

Assembly Bill 1919 — Fare Free Student Transit Passes

Assemblymember Chris R. Holden

SUMMARY

Assembly Bill 1919 requires transit agencies to provide free fare to youth 25 years or younger in order to be eligible for state funding under: the Transportation Development Act, the State Transit Assistance Program, & the Low Carbon Transit Operations Program.

BACKGROUND

With the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic and its harmful variants, like omicron, the resulting economic effects are of particular strain to lower income, diverse, and transit dependent communities within California. And, as a consequence of economic upset like job and wage loss, the cost of commute, transit, and transportation has become a larger economic burden on California youth and students, and one which deprives them and their families of meaningful wealth creation.

A study by the UCLA Luskin School of Public Affairs found that approximately 8% of youth use transit daily, that ¼ use it at least monthly, and that transit is disproportionately depended upon by individuals age 16-30 and transit use is strongly statistically associated with “student status.”¹ Furthermore, it is increasingly of concern how transit costs relate to educational equity as students without reliable or affordable transit options suffer adverse educational outcomes, according to the International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health.² These statistics are particularly relevant to California students, the most diverse student cohort nationally, especially given that POC students are at higher rates of transit dependency than non-POC students. Additionally, poorer individuals use transit at higher rates than other communities, therefore, lack of access to dependable transit disproportionately hurts students of disprivileged socioeconomic backgrounds.

This transportation inequity, relatedly, exacerbates educational inequity statewide as well. According to the International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, students without reliable access to transportation to-and-from school are exponentially more likely to have worse educational outcomes, including increased likelihood to drop-out.² And, as a consequence of California's present attendance funding formula for school districts, absenteeism, in part caused by lack of reliable transportation to schools, deprives schools of millions in annual funding. Whereas an attendance increase of just

1%, which feasibly could result from greater transit accessibility, could supply California school districts with some \$125,000 in funds and with an additional 29'000 instructional hours annually.²

In terms of climate, the U.S. Department of Transportation reports that transit options like buses produce a third (or more) less GHGs than Californian students' current top means of commute: the personal vehicle.³

Overall, while some local and school-specific programs exist in California to provide free or reduced transit fares to students, there exists no statewide program that students can access irregardless of grade, age, or institution to reliably provide more equitable and climate conscious transportation to-and-from school(s) and their extracurriculars, the latter of which comprises a notable portion of youth transit needs. And without addressing this lack of a universally accessible transit program for students, California will continue to experience rising educational and transportation inequity principally affecting the most vulnerable in society: our youth.

EXISTING LAW

Health and Safety Code Sec. 102335: Add Chapter 2 (commencing with Section 99100) to Part 11 of Division 10 of the Public Utilities Code, relating to transportation. In particular, a subsection qualifying transit agency funding on provision of fare-free transit programs for youth 18 years or younger and discounted/reduced fare to CCC, CSU, and UC students.

THE SOLUTION

AB 1919 will require all transit agencies receiving state funds under Transportation Development Act, State Transit Assistance Program, & Low Carbon Transit Operations Program to provide fare-free transit to youth 25 years or younger. Expanded access to free transportation will ameliorate transportation inequity, reduce financial strain on students, and improve educational equity and outcomes. Additionally, a free transit pass program bolsters efforts to reduce personal vehicle traffic/congestion and to achieve clean air standards across the state.

¹ <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/8kk5g8gg>

² <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4245618/>

³ <https://www.transit.dot.gov/sites/fta.dot.gov/files/docs/PublicTransportationsRoleInRespondingToClimateChange2010.pdf>

SUPPORT

Support: Move LA (sponsor)
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