



# Make Transportation Accessible to All Youth

## Supporting Research

Equalizing access to programs and activities will increase student involvement and engagement, as well as address what now might be considered de facto discrimination. Currently, there are two key issues related to transportation: (1) students who take school buses do not have transportation for “out-of-school-time” which is often critical to address their educational needs and to engage them in programs (sports, music, art, etc.) which develop positive skills and self-esteem; and (2) students who attend alternative learning centers outside of their home district are not provided transportation. While expensive, providing access to public transportation would increase engagement of high school aged students in programs that are critical for their academic and social success.

### Overview of Transportation Challenges

In 2013, GradMinnesota convened stakeholders who identified transportation as a key barrier to engaging students in school and out-of-school. These barriers negatively impact high school graduation rates and postsecondary success. This document summarizes challenges and provides some insights and recommendations compiled from several studies.

The most common reason for transporting children and youth is to get them to and from school. It is important to note that transportation is also necessary for getting students to and from extracurricular activities, internships, apprenticeships, postsecondary institutions and other employment opportunities. Ensuring equitable access to transportation for all children and young people is critical to close disparities in outcomes for youth – including graduation from high school and post-secondary success.

### Transportation Challenges for Districts

School districts provide some transportation services that are mandated through state or federal regulations and some that are not. All students in Minnesota have the right to a free appropriate public education (FAPE), including related services [Minn. Stat. § 125A.08 (a)(1)]. Transportation is deemed a "related service" as defined by Federal Regulation in 34 C.F.R. § 300.34 (c)(16). Costs of providing transportation services are funded in a variety of ways. The Minnesota Department of Education provides information to help school districts understand the requirements and funding streams in providing transportation for students to different types of schools and programs. The MDE website also includes information to help parents and students understand their rights to transportation services (including students who are homeless, attend charter schools, students with disabilities and for those who have enrolled in another school district (<http://education.state.mn.us/MDE/dse/schfin/Trans/>)).

In 2012 a study of student transportation and associated costs was requested by the Minnesota legislature. The purpose of the study was to identify potential cost savings through the use of regional or coordinated approaches and collaborative innovations including those with transit or other modes of transportation. The study found that challenges school districts face around transportation costs, and the efficiencies or innovations implemented to address them, differ by region or geography. For example, challenges facing districts in Greater Minnesota include large distances, long ride lengths, and low student densities. (Mattila, Smela & Dodge, 2013).

The study also reporting the following findings regarding the use of transit services:

- Public and private transit options give school districts flexibility to address special situations and provide temporary transportation until a permanent solution can be found. These options help increase transportation equity and inclusion, but are not necessarily cost-saving.

- Overall 27% of districts and charter schools that responded to the survey indicated that they had considered using public transit as a substitute for some kind of student transportation in the recent past.
- There is confusion about the legality of using transit for student transportation, particularly in Greater Minnesota. While federal laws limit the use of public transit for student transportation, there are allowances for mass transit services and for many scenarios that utilize smaller or private services, like dial-a-ride and taxis.
- Use of public transit for student transportation is generally well-accepted by parents where it is in place.

The legislative study also includes case study reports of Minneapolis, Little Falls, and Marshall and an expanded list of individual innovations and suggestions gathered via surveys and interviews (<http://www.leg.state.mn.us/lrl/lrl.asp>).

### Out-of-School Time

Research has shown that expanded learning programs after school and in the summer have helped narrow the achievement and opportunity gaps between low income children and their middle class peers (National Center for Time and Learning, 2012). Yet, transportation to and from afterschool programs is often problematic - in both rural and urban settings. “Many young people depend on rides from a parent or other adult in their life, and can’t attend programs if that adult is at work or doesn’t own a car” (Sprockets Youth Transportation Toolkit, 2015).

Providing adequate transportation for students in rural districts can be a significant obstacle.

“Districts have enough funding to provide a bus home after school but nothing more. Parents often lack a car or enough money for gasoline to make the long trip to town to pick up their children. And walking home, even for students who live nearby, is typically out of the question. We don’t have sidewalks and we don’t have lighting. We have winding roads with no sides to them, no lane painted, or the only road home is Highway 1 or [the Interstate].” (Frey, 2015).

In addition, youth in rural and metro areas face transportation barriers that hamper their opportunities for career exploration, community service, mentoring and internships. Research indicates that there is often a mismatch between where low-income youth live and where employment opportunities are located. Many entry-level jobs require working evening or weekend hours when public transportation is not available, or run infrequently. In addition, youth may lack access to personal vehicles due to costs, including vehicle purchase, gas, general maintenance or repairs.

### Minneapolis Go-To Student Pass Program

In August 2013, all transportation-eligible Minneapolis high school students began using public transportation instead of yellow school buses under the Go-To Student Pass Program. The program, a partnership between Metro Transit and Minneapolis Public Schools (MPS), enables students to take unlimited rides on regular-route buses and light rail from 5 a.m. to 10 p.m. daily during the school year.

An analysis of the program by University of Minnesota researchers documented a range of benefits—from better student attendance to financial savings to reduced vehicle mileage and emissions (Fan & Kirti, 2015). The analysis was funded by Metro Transit. For the analysis, existing data from MPS and Metro Transit was used and additional data was collected through surveys completed by more than 2,400 students and about 500 parents during May–July 2015. Findings are highlighted below.

- **Educational.** The pass helped students attend school more regularly (23% lower absenteeism for students using the pass). It also provided access to after-school learning opportunities at and away from school.
- **Economic.** Metro Transit ridership increased significantly. The costs of the extra service were almost entirely made up for by revenue from pass sales.
- **Transit perception.** Of the student pass users, 81% reported being “Satisfied” or “Very Satisfied” and 93% reported benefiting from the pass. Similarly, 80% of the parents reported being “Satisfied” or “Very Satisfied” and 85% reported that the pass had benefits for their family.

- **Younger rider base.** Students using the pass were more likely to report that they would use transit after graduation.
- **Safety.** A higher percentage of female students reported negative perceptions related to safety while waiting for buses/trains at stops, walking to or from bus/train stops, and traveling on buses/trains compared to male students.
- **Equity.** Reported benefits and level of ridership were most pronounced for students eligible for free/reduced lunch and those who were Black, foreign-born, or belonged to single-parent families.

After expanding the program in 2015—including a Summer Student Pass pilot—Student Pass ridership increased 12.5 percent from 2014 to nearly 4 million rides. The complete report can be accessed at

[https://conservancy.umn.edu/bitstream/handle/11299/180133/StudentTransportationPublicTransit\\_Fan\\_2015.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](https://conservancy.umn.edu/bitstream/handle/11299/180133/StudentTransportationPublicTransit_Fan_2015.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y)

### **Access to Employment and Training Programs**

Youth with transportation barriers are at a disadvantage in their ability to access employment and training programs to enhance their career exploration. Often, entry level jobs require working evening or weekend hours, times when public transportation is less frequent and accessible. The Joblinks (2011) brief – *Overcoming Transportation Challenges for Youth* – includes suggestions from effective youth employment programs on how to ensure access to transportation.

- Partner with employers to purchase bus passes
- Collaborate with transit authorities to provide bus passes
- Provide vouchers and taxi reimbursements
- Contract for shuttles and buses
- Facilitate participation in carpools
- Purchase vans, shuttles, and minibuses
- Facilitate the donation and repair of older vehicles
- Provide loans to eligible individuals to lease or purchase vehicles
- Make one-time or short-term payments for car repairs or insurance
- Provide gas cards or create incentives to earn gas cards

### **Summary**

Inadequate or lack of access to transportation is a critical barrier that decreases opportunities for many young people. Inequities in access to transportation to both school and out of school opportunities is a significant factor contributing to the gaps in achievement, school completion, and postsecondary success that exist between student groups. This issue goes largely unnoticed beyond the disenfranchised youth who experience it every day, and requires increased attention and action to provide effective solutions.

## References

Afterschool Programs: Helping Kids Succeed in Rural America (2007). Afterschool Alert Issue Brief #4  
[http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/issue\\_briefs/issue\\_rural\\_4.pdf](http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/issue_briefs/issue_rural_4.pdf)

America After 3PM: Afterschool Programs in Demand (2014). Afterschool Alliance.  
[http://afterschoolalliance.org/documents/AA3PM-2014/AA3PM\\_National\\_Report.pdf](http://afterschoolalliance.org/documents/AA3PM-2014/AA3PM_National_Report.pdf)

Fan, Y. & Kirti, D. (2015). Assessing the Impacts of Student Transportation on Public Transit.  
[https://conservancy.umn.edu/bitstream/handle/11299/180133/StudentTransportationPublicTransit\\_Fan\\_2015.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](https://conservancy.umn.edu/bitstream/handle/11299/180133/StudentTransportationPublicTransit_Fan_2015.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y)

Fitzgerald, J. (2010). The Wrong Way: Minnesota School Transportation Disparities. Minnesota 2020.  
[http://www.mn2020.org/assets/uploads/article/schooltransportation\\_web.pdf](http://www.mn2020.org/assets/uploads/article/schooltransportation_web.pdf)

Frey, S. (2015). Rural Communities Struggle to Provide After-School Programs. EdSource.  
<https://edsources.org/2015/rural-communities-rely-on-after-school-programs/73187>

Mattila, D., Smela, S. & Dodge, C. (2013). A Legislative Study of Student Transportation. Department of Administration and The Improve Group. <https://www.leg.state.mn.us/docs/2013/mandated/130083.pdf>

Overcoming Transportation Challenges for Youth (2011). Joblinks Employment Transportation Center.  
[www.ctaa.org/joblinks](http://www.ctaa.org/joblinks)

The Sprockets Youth Transportation Toolkit (2015). <https://www.sprocketssaintpaul.org/transportationtoolkit>