

March 5, 2007: Public Transit Forum for Youth

As part of the Transit Effectiveness Project (TEP), staff from the San Francisco Municipal Transit Agency (SFMTA) and the San Francisco Controller's Office partnered with the Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF), the Youth Commission, and the Mayor's Policy Council on Children, Youth, and Families to host a Public Transit Forum for Youth. The objectives of the forum were to: 1) inform youth about the TEP, its objectives and how to participate in the process; 2) allow youth to inform the TEP staff about the unique challenges they face when riding transit; and 3) encourage youth to help generate potential solutions to these challenges. It is also hoped that the forum informed youth transit riders about opportunities to provide ongoing feedback to Muni regarding issues beyond the scope of the TEP.

The Public Transit Youth Forum was held on Monday, March 5, 2007 from 6:00 PM – 7:30 PM at the SFSU Downtown Campus. Outreach for the event was led by the partner agencies and included several flyers mailed to DCYF grantees (over 170 community-based organizations) and recreational centers and libraries; flyering by Youth Commissioners; listing on web groups; tabling at community events; and notice in the weekly DCYF newsletter. TEP staff expected about 60-80 youth to participate; however, the final count of attendance included 17 Youth Commissioners and 21 other participants.

In order to encourage discussion and elicit concerns and suggestions, the forum was organized into four transit topic areas relevant to youth riders: Affordability, Safety and Security, Service (including reliability and crowding), and Interaction with Youth (referring to the way youth are treated as riders on Muni). In order to encourage small-group discussions, chairs were set-up in semi-circles around large butcher sheets to write comments for each of the four topics, with groups rotating every 12 minutes.

A Youth Commissioner acted as a facilitator of each small group. The facilitator was responsible for leading the discussion and bringing forth "concerns" and "solutions" for a particular topic. TEP staff filled the role of scribe, and recorded all the concerns and recommended solutions on butcher paper viewed by all. TEP staff was also on hand to respond to technical questions from participants. Each group built upon the concerns and solutions from the previous group(s), with the final small-group agreeing on two "Priority Solutions" for each topic.

At the end of the forum, all participants came together as a group to report the "Priority Solutions," then through a dot voting exercise ranked the eight Priority Solutions overall. The Priority Solutions include (from highest number of votes to lowest):

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| 1. Passes with options/variable pricing | Affordability |
| 2. Intermediate Fast Pass (discount for 18 to 24-yr olds) | Affordability |
| 3. More buses/special school services to deal with overcrowding | Service |
| 4. Accountability from drivers (for missed/skipped stops) | Service |
| 5. Improved security/possible security button/police presence | Safety |
| 6. Improved Hotline | Interaction |
| 7. Improved driver training to deal with conflict | Safety |
| 8. "All or None" fare inspection/not just youth | Interaction |

Affordability. Overall, youth transit riders were most focused on Affordability (Solutions 1 and 2 accounted for almost two-thirds of the total votes). In particular, they felt that the price of the Adult Fast Pass (\$45) is too high for youth between the ages of 18-24, many of whom are still students. They were interested in passes with options, or an intermediate pass to accommodate that group (for a price of approximately \$25). In addition, participants were interested in a youth pass that includes BART, an annual pass, a less expensive single fare with no transfer, and the ability to purchase a pro-rated Fast Pass later in the month. Youth riders were concerned that the cost of the pass can prevent some students from getting to school, particularly for students who turn 18 while still in high school.

Service. Second in importance to youth riders was the issue of Service. Buses running on school routes are subject to overcrowding during school peaks and often skip stops or experience missed runs, leading to frustration among riders. The participants suggested increasing the use of articulated buses on school routes and increasing the frequency of buses during time periods when crowds are anticipated. In addition, youth were interested in receiving more communication from drivers (regarding skipped stops) as well as possibly having special school bus service to alleviate these problems.

Safety. In the area of Safety, youth were most concerned about overcrowding (and theft that occurs during overcrowding), threatening passengers, safety at and around bus stops, and driver awareness of passengers and pedestrians on the street and while exiting the bus. Participants suggested improving operator training to deal with conflicts, and perhaps installing a security button at the back of the bus to inform drivers of safety problems they may be unable to see on crowded buses. Further, youth were interested in having a greater police presence (or security) on Muni, and possibly call boxes at bus stops.

Interaction with Youth. Discussions about Muni Interaction with Youth yielded a clear response that youth do not feel operators and other Muni staff treat them as they treat adults. In particular, youth feel that fare inspectors target youth and therefore advocated for an “All or None” fare inspection policy. Youth are looking for more accountability of operators and inspectors, mutual sensitivity training (youth and operators), better communication about pass-ups, as well as a more user-friendly 511 service. Some youth suggested having transit staff on-board (perhaps an inspector with the ability to serve multiple roles) to reinforce fare payment, address safety concerns, and maintain order on the bus on busy routes.

TEP staff has recorded all discussion items as well as concerns and solutions suggested by participants at the Youth Forum. The team will use this information when making recommendations for improvement to the Muni system and to address policies for improving the youth experience on Muni in general.

TEP staff held a similar Public Transit Forum for Families with Young Children on Saturday, March 17th. This forum was also co-hosted by Mayor Newsom’s Policy Council on Children, Youth and Families, DCYF, the San Francisco Youth Commission. Goals, objectives, and format of the forum were similar to the Youth Forum, with the aim of receiving a family perspective on Muni and the TEP.