



Mayor Darrell Steinberg and City Council Representatives  
915 I Street  
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Budget & Audit Committee Item #3 and City Council Agenda Item #9

With this letter, we would like to express our opposition for the elimination of the Fare Free Transit Program which supports Sacramento area students' access to free and reliable transit to and from school.

Civic Thread, formerly WALKSacramento, is a nonprofit organization dedicated to improving health equity in the built environment by elevating institutionally underserved voices and priorities. Our work providing comprehensive programming to K-12 schools, co-creating Safe Routes to School master plans, and providing technical assistance to school districts, agency partners and local jurisdictions over the past 20 years provides us with valuable insights on school community priorities, challenges and opportunities. We have heard directly from students, parents and school faculty on the need to improve student access to safe, reliable and affordable access to transit and active transportation options.

With significant school district transportation budget cuts and roll-ups of crossing guard programs along with this cut for this Fare Free Transit Program, it will have a serious impact on the ability of students to get to school every day and contribute to Single Occupancy Vehicles being the primary method of transportation for school commutes. According to the Sacramento Regional Transit (SacRT) website, Student/Youth Rides now account for 25% of SacRT Ridership<sup>1</sup>, with over half of the total ridership identifying as low-income. Thousands of students rely on the Fare Free Transit Program for transportation to and from school every day, and if that is taken away from them, we will see more students unable to attend school due to increased barriers to access for transportation.

In fact, a 2015 study by the UC Davis Center for Regional Change<sup>2</sup> found that transportation was one of the top barriers to student attendance in Sacramento City Unified School District (SCUSD). When asked what would make it easier for students to come to school, transportation assistance was ranked the highest. Chronic absenteeism - when students miss 10% or more of the school year - has significant impacts on students, schools, and the community. Students who are chronically absent are more likely to drop out of school due to compromised learning, leading to higher likelihoods of unemployment, incarceration, negative health outcomes, and broader societal costs. In 2020-2021, SCUSD had an

---

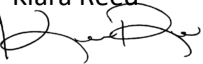
<sup>1</sup> SacRT Continues Fare-Free Transit Program for Students: <https://www.sacrt.com/sacrt-continues-fare-free-transit-program-for-students/>

<sup>2</sup> Chronic Absence in the Sacramento City Unified School District:  
<https://regionalchange.ucdavis.edu/report/chronic-absence-sacramento-city-unified-school-district>



absenteeism rate of 25%, nearly 5% above the national average, with an increasing trend in the following year of 2021-2022 to 36% student absenteeism.<sup>3</sup>

More students and families who can safely walk, bike, roll, and take transit to school results in less reliance on motor vehicles, safer neighborhoods, cleaner air, and greater community health. Supporting transit is a critical step in ensuring we meet our state, regional, and local goals around health, air quality, and reduction in vehicle miles traveled. We commend the City's prior commitment to this program along with their commitment to make Safe Routes to School a continued priority upon its integration as part of the General Plan 2040 (Policy M-4.9), which demonstrates the City's values of equity, inclusiveness and its commitment to our youth. We urge you to continue funding Fare Free Transit and to adopt a budget that is reflective of community values and prioritizes youth and the environment.

Kiara Reed  
  
Executive Director  
Civic Thread

---

<sup>3</sup> Sacramento City Unified School District Attendance and Engagement: <https://www.scusd.edu/student-attendance-engagement>