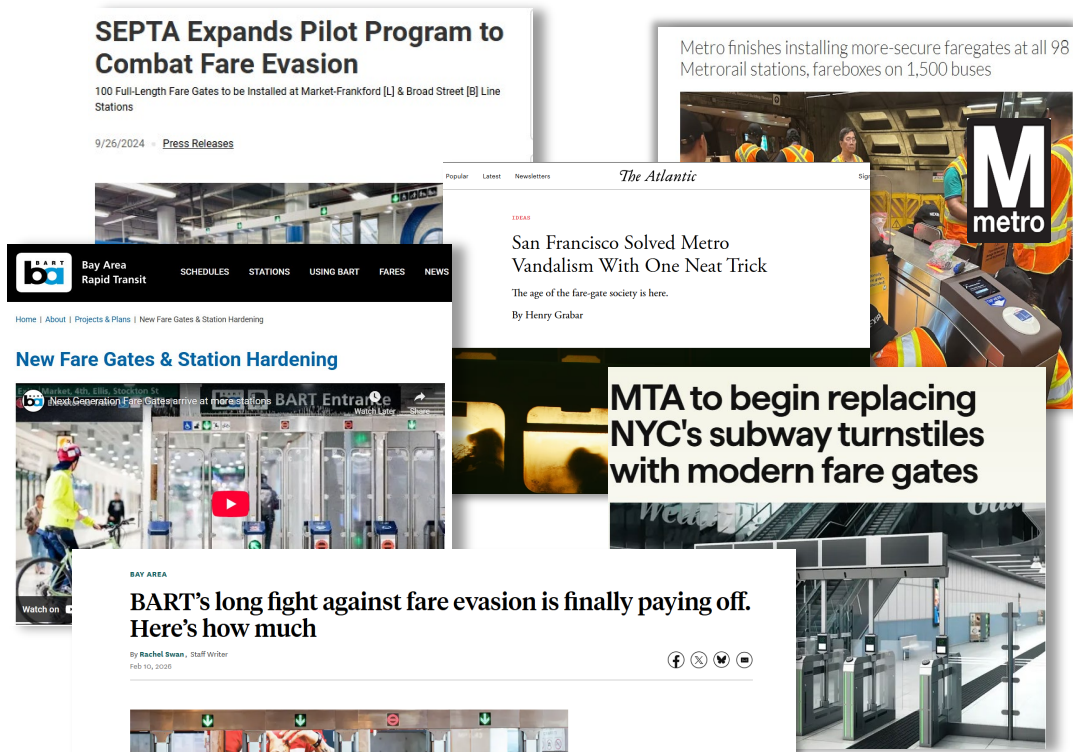
**Fare gate retrofit pilot** further develops compliance infrastructure to enable passengers to “ride right,” supported by Fare Engagement.

- **May 28 Board direction (R2026-11)** Advance the fare gates pilot and make a recommendation about whether, how, and when to implement fare gates on the Link light rail system

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



# Peer agencies have identified benefits to fare gate implementation



*Fare gate implementation follows industry best practices*



**Fare gates improve fare recovery by ensuring payment through design.**



**Better passenger experience**

- Increased perception of safety and cleanliness
- Clearer wayfinding
- Consistency with other systems
- Metering and crowd control for events



**Reduced fare compliance-related conflicts with front-line staff**



**Improved ridership data collection to better serve passenger needs**



**Retrofitting provides a good ROI, and the return is even higher if incorporated into stations in design/planning stage**

# 2025-2026 Retrofit Study

2025-2026 Retrofit Study conducted by WSP as directed by **M2025-64** evaluated **all stations** across the **current** system for fare gate implementation to understand the **return on investment for a pilot project**.

Factors considered at each station:



**Ridership** (both origin and destination)



**Operational considerations** (special events, intermodal transfers)



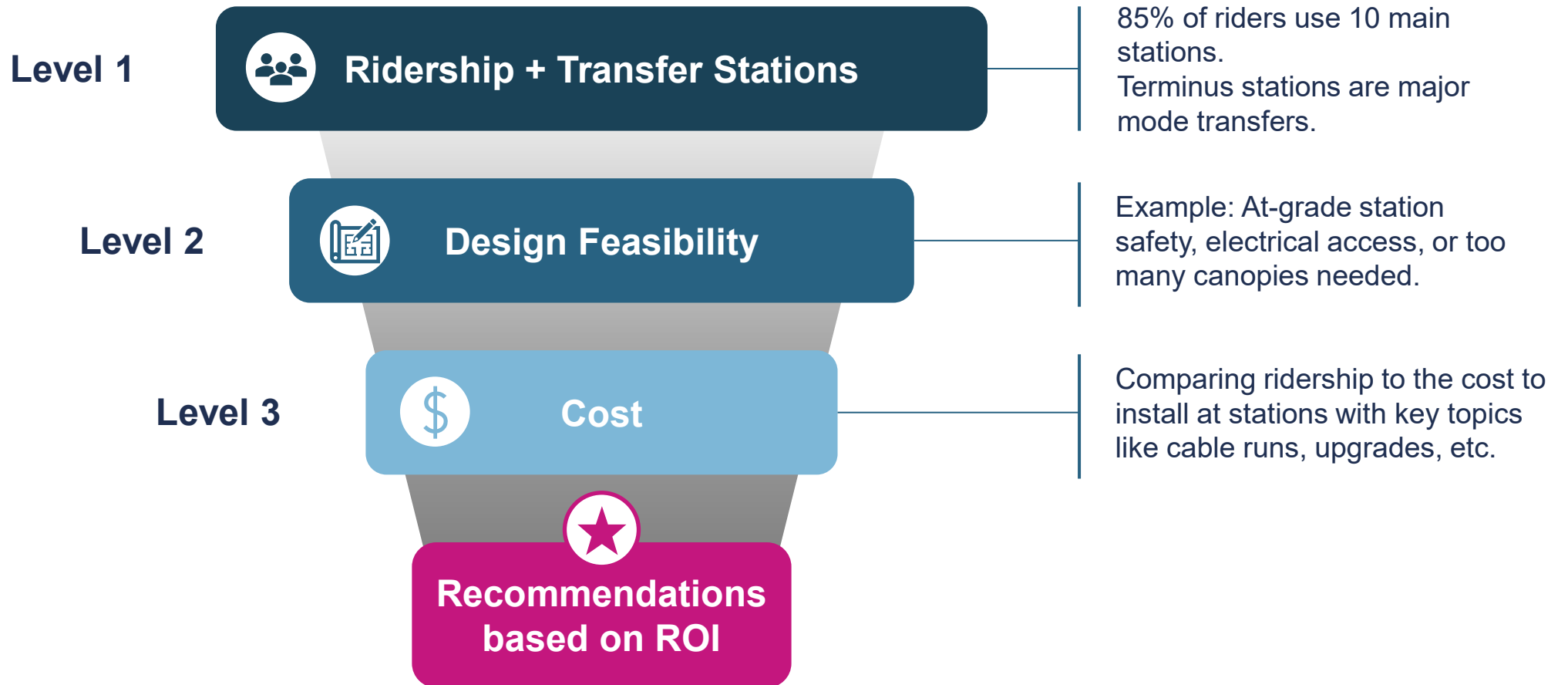
Station **complexity** and estimated implementation **costs**



Effects on **fare engagement operations**



The study used a process to identify an initial set of stations that maximize system benefit by balancing ridership vs. cost



# Recommended pilot stations

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 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.

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



# Study findings are positive and illustrate next steps



## Financial Findings

- Improved revenue system-wide
- Incorporation in all ST3 stations provides clearest positive outcome (re-evaluate as part of pilot with little-to-no risk).
- 2-5 Years+ Return on Investment based on proposed pilot stations
- **\$30M+ increased net annual revenue** after payback period when compared to current compliance (using low ridership estimates)
- ~\$79.3M-\$88.2M estimated construction costs



## User-friendly pilot next steps & assumptions

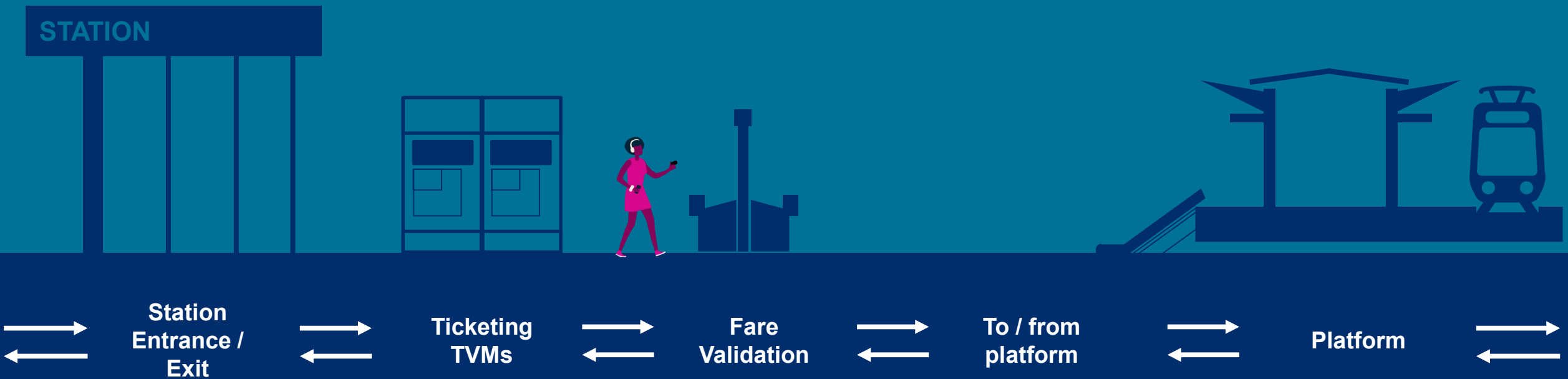
- Refine design requirements based on lessons learned from other systems and engagement
- Release design-build request for proposals
- Install fare gates/Ticket Vending Machines/Assistance Phones
- Use Fare Ambassadors to provide fare gate assistance/station ambassadorship (no job elimination)



## Topics for implementation & further refinement

- Deep engagement with communities based on Racial Equity Toolkit (RET) analysis
- Fare media integration (QR codes vs. tap media)
- Youth fares
- Staffing strategy
- Evaluation framework

# *How will faregates work?*



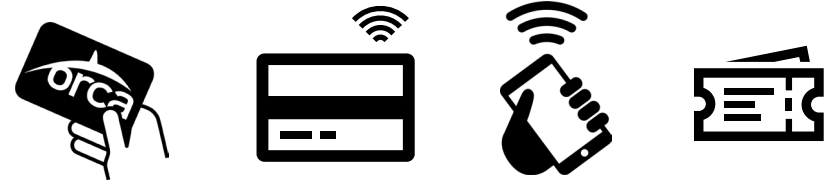
# Passenger Experience Journey

## Current Journey

### STEP 1

Boarding at a non-gated station  
(current state)

Current fare payment options include:



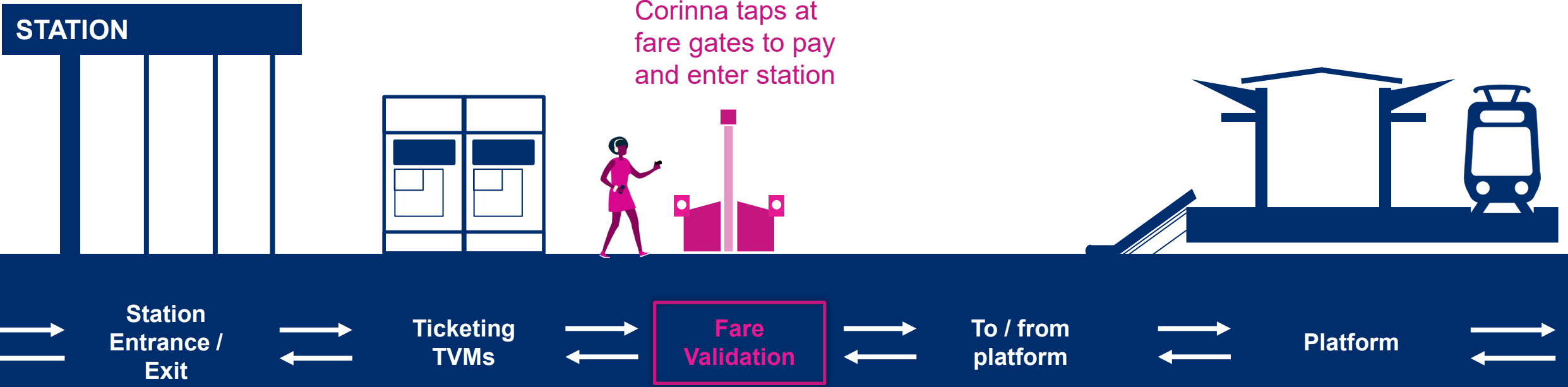
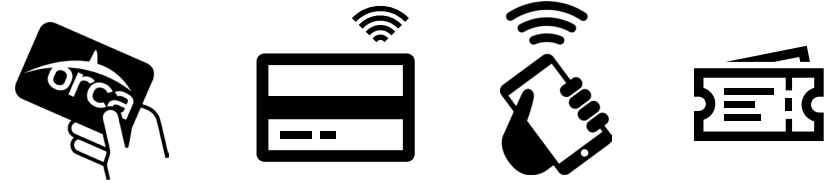
# Passenger Experience Journey

## Proposed Journey

### STEP 1

### Boarding at a fare-gated station

Current fare payment options include:



# Passenger Experience Journey

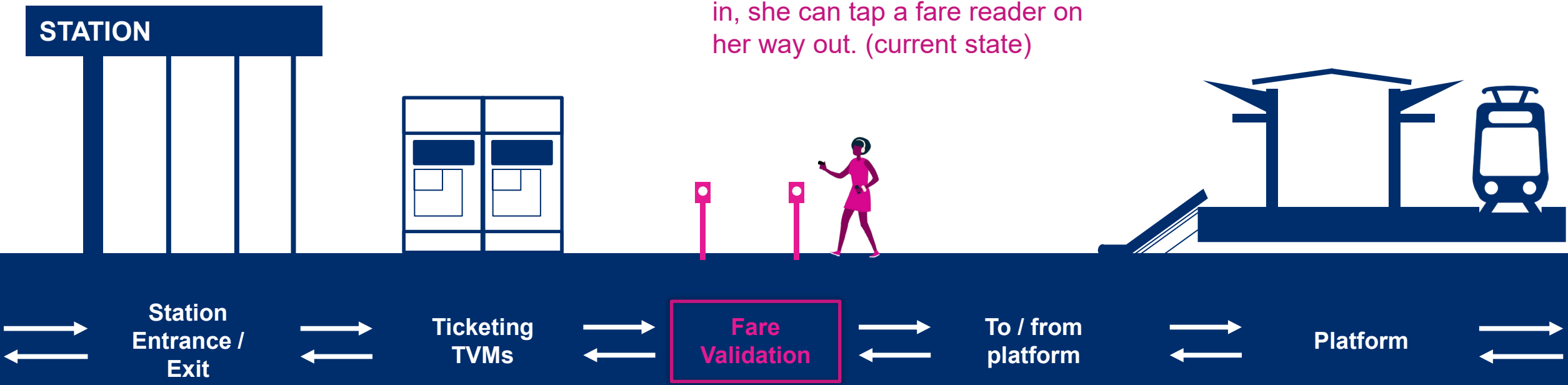
## Current Journey

### STEP 2

### Exiting at a non-gated station (current state)

Corinna exits station through a fare paid zone.

If she forgot to pay on her way in, she can tap a fare reader on her way out. (current state)



# Passenger Experience Journey

## Proposed Journey

### STEP 2\*

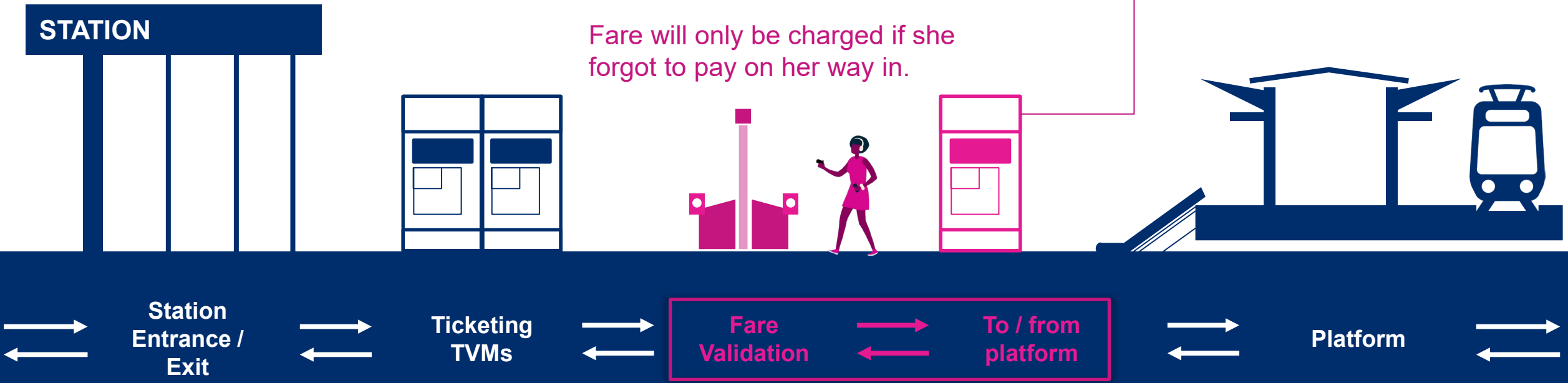
## Exiting at a fare-gated station

\*Pilot recommendation: tap to exit.  
Free exit options are also feasible.

Corinna exits station through a fare gate by tapping the same payment method she used on her way in.

Fare will only be charged if she forgot to pay on her way in.

Ticket vending machines will be available within the fare paid zone of fare gated stations.



# Passenger Experience Journey

## Implementation Considerations

Staffing Model (including Fare Ambassadors)

ADA and Accessible Design Strategies

ORCA Lift and Reduced Fare Strategies

Upgrading Fare Media

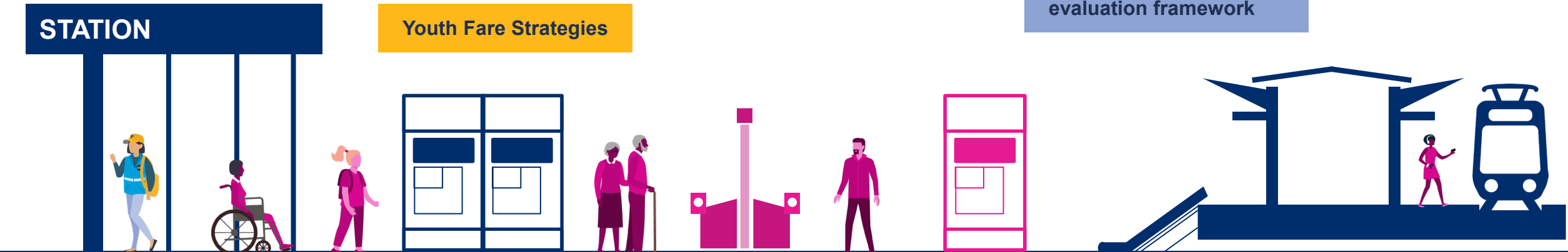
Each consideration has a mitigation strategy that will be used in the pilot project

Pilot project implementation includes **continued cross-departmental collaboration to finalize and monitor strategies to address these items.**

Youth Fare Strategies

Engagement, equity, and evaluation framework

STATION



Station Entrance / Exit

Ticketing TVMs

Fare Validation

To / from platform

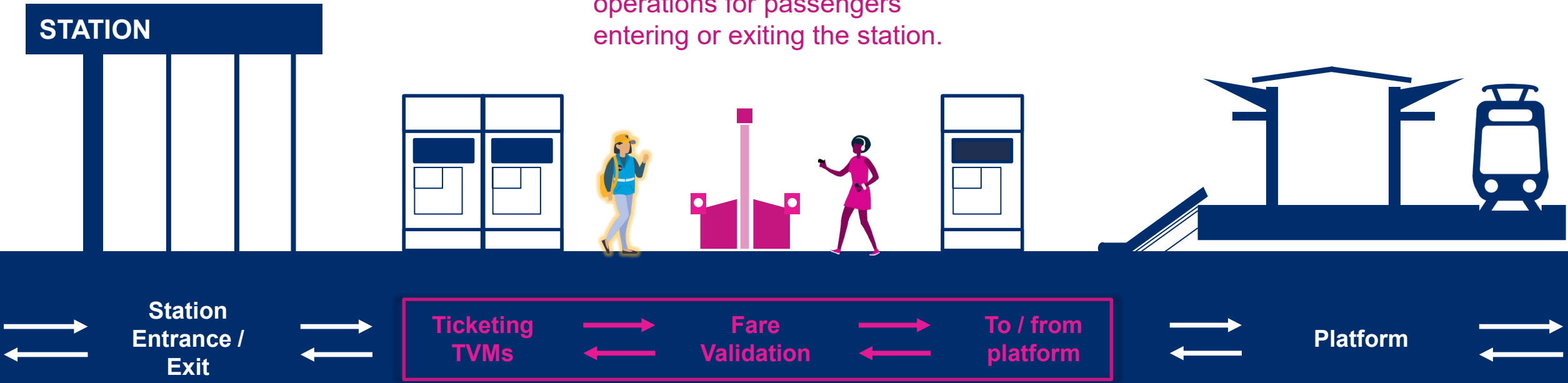
Platform

# Passenger Experience Journey

## Staffing Model

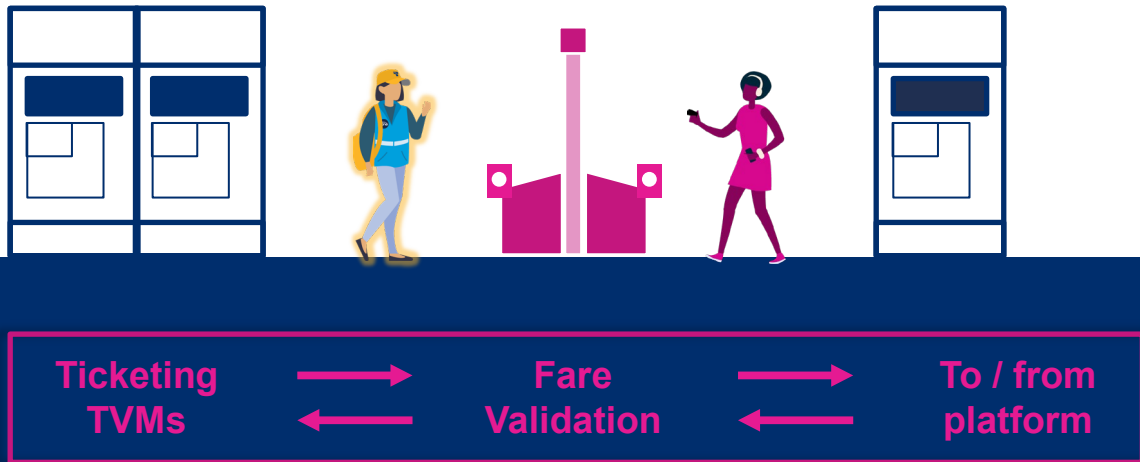
Staff will be part of the standard passenger experience at fare gated stations.

Staff can assist with ticket purchases and fare gate operations for passengers entering or exiting the station.



*Fare gating provides an operational opportunity*

Better leveraging the Fare Ambassador program's **critical passenger-facing support**



% of work hours



## FARE COMPLIANCE

- Fare education
- New inspection methods (platform inspections, mobile validators)
- Inspections & citations at ungated stations

~44%



## PASSENGER SERVICE

- System navigation (incl. accessibility)
- Disruption support
- Social services connections
- Brand ambassadors

~33%



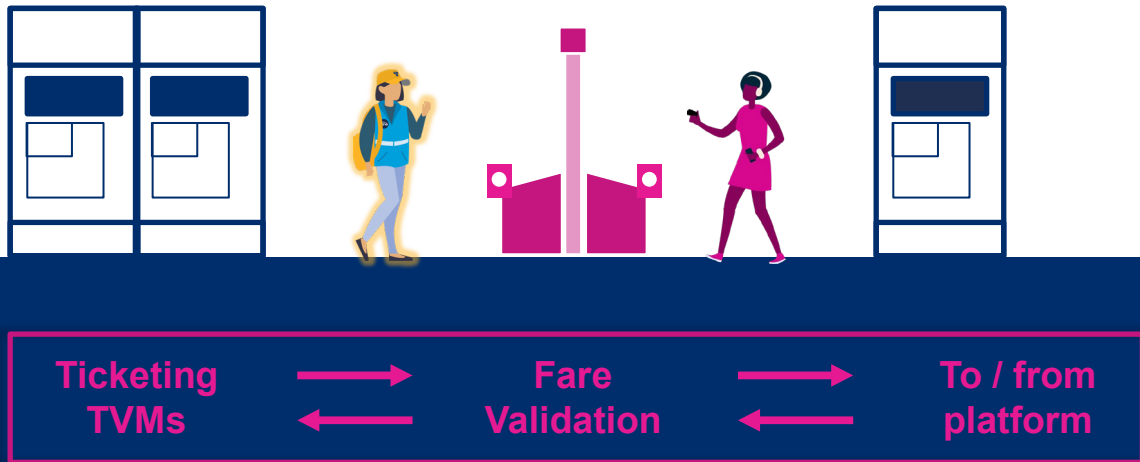
## SAFETY / AWARENESS

- Facilities & safety reporting
- Misbehavior deterrence
- Informal stakeholder coordination

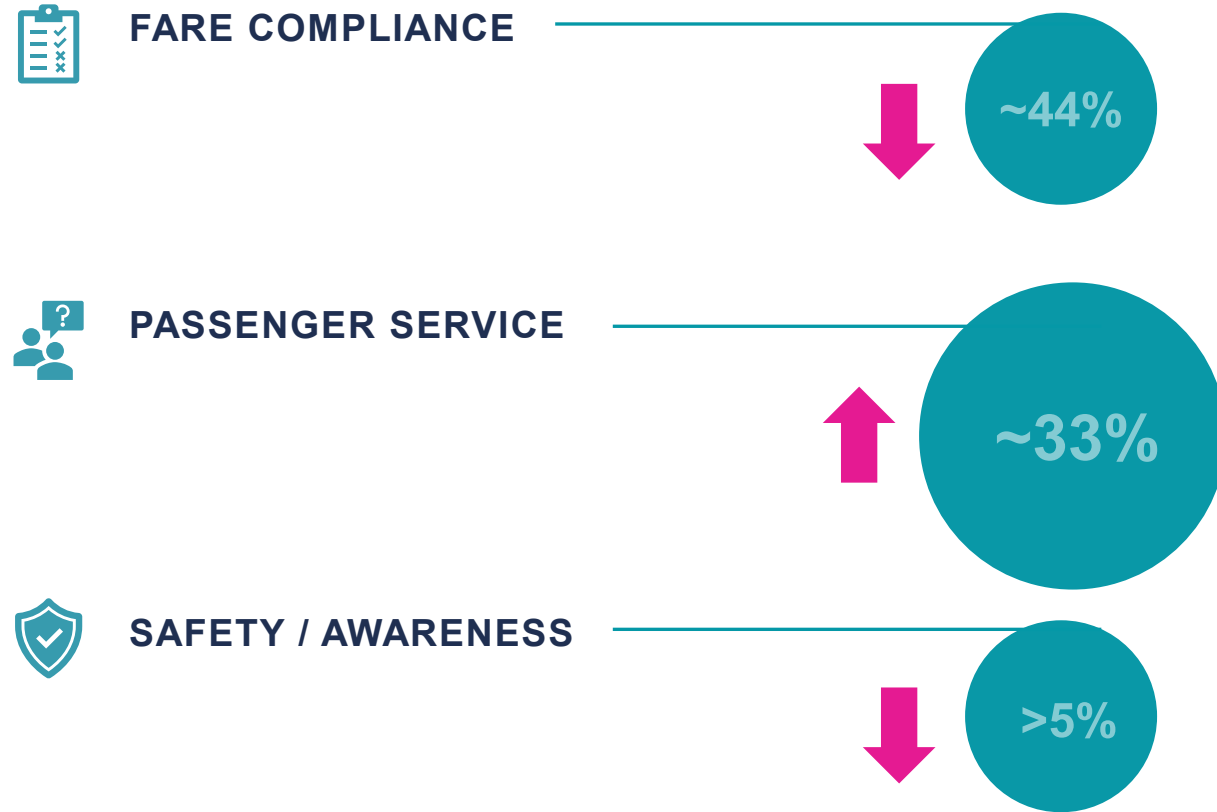
>5%

## Proposed Future State

Fare ambassadors assist fare gate operations while **increasing share of other critical front-line support activities** (no proposed staffing reduction)



% of work hours



Expected change with fare gate implementation

# Passenger Experience Journey

## ADA / Accessibility Considerations

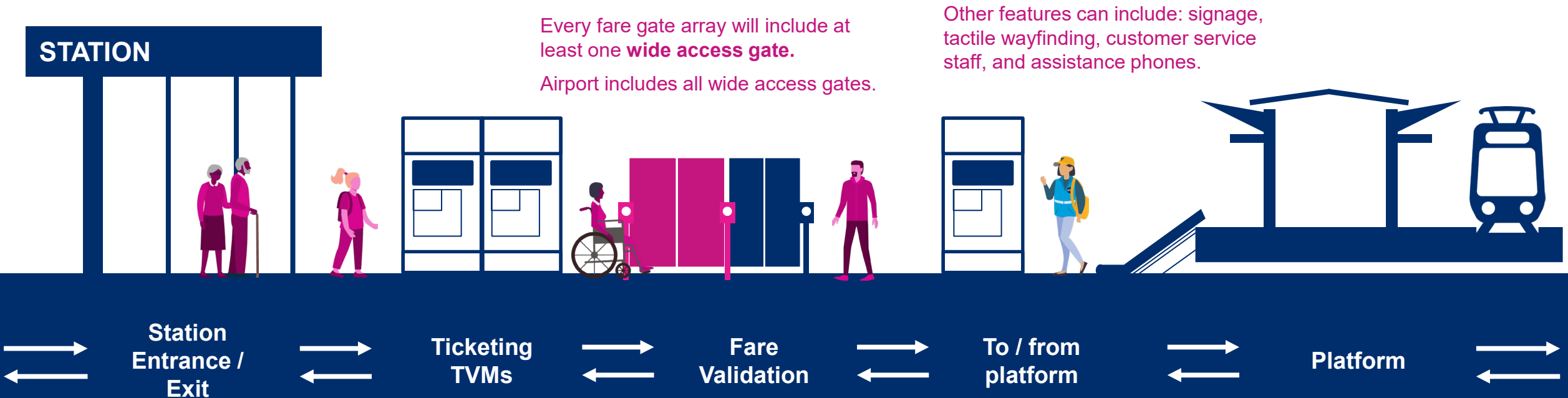
### ADA / accessibility considerations

Many transit systems throughout the United States have successfully implemented fare gates that address a wide variety of passenger accessibility needs:

- Mobility differences and rollers (bikes, wheelchairs, etc.)
- Sensory and neurological differences
- Passengers with luggage or strollers
- Other passenger needs

### NEXT STEPS:

1. On-going and consistent **in-depth collaboration with local accessibility expertise.**
2. Incorporate best practices from peer agencies for retrofits and new design standards



# Passenger Experience Journey

## Youth Fares

**NEXT STEP:**  
Continue expanding youth ORCA distribution and public education

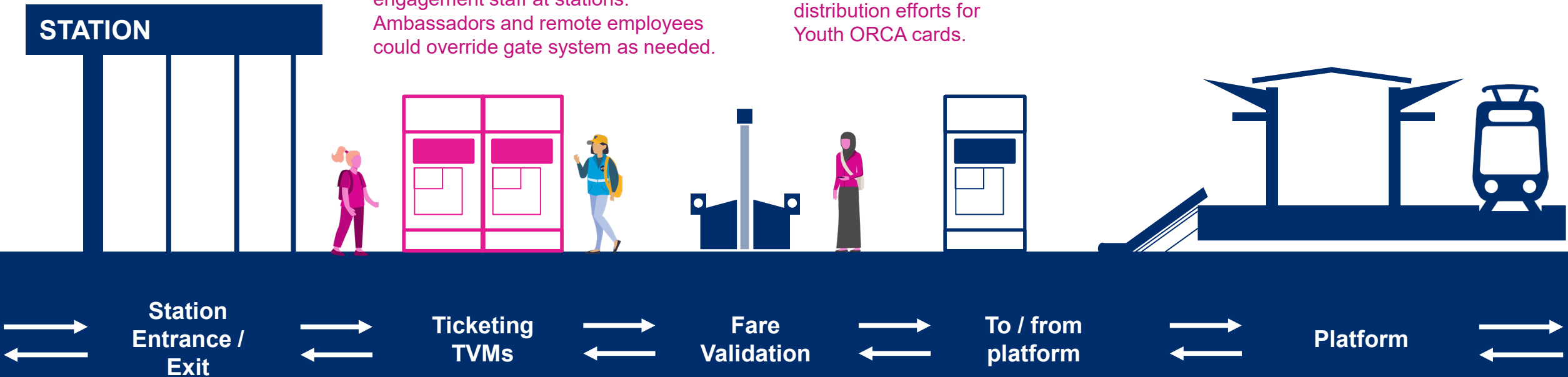
### Youth fares

Youth under 19 years old currently ride the ORCA public transit system for free, using Youth ORCA cards, student IDs, or the honor system.

With fare gate implementation, **Youth ORCA cards will become the primary method** for navigating through fare gates.

Incorporate support from fare engagement staff at stations. Ambassadors and remote employees could override gate system as needed.

Continue to expand distribution efforts for Youth ORCA cards.



# Passenger Experience Journey

## ORCA Lift and Reduced Fares

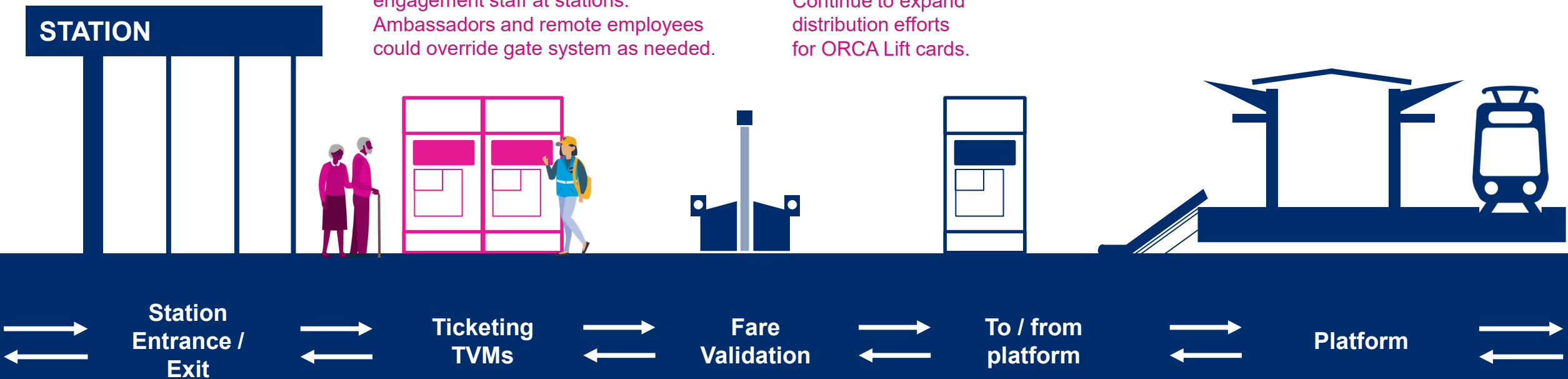
**NEXT STEP:**  
Continue expanding ORCA Lift distribution and public education

### ORCA Lift and Reduced Fares

ORCA Lift is part of our free and reduced fare program.  
If you have an ORCA Lift pass you will be able to access the gate.

Incorporate support from fare engagement staff at stations. Ambassadors and remote employees could override gate system as needed.

Continue to expand distribution efforts for ORCA Lift cards.



# Passenger Experience Journey

## Media Upgrades

### Passengers without ORCA Cards

#### Upgrading fare media and TVMs

Current ticket-vending machines (TVMs) vend ORCA cards, but paper tickets would require upgrades to be compatible with fare gate infrastructure.

Fare gates **will be compatible with open payment.** The only passengers this would impact are those without tap payment options (e.g., paying cash) who also do not wish to purchase an ORCA card.

**NEXT STEP:**  
Analyze mitigation options and incorporate both or one into the pilot project.

**Suggested mitigation option 2:**  
Modify **TVMs** to print disposable smart card media. (Similar to MARTA, TransLink, and others)

**Suggested mitigation option 3:**  
Make ORCA cards free from TVMs during pilot



#### Engagement Opportunities

- Confer with engagement teams and partners to implement effective fare gate education strategies
- Work with impacted and local community groups to identify and address concerns
- Develop and expand a youth-focused fare engagement strategy, as well as outreach and engagement around

#### Equity Opportunities

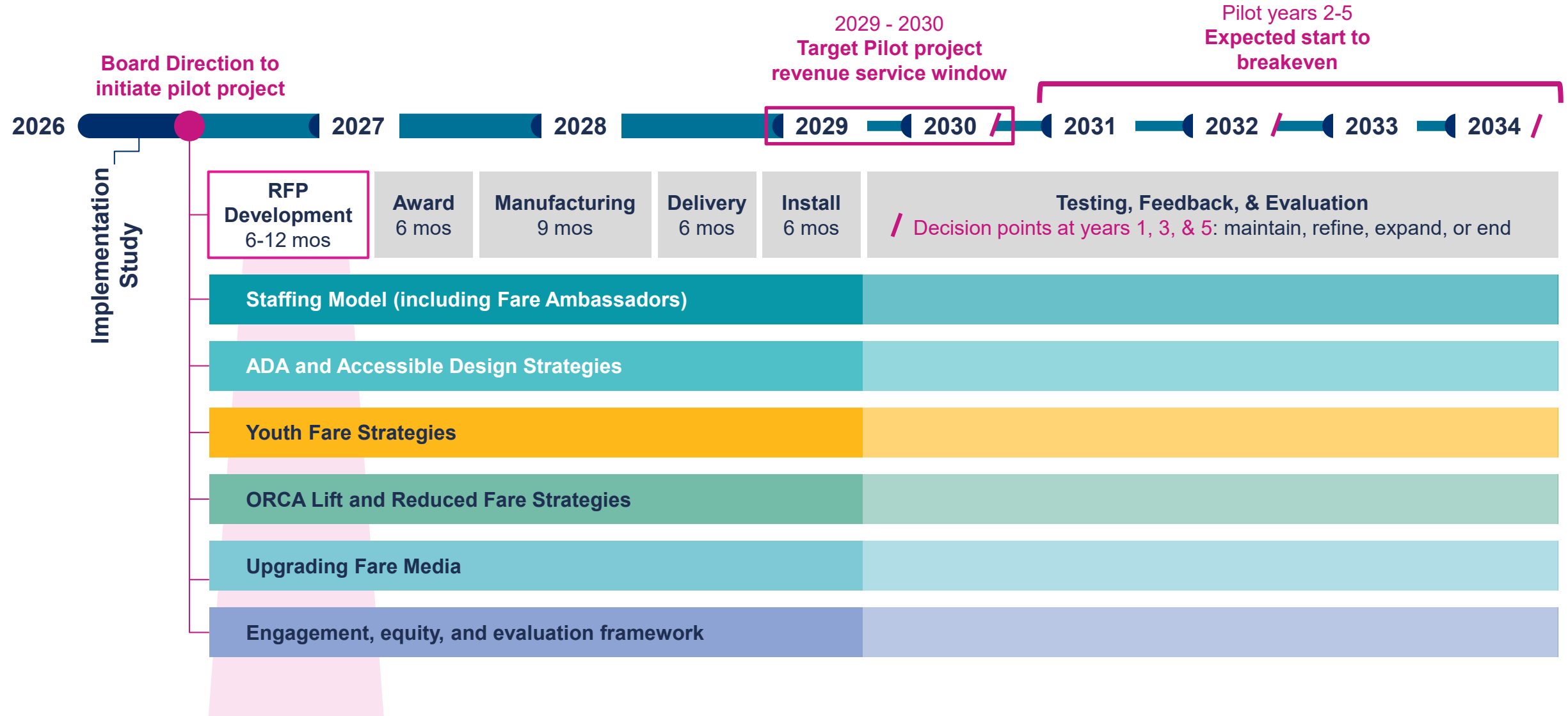
- Review proposed changes using the Racial Equity Tool
- Consult with communities on equity, accessibility, and inclusion concerns and incorporate ideas into design
- Confer with community leaders to identify logical ways to help the community learn about faregates

#### Evaluation Opportunities

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 fare media enrollment**

# Implementation timeline (Assuming Q3 Start)



# Next Steps

Today (June 2026)



## Board Briefing

Overview of draft Fare Gates Pilot report

Q3 2026



## Potential REO/Board Action

- Staff finalize and distribute Fare Gates Pilot report
- **Board decision on authorizing pilot**, and incorporating faregates into ST3 station designs
- Staff initiate task order to advance design and procurement documents

Q4 2026



## Potential Board Action

**Fare gates pilot construction cost in 2027 Budget**

Early 2027



## Potential Board Action

Return to Board with status update on key topics, **RFP selection.**

*Thank you.*



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