The Youth Opportunity Pass – A Pilot
A Proposal from the Improving Transportation in City Heights Momentum Team
at Mid-City CAN

Summary
The Youth Opportunity Pass is designed to provide positive opportunities for transit-dependent youth in San Diego. It will encourage and incentivize regular school attendance, increase safety for kids en route to school, increase access to extracurricular and job opportunities, and invest in future bus ridership for transit-dependent and low-income high school students. The pilot project will be a one-year program involving San Diego Unified School District schools where students are the most transit-dependent: Crawford High School, Hoover High School, Lincoln High School, and San Diego High School. There will also be a smaller-scale program for elementary and/or middle schools to preserve academic stability for students who move within the community but outside the local catchment area.

Background
School busing has been severely cut in recent years, affecting almost 400 students in the City Heights area alone. Now students are forced to walk long distances or buy bus passes to get to school. The long walks have put kids at risk of being victims of crime and accidents with motor vehicles. The cost of a bus pass severely impacts low-income family budgets. The repercussions for the student are serious, with the potential for increased stress, lack of sleep, spotty attendance, inability to participate in extracurricular activities, and lack of access to job opportunities. Transit dependant, low-income students experience severe limits on educational, extracurricular, and economic opportunities.

For the family, the financial strain can be insurmountable and can add another challenge to family stability. A transit-dependent family with three kids attending school will pay $108 a month for their children to get to school1. In City Heights, the median income is $19,000 a year for a family of five2. (The federal poverty line is about $24,000 for a family of four). This forces many to decide between transportation and other necessities, like food.

For the school, the obvious challenges with student performance and attendance are made greater when children struggle to get to school safely each day. In the area around Hoover High School, there is one of the largest concentrations of convicted sex offenders. This means that girls and boys walking to school, many times at distances of more than a mile, could fall victim to assaults, sexual harassment, and accidents with motor vehicles.

For the broader community, not only do better performing and involved students improve community cohesion, but the investment in long-term bus ridership is critical to the future viability of our public transit system and the quality of our environment.

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1 http://www.sdmts.com/fares.asp
2 House Meeting Data, by Bill Oswald, Jesse Mills, & Sheila Mitrasarker, 2009
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A 2012 student survey in Oakland of more than 1,500 students, analyzed by the San Francisco Public Health Department found that:

- One out of three students pays for bus passes and fares out of his/her own pocket.
- About 60 percent of students said they sometimes use their lunch money to ride the bus.
- Nearly 50 percent of low-income students reported that it was harder to get to school, jobs, or after-school programs with the current fare structure.
- More than 75 percent of students surveyed depend on the bus for mobility.

The neighborhoods served by San Diego High, Hoover, Crawford, and Lincoln are some of the most transit-dependent in the county. According to the San Diego Association of Government’s Residential Transit Orientation Index, these neighborhoods are at the top of the scale (see attached Exhibit 11).

Case studies

San Francisco - In December 2012, the San Francisco Municipal Transit Agency board approved the “Free Muni for Low-Income Youth” Plan. This program builds on a two-year pilot program that enrolled 27,000 low-income students and caused a dramatic increase in participation in after-school programs, effectively keeping youth safe and active. The funding comes from a $6.7 million Transit Performance Initiative grant from the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (their equivalent of SANDAG) that also puts $5.1 million into vehicle rehabilitation and maintenance.

Portland, OR - High school students in the Portland Public School District can ride the local TriMet transit system for free during the school year by showing their student ID. Unlike other school districts, Portland Public Schools does not provide regular yellow school bus service. The Student Pass program is a partnership between TriMet, the school district and the City of Portland.

Tempe, AZ - The Tempe Youth Transit Pass Program allows all eligible Tempe youth ages 6 to 18 (children 6 and younger are already free) to ride regional and local Valley Metro bus routes and the Metro light rail for free. Passes are valid on weekends, holidays, and even during school breaks.

Pilot Design

A thousand Youth Opportunity Passes will be split between San Diego High, Hoover, Crawford, and Lincoln, with 250 passes allotted to each school. Passes will be distributed by the school to students who meet certain criteria. Criteria for selection may include students who:

- Use/need transit
- Lost SDUSD provided busing during recent cuts (last 5 years)

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3 Urban Habitat, 2012
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- Families have a difficult time paying for passes
- Live far from school
- Fear for their safety while walking to school
- Have previous community and/or extracurricular involvement
- Are chronically absent
- Have siblings who go to other schools (because these families have more challenges transporting all their children to school)
- Have a part-time job
- Have a caregiver/close family member with a disability

An application will be required of each student receiving a pass and may include a question about his/her future plans for school or asking the student to illustrate his/her need. Selection criteria will be solidified through a series of focus groups with students at each of the four high schools. To encourage extracurricular activities and job opportunities, passes will be valid after school and on weekends. Outreach about the Youth Opportunity Pass will be done in languages appropriate for the population of each school.

A Community Oversight Committee will be formed in an advisory role to SDUSD and MTS staff and committees. If the school receives more applications than it has passes, the Oversight Committee will determine which students get the passes. The Oversight Committee will consist of representatives from the Mid-City CAN Improving Transportation in City Heights Momentum Team with participation from vice-principals and guidance counselors from each school.

In addition, 100 passes will be reserved for distribution by elementary and/or middle school principals to students who move within the community but outside the local catchment area.

Measuring Success
To measure the ways these passes are helping students and their families, the pilot will include performance measures among students receiving the passes including:

- Ridership
- Attitudes towards transit
- Financial burden for families
- School attendance
- Drop-out rate
- Participation in recreational/extracurricular/community activities
- Participation in breakfast at school
- Time saved
- Access to employment
- Access to health care
- Incidents of assaults/
  sexual harassment
- Accidents involving motor vehicles

Each student receiving the Youth Opportunity Pass will complete an entrance and exit survey to complement empirical data on the above performance measures. The attendance and dropout rates of students receiving the pass will be tracked and reported to the Community Oversight
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Committee on a quarterly basis. In addition, a series of focus groups with chronically absent students will be conducted to help identify the usefulness of this pass for improving attendance rates among like students.

Funding Strategy
The cost of the Youth Opportunity Pass for school year 2013-2014 will be:

| High school passes | 1000 30-day passes @ bulk discounted rate of $30.60 per pass X 9 months | $275,400 |
|                   | 1000 15-day passes @ bulk discounted rate of $15.30 per pass             | $15,300 |
| Elementary and middle school passes | 100 30-day passes @ bulk discounted rate of $30.60 per pass X 9 months | $27,540 |
|                   | 100 15-day passes @ bulk discounted rate of $15.30 per pass             | $1,530 |

Measuring success
Analysis of performance measures by Center on Policy Initiatives $40,000

Total cost for one school year of the Be-In-Class Pass: $359,770
This cost estimate assumes a 15% pass bulk discount for the program, which is consistent with the bulk pass program afforded to employers and other bulk pass buyers.

This pilot is seen as a down payment on the future of no-cost youth bus ridership in San Diego and all parties involved will actively seek regional, state, and federal funding mechanisms to continue and expand the project.

Timeline
The pilot is planned to roll out for the 2013-2014 school year.

Supporters
Mayor Bob Filner
Council President Todd Gloria
Councilmember Marti Emerald
San Diego Unified School District Trustee
Richard Barrera
San Diego Community College District Board of Directors
Candidate for 80th Assembly District Lorena Gonzalez

Candidate for 4th District San Diego City
Council Barry Pollard
San Diego Unified School District
Superintendent Cindy Marten (incoming)
Hoover High School Vice-Principal Andreas Trakas
Amalgamated Transit Union Local 1309
President Joe Gotcher
More than 850 San Diego residents