



COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

1600 PACIFIC HIGHWAY, ROOM 335, SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA 92101-2470

AGENDA ITEM

DATE: February 7, 2023

TO: Board of Supervisors

SUBJECT

ELEVATING COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE AND OPPORTUNITIES THROUGH YOUTH TRANSPORTATION INVESTMENTS (DISTRICTS: ALL)

OVERVIEW

Youth Opportunity Passes, which are no-cost public transit passes in San Diego County, are an investment in youth that eliminate financial barriers to get to school, early career opportunities, and extracurricular activities. Expanding access to mobility options reduces health disparities by increasing transportation to healthier food, medical care, and vital services. Youth Opportunity Passes have increased access to education and work for all youth, especially for our low-income transit-dependent youth in San Diego County. Not only has no-cost transportation become an investment that tackles social equity and health equity concerns, but it has also become an environmental justice investment. Youth Opportunity Passes expands the use of public transportation which leads to less traffic and reduces greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Investing in young transit riders creates a pipeline of youth becoming adult transit riders. Overall, the Youth Opportunity Pass Pilot Program has become a vital investment for youth development and regional planning for San Diego County. This current pilot program has been a great success with a consistent increase of youth transit ridership throughout various routes in San Diego County. According to the San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG), since the launch of the Youth Opportunity Pass on May 1, 2022, overall ridership among youth has increased by more than 90 percent compared to the baseline of April 2022.

Since 2011, grandmothers, mothers, youth, and community organizers in City Heights have advocated for Youth Opportunity Passes. In 2022, SANDAG in collaboration with the County of San Diego, San Diego Metropolitan Transit System (MTS), and North County Transit District (NCTD) launched a countywide Youth Opportunity Pass pilot program for youth 18 and under. Prior to the launch of the pilot program, youth in San Diego faced limited affordable transportation options. Investments in no-cost transportation have opened other doors for youth in the region. However, this pilot program is set to end in July 2023, and a permanent program that expands to youth ages 24 and under is needed. The expansion to include youth aged 18 to 24 will allow college

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students and youth entering the workforce to have increased access to jobs, internships, healthcare, and other community services.

This board letter includes actions for the Board of Supervisors (Board) to actively work with SANDAG, transit operators, businesses, educational partners, community organizations, and regional agencies to collaboratively seek and apply for funding opportunities supportive of public transportation investments for youth ages 24 and under. Additionally, actions in this board letter include a resolution in support of Youth Opportunity Passes for ages 24 and under for San Diego County. These recommendations will ensure that our Board takes a proactive approach to investing in youth.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

CHAIR NORA VARGAS AND SUPERVISOR NATHAN FLETCHER

1. Find that today's actions are exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to 15378(a) of the State CEQA Guidelines because they have no potential to result in a direct physical change to the environment or an indirect and reasonably foreseeable physical change to the environment.
2. Authorize the Chief Administrative Officer, Health and Human Services Agency, and Land Use and Environment Group to work with Regional Agencies but not limited to the San Diego Association of Governments, San Diego Metropolitan Transit System, North County Transit District, Air Pollution Control District, Regional Task Force on Homelessness and community partners to collaboratively seek and apply for state, federal, or private funding opportunities when available to support public transportation investments for youth ages 24 and under, which can ensure service cuts are not needed to fund the expansion.
3. Adopt proposed Resolution: RESOLUTION IN SUPPORT OF YOUTH OPPORTUNITY PASSES FOR AGES 24 AND UNDER FOR SAN DIEGO COUNTY

EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT

Youth Opportunity Passes eliminate the unique mobility challenges and financial burden youth face getting to school, jobs, extracurricular activities, and other early-career opportunities. Public transportation provides communities with affordable mobility options to get around. According to the San Diego Workforce Partnership, in San Diego County there are 38,000 opportunity youth – young adults ages 16-24 who are not working or in school.¹ Unfortunately, this number is unevenly distributed among our young adults, impacting women and Black, Indigenous, and people of color at higher rates. Expanding transportation access reduces the gap between rich and poor communities. As San Diego County and community-based organizations work to build a local workforce pipeline, removing access barriers is critical to the empowering of youth to access San Diego's high-growth industries. For example, Hispanics represent 34 percent of the San Diego population, yet Hispanics only account for 17 percent of workers in the innovation economy.

¹ *Race, Place and Opportunity - San Diego Workforce Partnership*. https://workforce.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Research_OppYouth_Bifold_2020.pdf

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Eliminating transportation barriers is one strategy to encourage more Hispanic youth to be employed in the innovation economy. Youth Opportunity Passes help address transportation access to assist youth in getting to work, school, and critical internship opportunities.

As the cost of automobiles and gas increases, public transportation is an affordable option that facilitates economic growth, social connectedness, and opportunities for all residents. Youth Opportunity Passes are a direct investment in working families and low-income, transit-dependent youth. Working families often find themselves weighing the options of either taking time off or missing workdays altogether to ensure their children can get to important school or work functions. Youth Opportunity Passes provide an alternative for working families.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT STATEMENT

Youth Opportunity Passes, increase youth ridership on public transportation, which would lead to less traffic and reduced greenhouse gas emissions. Investing in young transit riders would also create a pipeline of youth becoming adult transit riders creating a future with cleaner air, increased mobility options, and economic opportunities. Youth Opportunity Passes increase access to education, extracurricular activities, and early-career opportunities. This helps increase the participation in the workforce which contributes to economic growth.

FISCAL IMPACT

There is no fiscal impact associated with these recommendations. There will be no change in net General Fund cost and no additional staff years at this time.

BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT

Public transportation facilitates economic growth, social connectedness, and opportunities for all residents. Youth Opportunity Passes eliminate financial barriers with going to school, work, internships, and extracurricular activities. The cost of public transit can present a financial burden for youth and working families, limiting career and educational opportunities.

ADVISORY BOARD STATEMENT

N/A

BACKGROUND

Since 2011, community leaders in City Heights have advocated for Youth Opportunity Passes, no-cost transportation for youth in San Diego County. In 2022, the San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG), in collaboration with the County of San Diego (County), San Diego Metropolitan Transit System (MTS), and North County Transit District (NCTD), launched a countywide Youth Opportunity Pass Pilot Program for youth aged 18 and under. Prior to the launch of the pilot program, youth in San Diego faced limited affordable transportation options to get around. Investment in no-cost transportation has opened doors for youth in the region. However, this pilot program is set to end in July 2023 and a permanent program that expands to youth aged 24 and under is needed.

On June 8, 2021 (3), the County Board of Supervisors (Board) allocated \$3 million from American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding to no-cost transportation. On May 10, 2022 (4), the Board

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authorized the County Health and Human Services Agency to pursue an agreement with SANDAG to launch the Youth Opportunity Pass Pilot Program and invested \$1.5 million from ARPA. Additionally, SANDAG allocated \$8 million from the Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement (CMAQ) which was essential in ensuring that our transit agencies did not need to cut service in order to create the Youth Opportunity Pass Pilot Program. The Youth Opportunity Pass Pilot Program began on May 1, 2022, and is a fourteen-month program that provides all youth countywide aged 18 and under with no-cost fares on public transit like buses, the Coaster, the Sprinter, and trolleys throughout San Diego County.

Youth Opportunity Passes have been an investment in youth, eliminating the financial barriers to going to school, early career opportunities, and extracurricular activities. Additionally, expanding access to mobility options reduces health disparities by increasing transportation to healthier food, medical care, and vital services that may not be in walking proximity. Youth Opportunity Passes have increased access to education and work for all youth, especially for our low-income transit-dependent youth in San Diego County. Not only has no-cost transportation become an investment that tackles social equity and health equity concerns, but it has also become an environmental justice investment. Youth Opportunity Passes expand the use of public transportation which leads to less traffic and reduces greenhouse gas emissions. Investing in young transit riders creates a pipeline of youth becoming adult transit riders. Overall, the Youth Opportunity Pass Pilot Program has become a vital investment for youth development, regional planning, and economic development for San Diego County.

This current pilot program has successfully increased youth transit ridership. According to SANDAG, since the launch of the Youth Opportunity Pass, overall ridership among youth has increased by more than 90 percent compared to the baseline of April 2022. Youth ridership increases have been reflected in both MTS and NCTD bus and rail services. Approximately 16,000 youth used a PRONTO account to access MTS and NCTD transit services during the month of April 2022. After the introduction of the Youth Opportunity Pass Pilot Program, over 44,000 youth used transit in September 2022. By eliminating fares to public transit for youth 18 and under, our region has seen an increase in economic opportunities for youth that have access to school, work, and extracurricular activities without worrying about the financial obstacles that previously limited them and their families.

According to the California Department of Education, one in five students in San Diego County does not graduate from high school, and only 52 percent of high school graduates are college ready. In an ever-changing economy and job market, youth need to be able to access career opportunities early on to be competitive and better prepared to enter the workforce. This is particularly important for low-income transit-dependent youth who face transportation access barriers. Expanding Youth Opportunity Passes to include youth 24 and under will support our college students, working youth, and opportunity youth. As studies show a correlation between education and social mobility, it is critical for San Diego County to invest in this age group because the development of youth allows economic prosperity.

Students at UC San Diego pay for a monthly transit pass through yearly student fees. The other colleges and universities in the San Diego region provide their students with a marginally reduced

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monthly transit pass of \$57.60 compared to \$72. The expansion of Youth Opportunity Passes to this crucial demographic will put money back into the pockets of young adults while expanding the opportunities available to them. The cost of public transit can present a financial burden and limit career and educational opportunities in families that are already living paycheck to paycheck. The current Youth Opportunity Pass pilot program has allowed more youth than ever to access the transit system. Furthermore, increased ridership has removed barriers to new career opportunities that would not have been possible otherwise.

It is our hope that the County, along with our partner agencies, will help identify creative new funding opportunities to continue the existing pilot program without needing to cut service, as well as expand to all youth aged 24 and younger. Examples could include the continued use of CMAQ or the identification of funding within the State budget.

The County's partnership with SANDAG, MTS, and NCTD and local community members and organizations has led to a successful pilot program that has increased transportation access for youth and reduced financial barriers to working families and transit-dependent youth. The County has the responsibility to continue investing in our young people through increased mobility options in our region. This board letter is intended to reinforce San Diego County's commitment to work on a permanent Youth Opportunity Pass Pilot Program that expands to youth aged 24 and under.

ENVIRONMENTAL STATEMENT

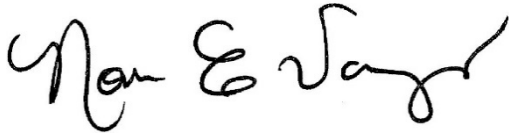
Today's recommended actions are in coordination with other government entities regarding funding and administration of public transportation programs. The goal of that coordination would be future expansion of youth ridership on public transportation, which would lead to less traffic and reduced greenhouse gas emissions. Investing in young transit riders would also create a pipeline of youth becoming adult transit riders creating a future with cleaner air and increased mobility options. Today's recommended actions are not a project subject to California Environmental Quality Act Section 15378(a) because they have no potential to result in a direct physical change to the environment or an indirect and reasonably foreseeable physical change to the environment.

LINKAGE TO THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO STRATEGIC PLAN

Today's proposed action supports the County of San Diego's 2023- 2028 Strategic Plan Initiatives of Sustainability (Economy and Resiliency), Equity (Health Community (Safety, Quality of Life and Partnership) and Economic Opportunity by supporting no-cost public transportation for every youth age 24 and under.

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Respectfully submitted,



CHAIR NORA VARGAS
Supervisor, First District



SUPERVISOR NATHAN FLETCHER
Supervisor, Fourth District

ATTACHMENT(S)
RESOLUTION IN SUPPORT OF YOUTH OPPORTUNITY PASSES AGES 24 AND UNDER FOR SAN DIEGO COUNTY