

EVIDENCE BRIEF: YOUTH AND PUBLIC TRANSIT

Despite high usage of public transportation, youth as a specific category of riders have received an underwhelming amount of focus by academics and transit authorities. This can be partially attributed to a lack of available data. This project synthesized the last ten years of evidence, policy, and pilot projects related to youth as a public transportation user group in order to provide an up-to-date summary of the state of knowledge in this area. Youth and public transportation research and media coverage were identified and evaluated, including data sources and gaps. Major themes include: demand, barriers, youth advocacy, various types of passes (i.e., U-PASS, free or reduced-fares), and active transportation. The project wrapped up by proposing an evidence-based agenda for future research and policy, with an eye toward enhancing the equity of access to transit systems for youth riders.

Key Findings:

- A lack of accessible public transit leads youth to report physical, economic, and social barriers to full participation in society.
- Barriers to transit use reported by youth include: cost, lack of knowledge, inconvenient service and stop locations, lack of service (particularly in suburban and rural areas), and safety. Safety concerns are particularly reported among equity-deserving members of society, including those who are racialized, disabled, 2SLGBTQ+, newcomers to Canada, and/or who experience poverty.
- Free and reduced-fare transit for youth and/or students is a subject of increasing interest globally, including among Canadian municipal and provincial governments. A critical finding is that free transit on its own is not sufficient to be helpful to youth, and must be integrated into broader comprehensive policies and strategies. Saphores et al. (2020) specify this includes ensuring the transit needs of intended recipients are understood; coupling free transit policies with other initiatives to reduce private vehicle use; and providing transit that is useful, safe, and clean. Due to growing attention to the subject, a separate two-page summary of academic literature and media coverage related to youth and free/reduced fare transit is [available](#).
- Transportation system officials around the world are attempting to boost youth ridership numbers, and involving youth in public transportation planning is seen as one avenue in which to accomplish this goal.
- Multiple studies found that youth are using transit at a higher rate than previous generations. A key question is whether this trend will continue as youth age, with some evidence published that this is the case. However, Agarwal (2017) and Newbold & Scott

(2018) both note that investment in useful, reliable, and safe transit must occur to support this trend.

- There is an absence of collected and published Canadian transit data – on both youth and in general – in the Canadian context, making research difficult.

Policy Implications:

Based on a review of the evidence, the following would enhance public transit for youth and scholarship related to this topic:

- Establish youth transit advisory committees
- Improve or implemented public transit education for youth (ideally youth-led)
- Improve safety
- Improve service at night and on weekends
- Use of a transportation equity or mobility justice framework to guide transit planning
- Record and publish national data related to ridership statistics and demographics

Further Information:

Additional information can be found in our [full report](#), a [short summary](#) of the literature related to free and discounted transit for youth, or by contacting the authors:

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