

# Make Transportation Accessible to All Students



## Youth Voice

### Why is this an Important Issue for Minnesota Children and Young People?

GradMinnesota believes in the power of young people to create their own bright future. By listening to their voices, we can gain a deeper understanding of the challenges and choices they face. Thus it is important to empower and mobilize youth to share their experiences, bring their perspectives, and give recommendations on issues that affect them. When young people are actively engaged in the decision-making process, programs are more likely to meet their needs and create the changes they desire. While identifying the priority recommendations for GradMinnesota, the GradMinnesota Advisory Council and staff listened carefully to the voices of young people and incorporated their input. The following quotes from young people on the importance of accessible transportation were compiled from several sources.

#### *Transportation is Necessary to Meet Family and Employment Responsibilities*

“I need to get medicine for my grandmother but I can’t cause I don’t have a bus card cause the one I get through school stops during the summer. And my friend is trying to get a job during the summer but his bus card also stops during the summer...” – MYC member<sup>7</sup>

#### *Highly Mobile Youth Need Reliable Transportation*

“When my mom and I moved in with my aunt, I couldn’t get to school no more. The bus route didn’t go to my aunt’s house and I had no one to drive me. No one I know has a car.” – Anonymous Young Person<sup>3</sup>

#### *Transportation Helps Address Gaps in Opportunity*

“Students who need [a bus pass], I feel like they’d jump at the chance [to get a free pass]. It’s something I think would help a lot of people reach opportunities that they otherwise couldn’t.” – Sebastian<sup>6</sup>

“Using transit has had a really profound impact on how I get around the Twin Cities, and I think it’s something everyone should have available to them.” – Spencer<sup>6</sup>

“Better public transportation to outlying areas [would] allow people within the community to commute to other jobs.” – Anonymous Young Person<sup>1</sup>

### Focus Groups with Students in Minneapolis, MN

In December 2015 a report was published with findings from a study examining the impact of the Student Pass program in Minneapolis, MN that enables high school 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 (i.e., excluding summer break). Focus groups were conducted with youth (and other key stakeholders) to gain a better understanding of the program and its impacts.<sup>8</sup> Four Minneapolis schools were selected as sites for the student focus groups. Participation in the focus groups was voluntary and students were recruited by MPS staff via in-class announcements. A total of 48 students participated in the focus groups which included 18 female and 30 male students. A brief summary of focus group findings is provided below.

For more information, the full report can be accessed at <http://www.attendanceworks.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Minneapolis-Student-Pass-Study.pdf>

*“Program Benefits:* In all focus groups, there was unanimous support for the Go-To Student Pass with students reporting benefits for themselves and their families. Benefits for the students included more flexibility in travel times, having transportation options after school, access to transportation for work, not having to pay for transportation, increased familiarity with the city, and reduced dependence on their parents. Students also mentioned a degree of dependence on the Pass.” pg. 16

*“Safety Concerns:* Almost all students reported that they and their parents had safety concerns regarding riding transit. These concerns for both student and their parents were greater after dark and in specific areas such as downtown Minneapolis. The safety concerns were related to non-student riders. In almost all focus groups, safety was reported as a bigger concern for female students.” pg. 17

*“Program Improvements:* The students suggested various improvements to the Student Pass program. Students reported issues with the Pass cutting off at 10 p.m. Most of the suggestions came from students who participated in sports and reported not being able to use transit to get home after games. Ten-thirty p.m. was often suggested as an alternative. A majority of the students mentioned friends who lived within two miles of the school who did not qualify for Passes. This was a burden especially during winter and limited social opportunities for them. Some students mentioned bus stop arrival times being more reliable as important. However, others mentioned understanding that slight delays were unavoidable.” pg. 18

*“Mode Preference:* In comparison to other modes of transportation, students reported transit being a better option than yellow buses primarily due to increased hours of access and more flexibility (i.e., unlike the yellow bus if you missed one you could always catch the next bus/train). Most students reported transit being a preferred mode for transportation compared to driving. Saving money on gas and parking was frequently mentioned. However, cars were preferred in winters due to waiting out in the cold for transit.” pg.18

### More Findings from Research Utilizing Youth Voice

Multiple studies have shown the correlation between school attendance and access or ease of use of transportation. Access to transportation may mean the difference between attending and missing school. Indeed, two studies in different cities found that access to transportation directly affected school attendance. In Portland, Oregon, a survey of more than 2,000 students found that 11 percent reported missing school due to their inability to cover transportation costs. In a survey of more than 500 high school students in the Oakland, California area, a number of students whose families were unable to afford bus passes regularly missed school, and some got detention for being late because of the amount of time it took them to walk to school<sup>4</sup>.

In a policy and practice brief produced by the Everyone Graduates Center, it was found that young people, especially in urban areas, start taking mass transportation to school in their middle school years. This transportation often involves a transfer. In some cities, the majority of middle grade students in some schools missed 20 or more days of school. In one large city, 40% of students missed a year or more of school cumulatively over a five-year period beginning with sixth grade<sup>5</sup>. The association with a transition to public transportation and attendance indicates the importance of efficient transportation to school that is easy to use.

It is also evident that accessibility to transportation opens the door to other opportunities in the form of employment and extracurricular activities. In January 2015, the St. Paul Youth Commission - a group of young leaders focused on community issues - provided 14 students at Central and Harding High Schools in St. Paul with cards to ride the Twin Cities Metro Transit for free for six months. In a survey of how they used transit during that time, it was shown that students used the passes several times a week to get to school and a variety of activities, including work, tutoring and sports<sup>6</sup>.

For more resources on youth voice, please visit the Minnesota Youth Council's (MYC) website [mnyouth.net/work/council/](http://mnyouth.net/work/council/). MYC is the official youth voice to legislators in Minnesota.

## References

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