



DASH FREE FARES PROGRAM REPORT

MWCOG REGIONAL PUBLIC
TRANSPORTATION SUBCOMMITTEE

FEBRUARY 28, 2023

DASH FREE FARES PROGRAM SUMMARY

- DASH eliminated fare collection in September 2021 as part of the launch of the New DASH Network.
- Funded by DRPT grant and increase in FY22 city subsidy;
- ATC Board adopted Fare Free Framework Policy in September 2021.



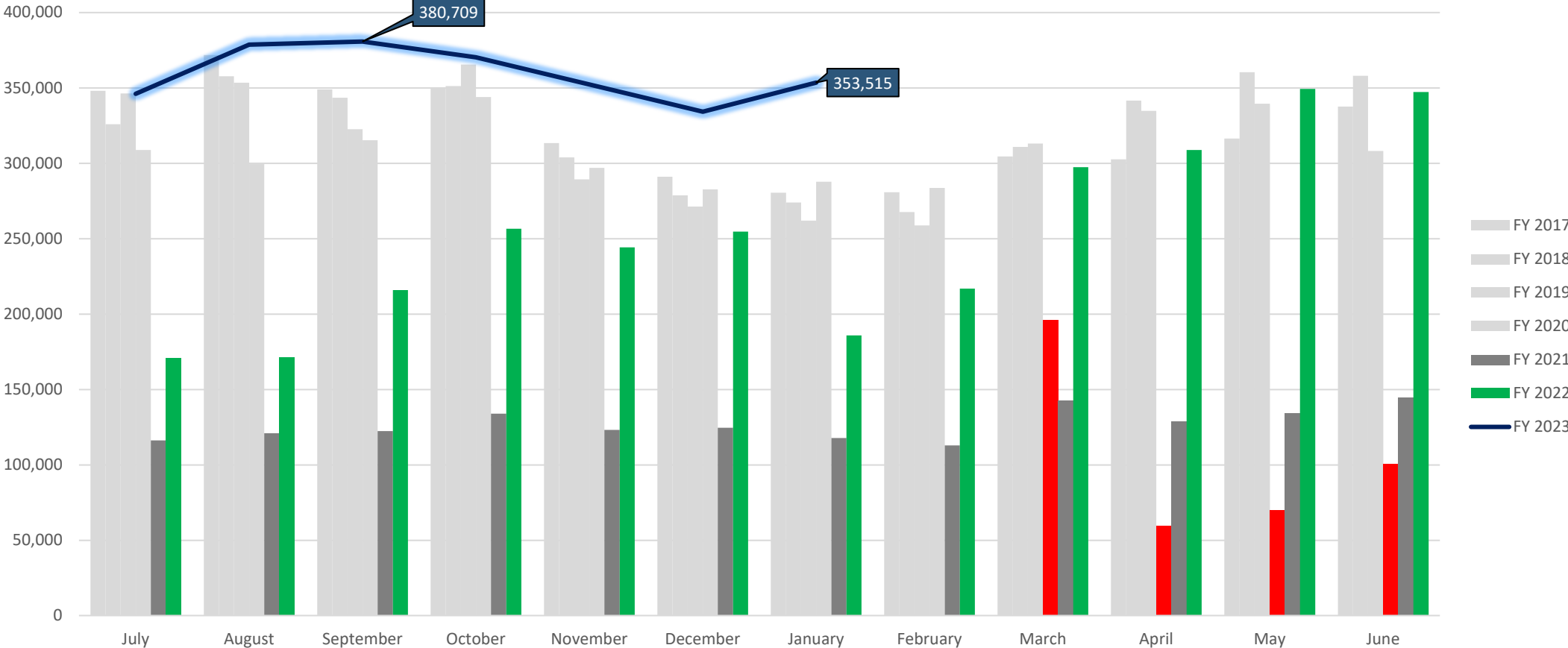
RIDERSHIP

- Average daily ridership has *doubled* in first year of free fares
- 380,000+ boardings in Sept. 2022 were highest since 2015, consistently surpassing pre-pandemic levels.
- Biggest ridership increases seen for middays, eves and weekends.
- Some overcrowding seen on Lines 31, 35 and 36 due to student riders



RIDERSHIP

DASH Total Monthly Ridership (FY2017-FY2023)



RIDERSHIP DATA CHALLENGES

- Loss of Ridership Data on Transfers & Fare Media Types
- Automated Passenger Counters (APC's) are undergoing NTD validation.
- Farebox Equipment



ALL DOOR BOARDING

- Entire DASH system transitioned to all-door boarding in April 2022.
- Some driver discretion is required for which stops are or are not suitable for all-door boarding.
- Generally positive feedback, though manual ridership data collection is more difficult.
- Future analyses of travel speeds to assess time savings.



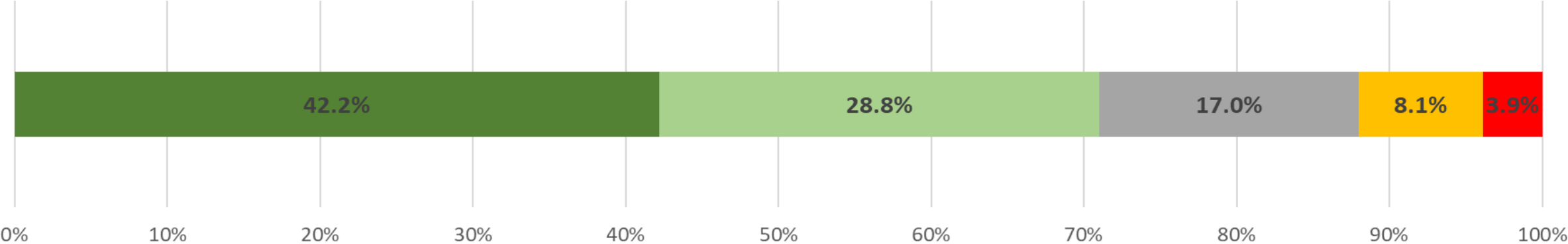
CUSTOMER SURVEY

- 71% of riders indicated that they are riding DASH more because it is free (80% among low-income riders).
- 22% of riders have started using DASH in last year; top factors were increased frequency (52%) and free fares (44%).
- 67% said free fares improved their perception of DASH service.
- Some concerns with overcrowding and feelings of onboard safety/comfort.



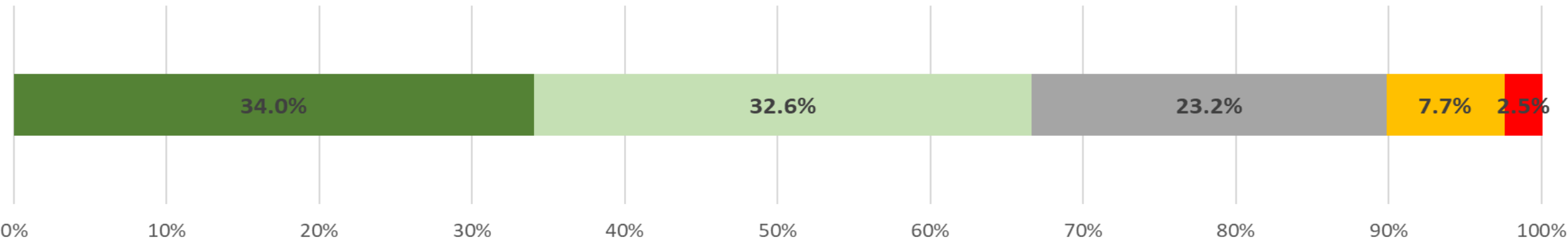
Q4. "I use DASH more often now than I have in the past because it is free to ride."

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral/Not Sure Disagree Strongly Disagree



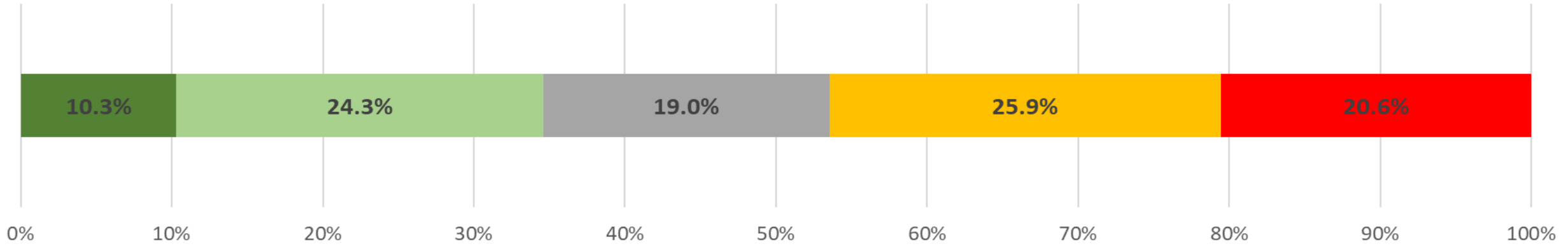
Q9. "Free Fares have improved my overall perception of DASH service."

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral/Not Sure Disagree Strongly Disagree



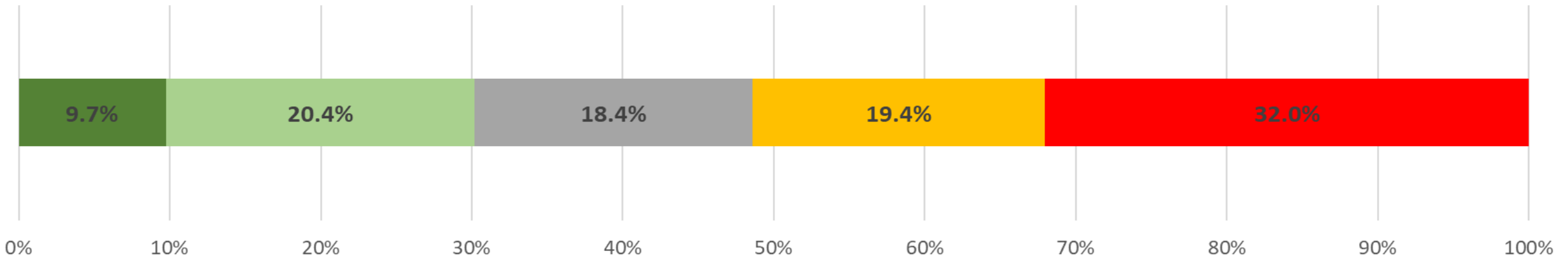
Q7. "My bus is sometimes too crowded because it is free to ride."

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral/Not Sure Disagree Strongly Disagree

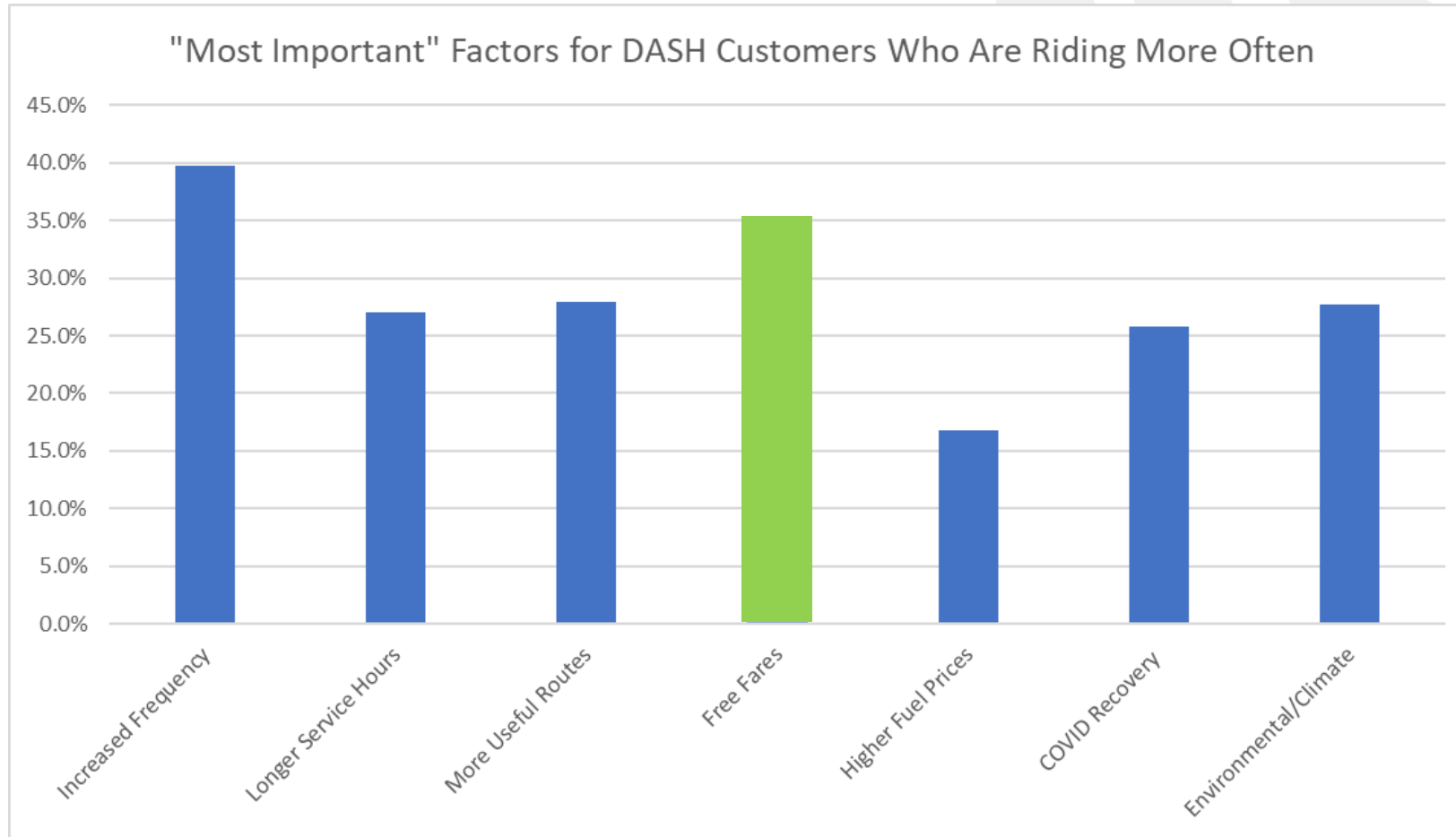


Q8. "Free fares have had a negative impact on my feelings of comfort/safety while riding DASH."

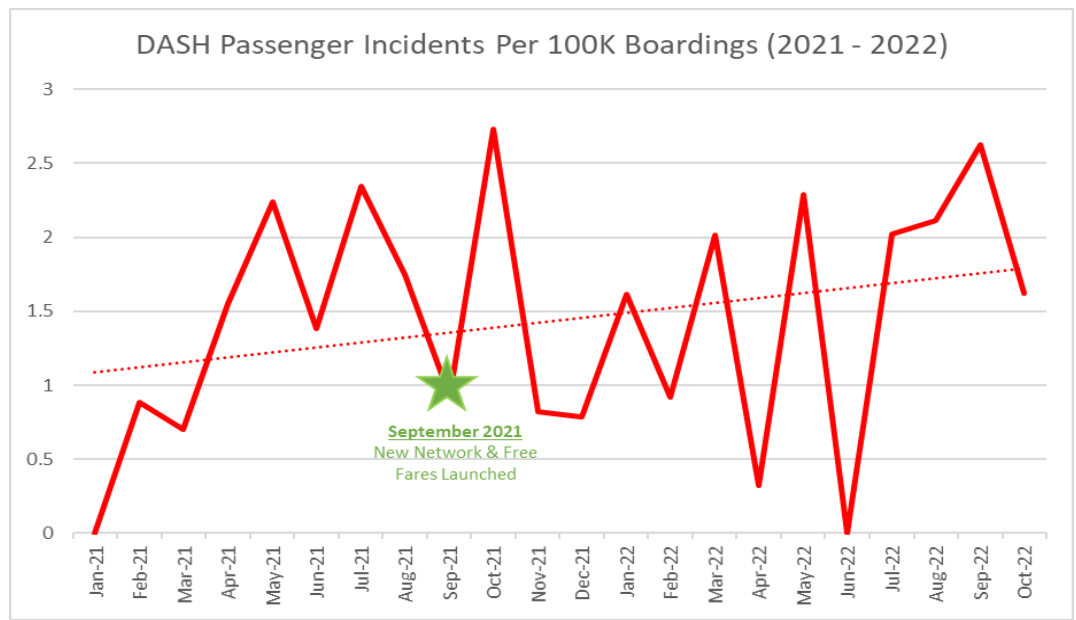
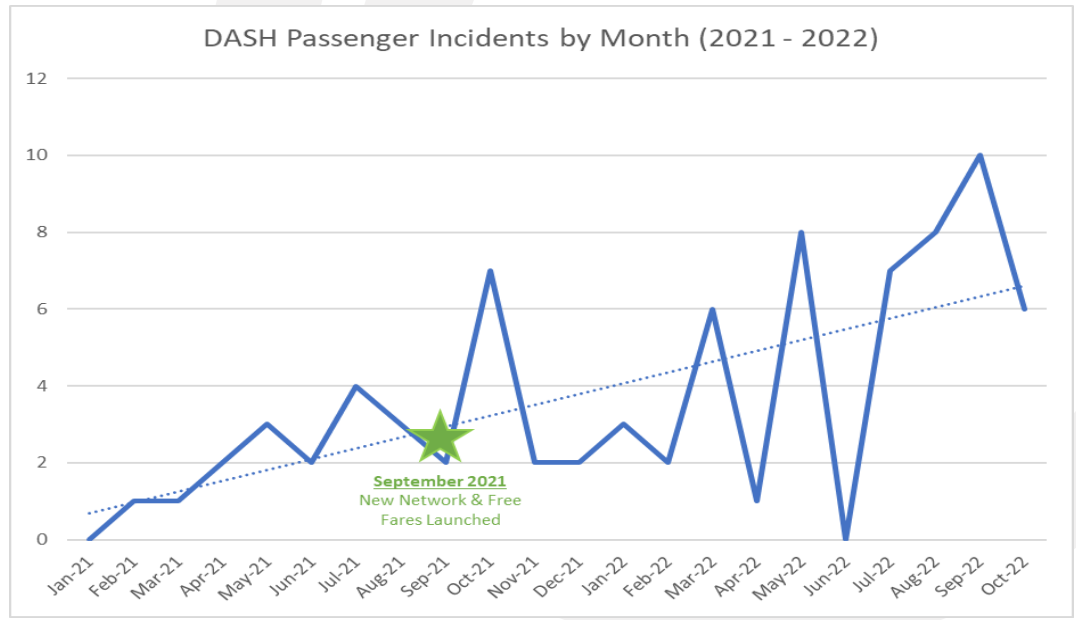
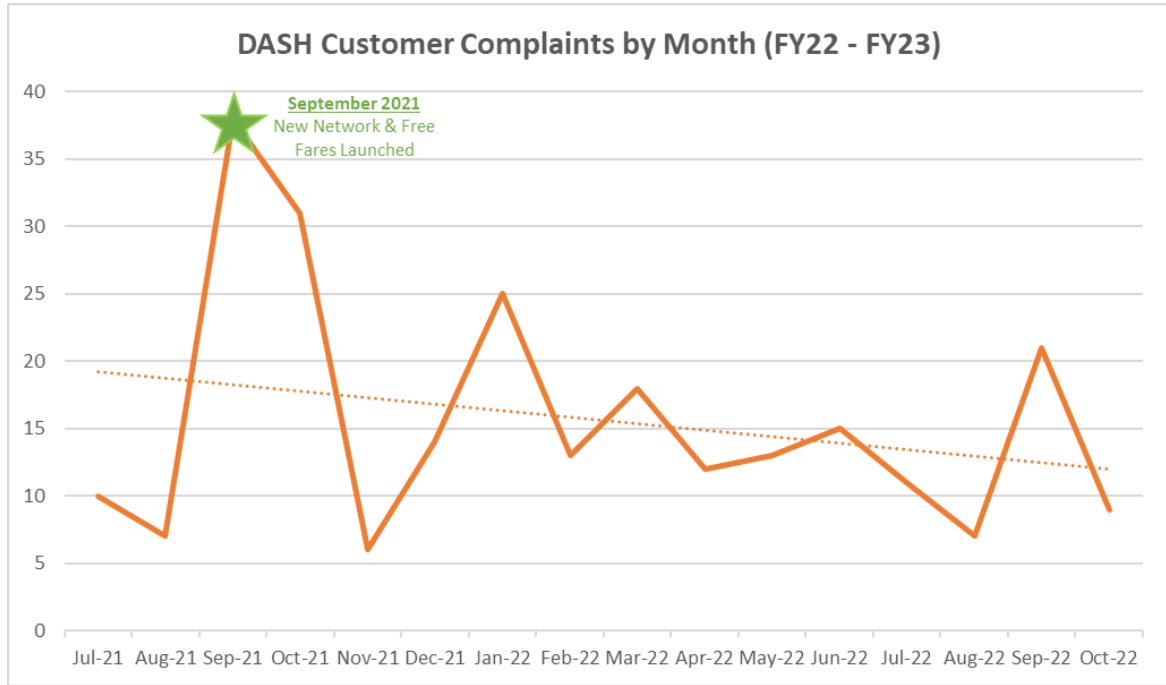
Strongly Agree Agree Neutral/Not Sure Disagree Strongly Disagree



CUSTOMER SURVEY (FALL 2022)

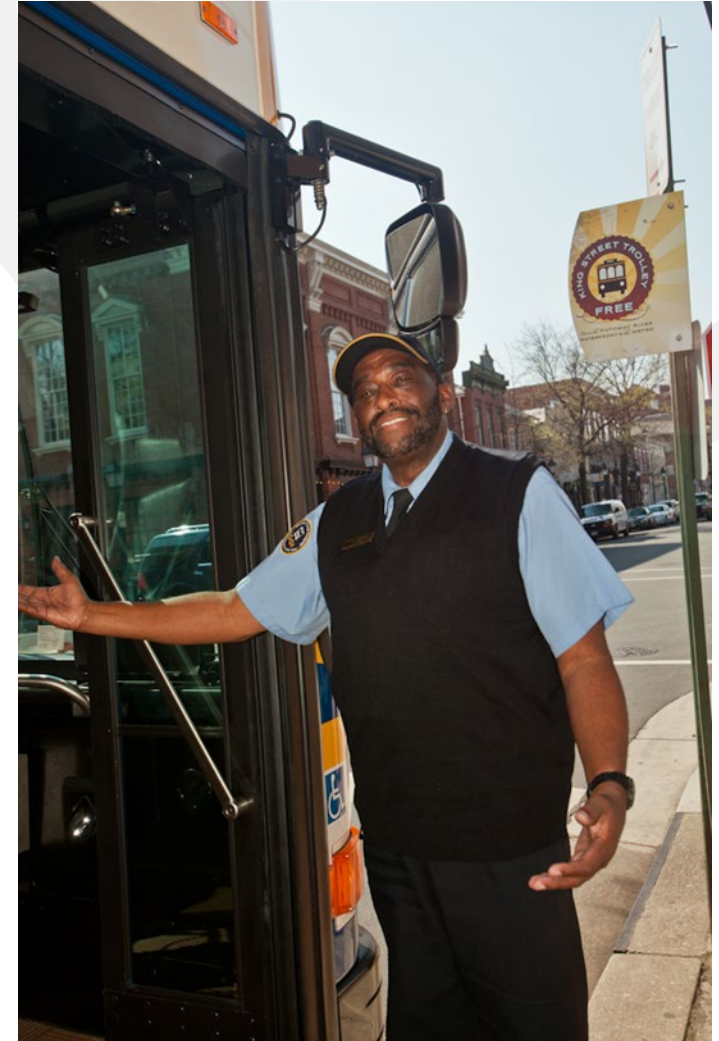


CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS & INCIDENTS



OPERATOR FEEDBACK

- Generally positive with elimination of fare collection responsibilities.
- Operator survey found slight increases in job satisfaction and perceived safety.
- Slight increase in number of incidents with unruly/disruptive passengers due to higher ridership; additional training has been introduced for new operators.
- Manual ridership data counting can be difficult but will be discontinued in 2023.



BUDGETARY IMPACT

- Lost fare revenues in FY22 were offset by increased city subsidy and DRPT grant funding from TRIP program.
- Additional cost savings:
 - Termination of cash collection contract
 - Discontinuation of DASH Bus app
 - Reduced labor for farebox maintenance
 - Annual SmarTrip contribution (Future)
- Cancellation of \$5 million capital project to replace fareboxes on entire bus fleet.



FINDINGS & CONCLUSIONS

- Free fares have achieved goals of increasing ridership, promoting new network and helping low-income riders.
- Historic ridership growth in first year; now exceeding pre-COVID ridership. Some issues with overcrowding particularly with more students riding.
- Positive customer feedback from survey responses; free fares are major factor in ridership growth, particularly for low-income riders.
- Generally positive feedback from operators, however, minor increase in negative passenger incidents due to ridership growth.
- Grant awards and other cost savings and offset budget impacts in FY22.



QUESTIONS / DISCUSSION?

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