

October 17, 2025

Youth Opportunity Pass Program Update

Overview

In May 2022, SANDAG launched the Youth Opportunity Pass (YOP) pilot program in partnership with Metropolitan Transit System (MTS), North County Transit District (NCTD), and the County of San Diego. The program provides free access to public transportation services for youth 18 and under throughout San Diego County. SANDAG has been collecting data since the program began to evaluate its impact on youth ridership. This data is available as a dashboard on [SANDAG's Open Data Portal](#).

Action: Information

Staff will present an update on the Youth Opportunity Pass Program.

Fiscal Impact:

The annual cost to SANDAG for the program is \$6.5 million.

Schedule/Scope Impact:

This is a pilot program with funding identified through June 30, 2026.

Key Considerations

SANDAG completed a [comprehensive program report](#) in December 2023 that identified many of the benefits of the program. In addition, the YOP dashboard on SANDAG's Open Data Portal is updated quarterly and allows members of the public to view and download ridership data. The dashboard shows that YOP has provided over 32 million free transit rides to San Diego County youth since its launch in May 2022. October 2024 saw the highest YOP ridership with 1.26 million rides recorded across all transit modes. Routes with the highest youth ridership include the trolley lines and bus routes 7, 12, 13, 303, 929, and 955.

The past three months of available data, April through June 2025, have seen youth ridership down 13% year-over-year, in contrast with the 18% year-over-year average increases experienced since the program began. Regional transit ridership continues to increase, so SANDAG, MTS, and NCTD will continue to monitor youth ridership to determine if this is an emerging trend or merely a temporary decline. Despite the recent changes, the program continues to provide youth with hundreds of thousands of fare-free rides every month.

Next Steps

The program is currently funded on a temporary basis from the Congestion Mitigation & Air Quality Improvement (CMAQ) program through June 30, 2026. Funding beyond the end of this fiscal year could potentially be available from the state, as [California Senate Bill 840 \(Limón, 2025\)](#) identifies the intent of the state legislature to reserve \$125 million from the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund for the 2026-2027 fiscal year for transit passes. SANDAG and the transit operators will monitor the state budget process as this funding is allocated and continue seeking additional options for maintaining zero-fare public transit for youth.

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