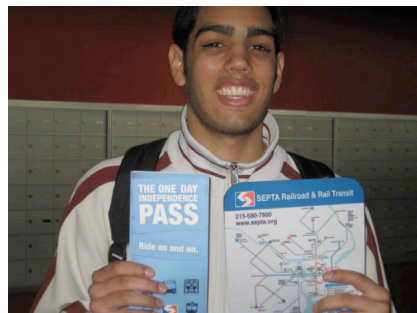


# A Philadelphia Youth Rider Agenda



A report by the  
**SEPTA Youth Advisory Council**

*“Getting Youth on Board with SEPTA”*



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# Letter from the Chair

Dear SEPTA rider,

It is my pleasure to present you with an extraordinary achievement from the youth of the Philadelphia region.

In a recent interview about the SEPTA Youth Advisory Council (YAC), I was asked if I thought that our generation was starting to favor public transit over private automobiles. While it may still be premature to speculate about how today's youth will compare to their predecessors, it's not too early to recognize that public transit will be an ever-more vital resource to young people in years to come. As world population increases and becomes more urban, providing for sustainable and accessible cities and regions will require greater reliance on viable public transportation networks—and the rise of a generation that is comfortable with using them. Creating a culture of transit ridership is no easy task, but if Philadelphia is serious about becoming “the greenest city in America,” it's a good place to start.

In the broadest sense, this report is the SEPTA Youth Advisory Council's first answer to how we can approach that challenge. The YAC realized early on that its goal—“Getting youth on board with SEPTA”—was one which would require the collaboration of multiple parties, from young riders themselves, to SEPTA management, to the administrations of local high schools and colleges. For that reason, it has focused its energy not only on encouraging youth to ride transit, but also on understanding why they don't—and how local transportation policies could be modified to serve them better. The recommendations contained in this report are carefully considered strategies for closing this gap, supported by the feedback of over 800 Philadelphia youth from surveys and public forums. The YAC believes that addressing these issues is not merely a means of improving customer service, but is also foundational to meeting SEPTA's strategic goals of increasing youth ridership.

SEPTA has already taken a proactive step toward engaging a customer group of growing importance with its creation and support of the YAC, the first permanent youth advisory body to a transit authority in the United States. It is the YAC's hope that this document continues to break ground by inspiring real changes that benefit youth, and by starting an active dialogue with local transportation policy-makers around those ideas.

Finally, it is my hope that this *Philadelphia Youth Rider Agenda* serves as a catalyst for increasing local youth's interest and active participation in determining the future of the public transportation system that serves them every day. If this is to be a generation that supports transit, we are the ones who must ultimately make that choice, and never before have we had such an opportunity to have our voices heard.



Philip Dawson

Chair, SEPTA Youth Advisory Council

# Authorship

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Composed of college and high school students with an interest in transit and civic affairs, the YAC's diverse membership has generated a rich dialogue about the transportation needs of the current generation of young people. This report would not be possible without the work of the following individuals.

## The SEPTA Youth Advisory Council:

Philip Dawson, Chair | University of Pennsylvania  
Matthew Zaccagni, Vice Chair | LaSalle University  
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Emily Shaeffer | University of Pennsylvania  
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Jonathan Tieu | Masterman High School  
Ashley Wagner | Temple University  
George Wright | University of Pennsylvania

*The YAC also wishes to acknowledge emeritus members Blaise Mannino, Erik Virbitsky, Charles Graham, and Kagiso Reed for their service on the Council during the compilation of this report.*

# Acknowledgements



**The SEPTA Youth Advisory Council wishes to thank the following individuals and agencies for their assistance in the compilation of this unprecedented report.**

*SEPTA*, for its support of the YAC's research, surveys, and public forums that were essential to this report. We wish to offer special thanks to Customer Service & Advocacy Manager Nilda Rivera-Frazier for her service as liaison to the SEPTA administration, and to Communications Manager Brian Anderson for his assistance with the Philadelphia Youth Rider Survey and Philadelphia Youth Rider Forums.

*The School District of Philadelphia*, for its cooperation in providing access to 10 schools across the City for YAC information sessions and administration of the Philadelphia Youth Rider Survey to students.

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*Dana Rommerdahl*, for her assistance in the graphic design of this report during its preparation for publication.

# Introduction & Methodology

## *Introduction*

- About the YAC
- Service Evaluation
- Purpose of this Report

## *Survey Process and Methodology*

- The Philadelphia Youth Rider Survey
- College Students
- High School Students
- Other Youth
- Youth Rider Forums
- Data Analysis



# Introduction

## Introduction

### *About the YAC*

Founded in September 2009, the Youth Advisory Council is SEPTA's primary outreach group for riders ages 14 to 22. The YAC was formed under the leadership of SEPTA and the existing Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC), which sought to provide for a formal means of engagement with the system's large population of college and high school-aged users. Along with the CAC, the SEPTA Advisory Committee for Accessible Transportation (SAC), and the Shared-Ride Program Advisory Council (SRPAC), the YAC is one of a group of SEPTA partners which provide the agency with feedback from sectors of the riding public. Open to youth between the ages of 16 and 23, the YAC's 17 current members represent seven area colleges and two local high schools.



In order to fulfill its mandate of advocating youth needs to SEPTA leadership, the YAC defined an ambitious work plan centered on outreach, communication, and service evaluation. Through the first focus, the YAC educates youth about public transportation services at their disposal and promotes SEPTA as a safe, convenient, and affordable means of transport in the Philadelphia region. Since its founding, the YAC has conducted over 15 major outreach events at high schools and college campuses, directly engaging students about their

ideas and concerns, answering questions about SEPTA, and distributing free information and promotional materials.

Through Communications, the YAC seeks to establish itself as a familiar and accessible resource for youth to learn about SEPTA and share their needs. In addition to talking with students in person, the YAC has gained attention by being featured in 12 news stories in the local media, and by maintaining a dynamic webpage and Facebook site.

### At a Glance: YAC Accomplishments

- Over 15 major outreach events
- 12 news stories in local media
- 800 college and high school students surveyed
- Active Facebook page with over 475 fans
- Recognized by the SEPTA Board for its service
- National attention as a model program

### *Service Evaluation*

While each of these two areas is important to its mission, the YAC decided that it was crucial to balance them with a more receptive component of its work. Through its third focus—service evaluation—the YAC seeks to listen to young riders and learn about their needs in order to better advise SEPTA on policies that would benefit them. Service evaluation work to date has consisted of administering online surveys to designated groups of youth, hosting deliberative Youth Rider Forums, and utilizing the results of both to generate recommendations for service improvements. Although the report that follows is based on the YAC's first Service Evaluation project in the City of Philadelphia, the YAC is currently beginning a similar study that will focus of the needs of youth in the surrounding suburban counties. The YAC hopes that its Service Evaluation work will not only produce substantive results in these areas, but also generate continued dialogue with youth about their experiences as SEPTA riders.

# Survey Process and Methodology

## *Purpose of this Report*

As its first formal set of policy recommendations, *A Philadelphia Youth Rider Agenda* is both an important milestone for the YAC and a document with valuable customer service implications for SEPTA leadership. As the only study to date to specifically focus on the needs and usage patterns of young SEPTA riders, the results of the Philadelphia Youth Rider Survey indicate how the agency can best move forward so as to retain and expand this share of its customer market. Drawing on the feedback from nearly 800 surveys, two public forums, and the consensus of established youth organizations, it also represents a clear and unified statement in support of a world-class public transportation system in the Philadelphia region.

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## Survey Process and Methodology

### *The Philadelphia Youth Rider Survey*

Given the large population of SEPTA riders between the ages of 14 and 22, their geographic distribution over five counties, and limited volunteer resources, the YAC elected to study the needs of City and suburban youth separately. The YAC's Service Evaluation Subcommittee then carefully developed a set of 25 questions, which were released as the Philadelphia Youth Rider Survey on February 1, 2010.

The Survey sought to answer a number of overarching questions about youth riders' usage patterns and needs, including:

- How often youth use SEPTA
- What type of trips youth use SEPTA for
- Familiarity with the SEPTA system
- What factors discourage youth from taking SEPTA
- How youth access information about SEPTA
- What improvements would lead youth to use SEPTA more
- What needs are specific to college and high school-aged youth

A complete list of the questions and results of the Philadelphia Youth Rider Survey may be obtained by contacting the YAC at the address given at the end of this report.



### *College Students*

The YAC employed different approaches to obtain the desired samples of both college and high school students for the survey. Since the City's largest universities offered high concentrations of students in small areas, they were targeted through established communication networks. At the most general level, the YAC reminded youth to take the survey through updates on its Facebook page and via university-wide emails facilitated by student governments. The survey was promoted among other groups of students by YAC members at outreach events and through the partnership of academic departments in areas like urban studies and environmental sciences. The release of the Philadelphia Youth Rider Survey was also heralded by a formal press release from SEPTA, which generated some additional publicity for the project.



# Survey Process and Methodology

## *High School Students*

After the Survey had been available on SEPTA's website for a month, preliminary results revealed that virtually no high school students had participated in it, demonstrating that they were not receiving information through the same media that were exposing their college counterparts to it. Since high school students are distributed throughout the city in a number of smaller schools, the YAC decided to pursue a controlled distribution strategy with the partnership of the School District of Philadelphia. With the approval of the District's Office of Research and Evaluation, the YAC organized administration of the survey to groups of students in designated schools throughout the city.

For geographic uniformity, the YAC selected one school in each of the City's 12 Planning Analysis Sections (PAS)—divisions of Philadelphia's main districts created by the City Planning Commission. Whenever possible, magnet schools were targeted due to their students' high propensity of commuting via public transportation. Ultimately, 9 of the 12 selected high schools were able to participate in the Survey, and many schools deliberately diversified their samples by age by recruiting equal numbers of students from each grade to participate.



## *Other Youth*

Since the survey was hosted on SEPTA's official website, it was open to all youth regardless of school affiliation, and a small number (2%) of respondents who were not enrolled in an academic institution contributed to the survey. The enrollment status of a somewhat larger cohort of respondents (14.9%) remained unknown, as these individuals did not complete the survey up to that point.



## *Youth Rider Forums*

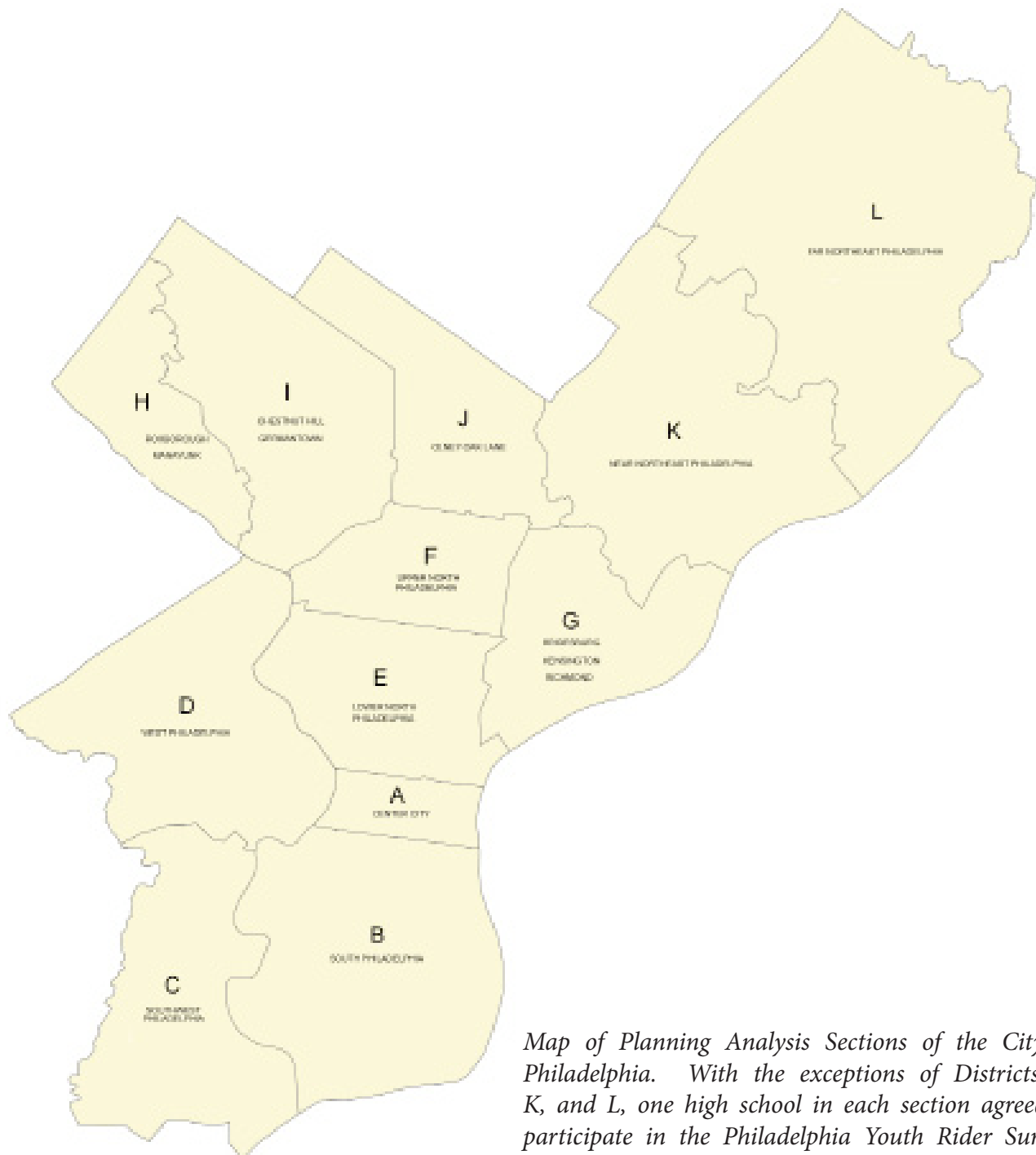
Although not the primary source of data for this report, the YAC did hold two Youth Rider Forums as part of its concurrent Service Evaluation activities. Open to all young SEPTA riders, the forums—held at the University of Pennsylvania in the spring of 2010 and at Temple University in the fall of 2010—employed group deliberation to answer some of the same questions posed by the Philadelphia Youth Rider Survey. During the first forum, attendees were challenged to describe their experiences on SEPTA, imagine an ideal public transportation system in the City, and brainstorm ways to close the gap between the two. For the second forum—by which point the YAC had already completed preliminary synthesis of the Survey results—attendees were also asked to give feedback on the Draft Recommendations to SEPTA. The results of both forums were taken into account when generating this final report.

# Survey Process and Methodology

## Data Analysis

During data analysis, percentages were calculated out of the total number of people who answered a question, and not out of the total number of respondents to the survey. All figures are rounded to the nearest tenth of a percent. Qualitative feedback from the Philadelphia Youth Rider Forums and the

free response section of the survey were incorporated into the YAC's core recommendations, but did not influence quantitative data in any way.



*Map of Planning Analysis Sections of the City of Philadelphia. With the exceptions of Districts D, K, and L, one high school in each section agreed to participate in the Philadelphia Youth Rider Survey.*

# Results

- Ridership Patterns
- SEPTA vs. Alternate Forms of Transportation
- Familiarity with SEPTA Services and System
- Disincentives to Take SEPTA
- Access to Information
- Effect of Suggested Improvements
- Free Response
- Demographics



# Results

## Results: Understanding Youth Rider Needs

### *Ridership Patterns*

Some of the most basic information the YAC wanted to learn was what youth use SEPTA for, and how often they use it. Correlating SEPTA usage with educational status produced several useful conclusions about how the system serves riders of different ages. For high school students, SEPTA is most often used for transportation to school, although more than half of respondents also take public transit to run errands or travel for leisure. On the other hand, since a large number of college students live on or near their campuses, they use SEPTA to get to school at half the rate of their high school counterparts, but were more likely to use it to travel to jobs or internships. Even more than school or work, however, college students are most likely to use SEPTA during their free time. Large majorities of them report taking it for shopping, running errands, or nightlife, and 91.4% say they've used the system to reach some type of leisure activity.

These different passenger profiles hold important implications for how SEPTA can market and improve service for young riders. For the average high school student, public transportation is an essential part of daily life, so SEPTA should ensure that it meets their basic needs by effectively conveying them to school and part-time jobs. Where opportunities to expand ridership exist, they should focus on familiarizing high school students with the full scope of SEPTA services, and how they can make use of them outside of their daily commutes.

For the college student living away from home, on the other hand, SEPTA is not something that must be used everyday, but rather a means of accessing different parts of the city, going out with friends, and meeting other non-essential needs. For young people who are unfamiliar or uncomfortable with taking SEPTA, these activities can easily be reached via other means of transportation. Educating these

students early in their college years and attracting them to public transportation is an important step in encouraging them to choose SEPTA first. Clearly, this generalization does not apply to commuter students, which comprise a significant percentage of college students citywide, and do represent the “average student” at schools like Temple University. For this population, as with high school students, general education about SEPTA services can encourage them to consider it for a variety of transportation needs in their daily lives.

### *SEPTA vs. Alternate Forms of Transportation*

Analyzing how often youth use SEPTA to get around begs the question of how their ridership compares with their use of other forms of transportation. When asked to rank how often they use various modes, youth as a whole reported using SEPTA most frequently, followed by walking and automobile; taxis and bicycles were highly unpopular as everyday forms of transportation. Inquiring how respondents would be most likely to travel into Center City on a given day revealed some differences between college and high school students in this regard. About 70% of each group reported that SEPTA would be their first choice for the trip, but four times more high school students (24%) than college students picked automobile, whereas college students were four times more likely to go by bicycle or on foot. These preferences are most likely the result of geography and varying levels of independence in each population. High school students sampled live in neighborhoods throughout the city, and are more



# Results

likely to face a longer journey to Center City, and to be driven places by their parents. Most college students sampled spend their time on campuses in the inner city, so walking and biking are more convenient. They are also less likely to own cars during their time in school.

## *Familiarity with SEPTA Services and System*

The level of young people's familiarity with the SEPTA system is a pivotal factor in their ridership, as they are more likely to use it when they understand how to get around, are aware of fare discounts, and feel safe and comfortable. When asked to rate their own knowledge of SEPTA, 44.7% of youth say it is "pretty good," and an additional third characterize it as "average." Somewhat surprisingly, college students indicated significantly higher levels of familiarity than their high school counterparts, indicating that while high school students use SEPTA more regularly, their overall knowledge may be limited to the few routes they use on a daily basis. College students, who more often have to accustom themselves to new surroundings and a new public transportation system, may end up obtaining broader knowledge about SEPTA.

From this general assessment, the Survey presented more specific questions about respondents' familiarity with SEPTA services. Few youth (22.2%) have ever heard of the discount Independence Pass, but college students (29.8%) were twice as likely to know of it as high school students (13.2%). Even fewer youth (15.9%) had heard of Mobile SEPTA, but there was no significant difference between the two student populations in this regard. These findings indicate that SEPTA, both independently and through the YAC, could do more to apprise young riders of new services like these which are likely to appeal to them. Especially for college students, knowledge of these discounts and new technologies has great potential to increase ridership. Finally, the Survey revealed encouraging data on youth riders' knowledge of basic SEPTA sales: fully 86.5% of them reported knowing where tokens and passes are sold near their home or residence, with little variation among high school and

college students. This finding invalidated the YAC's initial prediction that increased advertisement of SEPTA sales locations would be a necessary first step in raising public transportation usage.

## *Disincentives to Take SEPTA*

Although most youth surveyed had at least a moderate knowledge of SEPTA and reported using the system for multiple types of trips, a large number of respondents also acknowledged problems with the system that discouraged them from using it more often. Over 2/3 of youth (64.4%) experienced at least one occasion in the previous month when they had initially planned to travel on SEPTA, but ultimately used another means of transportation. While respondents attributed these incidents to a number of factors, the most common causes for high school students were unreliability of service



and not being sure how to reach their destination on SEPTA. For college students, the three greatest contributing factors were insufficient late-night service, unreliability of service, and tokens being unavailable nearby. Among the responses of both populations, the role of insufficient late-night service in discouraging college students from using SEPTA was the most striking, with 54.4% of respondents saying they took another means of transportation for that reason.

# Results

## *Access to Information*

Since access to SEPTA information is a foundation of building familiarity with the system among youth riders, the Survey asked respondents whether such information was available at their schools, and how useful it was. While just over half of all youth say their schools offer information about how to use SEPTA, there is a significant gap between high schools and colleges in this regard, with only 37.5% of high school students indicating awareness of such resources, while 70.9% of college students say they have access to them. When asked to rate the quality of this information, 2/3 of youth report that it is “okay”, while 26.8% say it is “good”, and only 3.3% believe it is “excellent.” The vast majority of college and high school students are identical in their assessments of the information as okay or good, although college students were slightly more disposed to negative ratings than their high school counterparts. The key implications from these findings are that SEPTA and the YAC could do more to see that information makes its way into Philadelphia high schools, and that the quality and variety of SEPTA resources could stand to improve across all institutions.

## *Effect of Suggested Improvements*

The purpose of the Survey was not only to understand how young riders use public transportation and what difficulties they face in doing so, but also to find out what changes SEPTA could make to serve them better. In this section, respondents were presented with a list of suggested improvements and asked to consider how much more likely they would be to use SEPTA if each one were implemented. At a time when funding for local public transit is very limited, their responses were vital in helping the YAC gauge whether a given improvement would actually be likely to increase ridership.

The chart on the next page indicates the responses of all youth surveyed in regard to the seven suggested

improvements. Clearly, the most appealing change by far was SEPTA offering a selection of discounted youth passes, with 66.4% of young people reporting that it would make them “much more likely” to take SEPTA. More rigorous cleanliness standards and the extension of late-night hours on subway lines also earned high marks, with just under 50% of respondents saying that each one would make them much more likely to ride. Improving public safety and expanding and publicizing sales near schools were also appealing to youth, but most respondents felt they would make them “somewhat more likely” to use the system. Receiving a SEPTA 101 information session and extending hours on regional rail scored lowest out of the group, with the largest numbers of young people indicating that they would be no more likely to use SEPTA if such changes were made.

As above, it is also useful to parse the results by student group to reveal which issues resonated most with each population. For high school students, the top three issues were discounted student passes, improved cleanliness, and enhanced safety. These responses may reflect quality of customer experience issues which high school riders encounter on a daily basis. College students differ slightly in their priorities, as their top three concerns were discounted student passes, extended late-night subway service, and improved cleanliness (followed closely by enhanced safety). Given their current ridership patterns, these responses may indicate issues which are significant barriers to them taking SEPTA in place





# Results

of another form of transportation. Still, the relative agreement of high school and college students on these suggestions is an encouraging testament to the potential of targeted improvements to boost youth ridership.

## Free Response

While it was necessary to gather feedback on suggested improvements in order to generate manageable results, the YAC also wanted to give respondents the opportunity to share all ideas they had without the restrictions of multiple-choice survey questions. Therefore, the survey included a free response area that asked young people to answer the question “What specific improvements would you like the Youth Advisory Council to advocate to SEPTA” in their own words. Their responses ranged from brief phrases to paragraphs with detailed suggestions, but all proved very useful in helping the YAC formulate its core recommendations to SEPTA. Most of the quotation

boxes distributed across the following pages contain excerpts from this material. While some free response ideas reinforced issues that were brought up elsewhere in the survey, others called attention to legitimate concerns that the YAC had not yet considered. Several of these are reflected in the “Other Recommendations” section later in this report.

## Demographics

A total of 784 respondents participated in the Philadelphia Youth Rider Survey. Of these, 325 (41.5%) were high school students, 326 (41.6%) were college students, 16 (2.4%) were not enrolled in school, and 117 (14.5%) did not complete the entire survey and identify themselves. Although the Survey was focused on Philadelphia, a small number of respondents (10.9%) identified themselves as residents of one of the outlying counties. This may represent the portion of commuter-students who took the survey.

### 37. Please indicate how much MORE LIKELY you would be to use SEPTA if the following improvements were made.

	Not At All Likely	Somewhat More Likely	Much More Likely	Response Count
Sales of tokens and passes near your school are expanded and better publicized	21.3% (136)	<b>47.9% (306)</b>	30.8% (197)	639
You receive a “SEPTA 101” intro to the system at your school	<b>51.8% (330)</b>	35.9% (229)	12.2% (78)	637
Late-night hours are extended on subway lines	24.1% (153)	31.8% (202)	<b>44.2% (281)</b>	636
Late-night hours are extended on Regional Rail lines	<b>40.5% (259)</b>	33.2% (212)	26.3% (168)	639
Police officers are assigned to all subway stations	20.5% (130)	<b>40.8% (259)</b>	38.7% (246)	635
SEPTA vehicles and stations are cleaned more frequently	14.7% (94)	37.2% (238)	<b>48.1% (308)</b>	640
SEPTA offers a selection of discounted student passes (weekly, monthly, by semester)	8.1% (52)	25.5% (163)	<b>66.4% (425)</b>	640
			<b>answered question</b>	<b>646</b>
			<b>skipped question</b>	<b>138</b>

# Recommendations

1. Offer an expanded selection of discounted student passes
2. Extend late-night hours on City subway lines
3. Increase focus on public safety in SEPTA stations and vehicles
4. Increase access to fare instruments at colleges
5. Extend high school pass privileges for student workers

# Recommendations

## Recommendations

The information gleaned from the Philadelphia Youth Rider Survey is most valuable as a foundation from which SEPTA leadership can evaluate options for improving service to young riders.

In formulating the following Recommendations, the YAC applied a number of criteria to identify issues that resonated strongly with youth while being feasible to implement in the foreseeable future.

First, it is important to note that the recommendations call attention to issues which disproportionately affect youth and which the YAC felt were not being adequately addressed at the current time. For example, although many youth indicated in the Free Response section that they wanted to see SEPTA move toward a “SmartCard” system, this was not adopted as a recommendation since this project is already in the procurement process. Secondly, the YAC is keenly aware that

recommending significant changes to the system during a period of decreased government funding is a difficult proposition. Faced with these budget shortfalls, SEPTA has found it challenging to keep even planned capital programs on schedule, let alone consider additional upgrades in service.

**“If I could just get a pass for a discount, I would always use SEPTA.”  
—19-year old University of Pennsylvania student**

Nevertheless, we believe it is in the agency’s interest to make a provision for the future by investing in its next generation of customers. Where modest improvements make it more convenient for youth to use SEPTA, there is the short-term benefit of increased ridership and the long-term

dividend of building a culture of transit ridership in the Philadelphia region. Therefore, the following recommendations are broken down into short-term and long-term steps. Where the latter may be an appropriate five-year goal that is more dependent on funding levels, short-term actions can lay the groundwork for such changes (and show progress to the public) with minimal initial investment.

We believe that each of the following Recommendations meets our goals of improving service to youth, being feasible to implement, and increasing ridership on the SEPTA system.

### *Core Recommendations*

#### **1. “Offer an expanded selection of discounted student passes”**

##### *Understanding the Issue*

No single issue aroused as much support in local youth as the expansion of SEPTA’s discount student pass program. Trailpasses, Transpasses, and other discount fare instruments are popular with riders in general because they can be purchased at occasional intervals and used for multiple trips. Pass-holders can conveniently take SEPTA at any time, since they





# Recommendations

don't have to locate tokens or come up with exact change before beginning their trip. As such, holding a pass places the fewest barriers between the rider and their entry to the system. This convenience is desirable to both commuter college students and those who use the system on an irregular basis.

SEPTA currently meets this need through the University Pass Program, through which colleges like the University of Pennsylvania, Drexel University, and Temple University sell "Semester Passes" at a 10% discount to eligible students. Passes are valid for the full length of a semester (September through December and January through May) and are sold directly by participating schools.

## *Understanding the Problem*

Although the University Pass Program is a good start to providing lower-cost fare instruments to youth, its limited scope and flexibility make it a poor tool for increasing ridership among college students. In the Survey, Forums, and at YAC Outreach Events, youth have complained about the deadline for purchasing the pass during their busy first days of classes, the high one-time cost of purchasing one (\$284-\$653), and the fact that passes are ineligible for partial refund or replacement if lost or stolen. Many other youth were frustrated that they could only purchase a semester pass at school, adding that they would be more interested in the program if discounted monthly, weekly, and daily passes were available as well.

Complicating these issues is the fact that the University Pass Program is a joint venture between SEPTA and each of the participating colleges, and thus any solution to the problem must engage multiple agencies. The 10% discount that students receive is financed in equal amounts by the school and SEPTA, meaning that colleges end up selling the

passes for 5% less than they purchased them for. Although Drexel University offers students monthly passes under the same terms as Semester Passes, in general schools have a disincentive to expand sales in this way since each additional pass sold increases the loss they have to finance out of their own budget. Universities also have little motivation to devote more resources and personnel-hours to expanding sales in what they view as a courtesy service that is the primary responsibility of a public transit authority.

We believe that there are two distinct solutions to this problem: a short-term one that can be led by universities and their student governments and a long-term one that requires SEPTA leadership.

**"The student pass must be paid in one lump sum for the entire semester and [payment] is due before I get tuition refunds...I can never afford to buy it ahead of time."  
—23 year old Temple University student**

## *Short-term solution:*

***Encourage colleges and universities to provide discounted monthly, weekly, and daily passes in addition to the existing semester pass.***

While a permanent solution to the problem of discounted student passes can come with the implementation of SEPTA's New Payment Technologies, or "SmartCard" system, Philadelphia

youth can take action in the intervening years to see that universities broaden their student pass programs. Since colleges have no financial motivation to expand sales under the current model, advocacy on the behalf of student governments and the YAC must focus on how the issue aligns with school's environmental goals. Most major institutions have set goals to reduce their carbon footprint and promote public transportation usage that may implicitly or explicitly align with expansion of the pass program.

For example, the University of Pennsylvania's Climate Action Plan proposes a number of action steps to "increase accessibility and usage of public

# Recommendations

transportation.” Among them are to “allow students to use University identity cards as SEPTA passes,” to “provide introductory daily passes for new students” and to “increase subsidies for Transpasses and Trailpasses.” Progressive ideas like these offer a good starting point for negotiations between student governments and university administrations, and building popular support for such changes in the student body can create the “political will” to turn them into reality.

*Long-term solution:*

## ***Integrate Youth Passes with New Payment Technologies***

A long-term vision for discounted youth fares must be forged within the parameters of SEPTA’s new fare system, which is currently in procurement under the provisional title of “New Payment Technologies.” The agency has consistently stated that the system will be the most advanced in the United States at the time of its release, and will be flexible enough to allow payment via cash, credit card, pass, and even mobile phones. While SEPTA has declined to discuss with the YAC the possibility of incorporating student discounts into New Payment Technologies for reasons of active contract procurement, the YAC strongly urges SEPTA leadership to consider this issue internally. Taking advantage of this \$100 million upgrade to implement progressive changes to student fares is a potential game-changer that could increase youth ridership for years to come.



The strongest action SEPTA could take to promote youth ridership across its entire system would be to offer a percent discount on fare instruments to all youth within a given age range. This reform would benefit high school students, college students, and young people in the workforce equally, rather than limiting discounts to youth who attend specific schools. Similar “across the board” youth discounts have been implemented in Europe, with government support for their goals of increasing mobility, facilitating participation in the labor force, and incentivizing public transportation usage. Encouraging both state and congressional representatives to support such programs in transportation funding bills can become a point of advocacy for the YAC and the youth it represents. Even if legislative support is weak, SEPTA should investigate how it could implement youth fare discounts independently, as the resultant increase in ridership may well prove to be sufficient to sustain the program. A well-publicized pilot program accompanying the debut of New Payment Technologies is a good way to test the idea with minimal risk to the agency’s income stream.

## **2. “Extend late-night hours on City subway lines”**

*Understanding the Issue*

With two-thirds of college students surveyed indicating that it would make them much more likely to ride SEPTA, extending late-night hours on City subway lines is a service improvement with high potential to increase youth ridership and accustom students to using SEPTA for their leisure needs. For the college-aged population living in Philadelphia, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday nights are prime time for traveling to downtown Philadelphia (or other campuses) for restaurants, bars, clubs, and the company of friends. Unfortunately, for many students who use SEPTA on such evenings, the trip is one-way, as the closure of the Broad Street Subway and Market-Frankford Line after 12:30AM and students’ lack of knowledge of other late-night

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services lead them to hail a taxi for the ride home. Nevertheless, these services do exist, as both subway lines are replaced by Nite-Owl buses, subway-surface trolleys run throughout the night six days a week, and other regular bus routes continue uninterrupted.

## *Understanding the Problem*

The two main obstacles to increasing youth ridership late at night are the time at which subway service terminates on weekend nights and poor familiarity with SEPTA's Nite Owl Services. Survey feedback and personal interaction between YAC members and fellow youth have revealed that many students are unaware of Nite Owl bus service on subway lines and have very poor knowledge of which surface routes continue to operate after midnight. Other youth acknowledged having tried the Nite Owl bus, but reported feeling unsafe standing on the street for seemingly long headways between buses. While the YAC feels that existing headways of 10-15 minutes are adequate, it also believes that there is much to be done in informing youth of this convenience and of the range of late-night services available to them. There are currently no informational or marketing campaigns that SEPTA oversees which are related to late-night service.

The question of when subway service ceases at night—and why—is somewhat more complicated. The current closing times on both of the City's subway lines are dictated chiefly by cost, labor, and safety concerns. As SEPTA's Service Planning Department explains:

*"There are 28 Market Frankford Line stations, and 22 Broad Street Line stations, each which would require cashiers and police security during the late night hours. In contrast, we are able to provide 10-15 minute service frequency using just ten buses and bus operators on each line."*

Additionally, closing the lines provides SEPTA workers with needed time to complete scheduled

**"Extend late night hours!!!! I would rather take SEPTA than a cab!!!"**  
**—23 year old Temple University student**

track maintenance without interference. Although such a large majority of youth supports an extension of operating hours on these lines, current funding cuts relegate this service expansion to being a definite long-term goal.

## *Short-term solution:*

### ***Improve Marketing of Nite Owl Service***

Fortunately, it is possible to increase late-night youth ridership on SEPTA in the short term simply by improving the marketing of Nite Owl service. Ideally, this should be done through both a general SEPTA advertising campaign and targeted YAC outreach to Philadelphia colleges. Transit authorities in other cities have invested in similar initiatives with considerable success (see the Madrid case study), typically orienting them toward the young adult populations who take part in nightlife the most.

Going out tonight?  
Why pay more?

SEPTA tokens are available for \$1.55 apiece every day.  
See your college house information desk for details.

Sponsored by the SEPTA Youth Advisory Council. [www.septa.org/partner/yac](http://www.septa.org/partner/yac)



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The YAC recommends that a SEPTA advertising campaign focus on promoting Nite Owl service as a convenient, safe, and inexpensive alternative to other forms of transportation in the late-night hours. Some slogans that may form the basis for good ads are:

- “Going out tonight? Why pay more? SEPTA tokens are available for \$1.55 apiece every day.”
- “Love to stay out late? So do we. Nite Owl buses stop here every 15 minutes” (ideal for bus shelters on lines with Nite Owl service)
- “Travel home safe. Your designated driver awaits” (accompanied with a picture of a SEPTA bus and driver)

In addition to appealing to young people, these ads help reinforce the perception of downtown Philadelphia as an area with active nightlife and good public transportation. For its part, the YAC plans on creating new college-specific flyers which promote late-night service and inform youth which lines continue operating after hours, and with what frequency.

*Long-term solution:*

## ***Extend City Subway service to 2:00AM from Thursday through Saturday***

Although current funding restrictions do not make it feasible to expand subways service beyond its current closing time, the YAC still believes that SEPTA should adopt this as a long-term goal. Our aspiration is for Philadelphia to become a world-class city with a world-class public transportation system, and this is one way of providing a seamless continuation of service for both residents and visitors who enjoy the downtown’s nightlife. Furthermore, even with better promotion of existing Nite Owl

service, it is likely that only expansion of subway operating hours will realize the full potential of increasing late-night ridership. Several transportation studies have sought to quantify riders’ perceived preference for rail transportation over buses, and while the Philadelphia Youth Rider Survey did not investigate this point per se, it did reveal that over 30% more youth take the subway when going out for nightlife than the bus. Although marketing of bus service to youth should help reduce this disparity, visitors and those unfamiliar with the system may still prefer subway service. Given that almost all bars and clubs close at 2:00AM, we believe that having the last

subways on Thursday through Saturday nights depart from their termini at this time would provide a suitable expansion of service. Washington, D.C.’s Metrorail, which remains open until 3:00AM on Friday and Saturday evenings, is a best practice in this regard. Since transit ridership, the number of nightlife establishments, and Center City’s residential population have all risen since the last time Philadelphia had

late-night subway service (around 1990), it would be worthwhile for SEPTA to run a pilot program to this effect when it finds itself in more flexible funding environment.

**“I would love to be able to take SEPTA when I go out on weekend nights, but it has stopped running by the time I am ready to go home.”  
—21 year old Roxborough resident**



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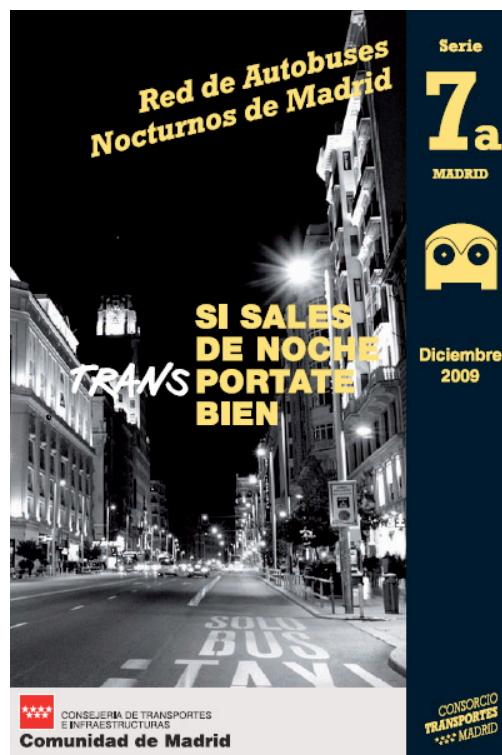
## Best Practice: Madrid, Spain



### Marketing Nite Owl Service to Youth

A novel and successful project to promote late-night public transportation usage can be found in Madrid, Spain. Realizing that their interest in increasing nighttime ridership coincided with the city's interest in decreasing drunk driving, Madrid's public transportation agency participated in the Campaign for Responsible Leisure and Transportation. An unprecedented partnership of the municipal public transit agency, the city, and the alcohol manufacturer Diageo developed the public service campaign *Si Sales de Noche, Transportate Bien*, a Spanish play-on-words that most closely translates as "If you go out at night, Transport yourself (and behave) well." Displayed on full-size posters, bus schedules, and metro schedules, the advertisements urged young people to plan a way home before heading out and to take public transportation if they'd been drinking. The initiative also received the support of local taxi companies.

Madrid was especially well-equipped to administer such a campaign due to the extent of its late-night public transit system and its advertisement of these services. A network of 24 "owl buses" operates every 35 minutes throughout the night, seven days a week. On weekends and festivals, two additional circular bus routes operate in the highest-activity areas of downtown Madrid. Pamphlets especially designed for the program—distributed in 500 nightlife spots throughout the city—featured maps that showed all owl routes operating in the downtown, thereby making it simple and convenient for riders to find their way home.



### 3. "Increase focus on public safety in SEPTA stations and vehicles"

#### *Understanding the Issue*

Although many youth feel comfortable using SEPTA as one of their primary means of mobility, the emphasis that both high school and college students placed on increased safety as a condition for them using SEPTA more often identifies it as an issue which merits closer attention. SEPTA currently maintains safety in its vehicles and stations through a number of strategies, beginning with its own independent police department. The agency's 260

**"Safety is a number one concern of mine, especially as a young woman. Taking SEPTA at night feels unsafe and no longer becomes an option."—21 year old Temple University student**

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Transit Police officers patrol the system in cars, on foot, and in plainclothes, and the department has designated canine, bicycle, and community affairs units. Station security includes emergency call boxes, which allow passengers to speak with public safety personnel in the SEPTA Control Center with the touch of a button. Riders can also call SEPTA Police at emergency and non-emergency numbers from their cell phones if they need assistance. Finally, SEPTA has implemented several security features which utilize modern technology to improve surveillance and communication throughout its vast system. Security cameras on buses and subways record on-board footage in case a crime is committed, and SEPTA Police report that all vehicles will be equipped with these devices by 2014. Most recently, the Department has taken a proactive approach to deterring cell phone theft with its *Keep Alert* campaign, consisting of advertisements which exhort passengers to be aware of their surroundings and keep their valuables close at hand.

## *Understanding the Problem*

Given these various approaches, the YAC believes that SEPTA has made a strong commitment to providing for security on the system within the financial constraints it is subject to. Still, significant gaps in security and insufficient education of the public about existing resources have left many youth (and riders in general) wary of how safe it is to use the system. As the survey revealed, young riders—and especially young women—feel uncomfortable taking SEPTA at nighttime, but report that a more visible police presence could mitigate this problem. Maintaining such a presence is challenging given the extent of the SEPTA system, and the agency acknowledges that its 260 officers “are responsible for SEPTA’s 2,200 square-mile service region, including over 100 stations on the Market-Frankford, Broad Street, and Regional Rail Lines.” While some riders feel it may be desirable to have a uniformed officer posted at every subway station, the logistics of such

a deployment would make it difficult for the force to maintain a presence on vehicles and to police more distant lines. Fortunately, the heavy concentration of college students in small areas of the city as well as the existence of abundant security personnel in those locations makes improving safety in nearby stations a feasible goal.

## *Short-Term Solution:*

### ***Better Inform the Public about Safety on the System***

While a large amount of public safety information is published on SEPTA’s website for those who seek it out, there are currently few programs to visibly disseminate it around the system in stations, vehicles, and other places where SEPTA information is

available. Although the current Keep Alert campaign has been highly visible, basic information on both safety features and crime rates on the system (which are actually quite low) are not as accessible. The YAC believes that addressing this gap is key to reversing the perception that taking public transportation

in a large city is a risky proposition—a view that is especially prevalent among youth from the suburbs or other regions.

**“Safety is the number one reason I choose alternate forms of transportation.”—22 year old Torresdale resident**





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## Public Health Alert:

### *...When Passenger Etiquette Doesn't Cut It*

Have you ever stood waiting for a train or subway while someone lights up a cigarette, right within view of a “No Smoking” sign? You’re not alone. Although SEPTA Police report issuing 5,697 “quality of life” violations in the past year, enforcement of its smoking policy in high-traffic stations still leaves something to be desired. In December, a YAC member waiting at City Hall subway station just after midday witnessed three separate passengers smoking on a busy platform—one standing less than 10 ft. from a mother with an infant. Tolerating this behavior violates all riders’ right to healthful conditions on the system, and is a special concern for customers who are very young, elderly, or suffer from respiratory problems. The YAC believes that SEPTA Police should begin aggressively ticketing individuals who flagrantly violate its smoke-free policy, in accordance with its own policies and/or the penalties enumerated in The Clean Indoor Air Worker Protection Law (Philadelphia City Code §10-602). Assigning a police officer to high-traffic areas like City Hall or 15th Street Subway-Surface Station, where violations are known to occur, is a good first step in increasing enforcement. As indicated in the oft-cited experience of New York City’s ticketing of subway turnstile jumpers, enforcement of petty crimes on transit can tangibly increase safety on the system by creating a visible police presence.



Most young people are deterred from taking public transportation out of fear of robbery, unwanted attention, or encounters with vagrants. Although these perceived dangers actually occur very rarely, the concerns of uneasy passengers can be assuaged by informing them what safety features are built into the system, and how to act in the case of an emergency. The installation of cameras on SEPTA vehicles, existing call boxes in stations, the presence of plain-clothes officers throughout the system, and phone numbers for SEPTA police are all useful topics that should be passed on to passengers via pamphlets or placards in trains. Finally, very few youth are aware that they can call SEPTA Police to obtain a walking escort from a station if they feel unsafe. While some colleges already offer this service on their campuses, informing young riders that it is available elsewhere in the city may make them more comfortable with using SEPTA late at night or in unfamiliar areas.

*Long-term Solution:*

### ***Partner with University Police Departments and Special Districts to Improve Station Security***

Although better informing passengers is a good start toward improving their impressions of safety on the system, the most effective way of changing negative perceptions and deterring actual crime is by increasing security in SEPTA stations. While it may not be financially feasible to increase the





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size of SEPTA's police force in the near future, the YAC believes there is great potential in partnering with other law enforcement and security personnel to achieve common goals. Major institutions like the University of Pennsylvania and Temple University already have their own police forces, which meticulously patrol their respective campuses and surrounding neighborhoods. SEPTA Police acknowledge that they already collaborate with these departments for special events, but have not developed any joint initiatives to improve station security together. Where SEPTA Police are unable to assign officers to patrol subway or trolley stations in these areas, they should discuss the possibility of allowing campus police (or uniformed campus security personnel) to fill that role. It may also prove beneficial to consider a similar arrangement with the unarmed security staff of local business improvement districts (BIDs) like the Center City District and University City District. These organizations are dedicated to promoting the areas within their boundaries as clean, safe, and desirable places to live and do business. As such, they have an interest in seeing that this perception extends to the experience people have at the public transportation stations within their districts. It may

be possible to negotiate an arrangement whereby BID security officers are given permission to enter and patrol SEPTA stations at certain times of day. While they do not have the authority to make arrests or ticket offenders, they could function as the eyes and ears of professional law enforcement in much the same way as they do on the streets. Furthermore, the presence of any uniformed security personnel can be instrumental in discouraging illegal activity and promoting safety.

## 4. "Increase access to fare instruments at colleges"

**"It is often not enough to simply provide transit services to a campus. To make members of the school community aware of services provided, the transit operator must advertise its existence and use." — *Transit Cooperative Research Program, Synthesis 78***

### *Understanding the Issue*

This hybrid recommendation is derived from Survey questions which asked youth to identify barriers to their use of SEPTA. Results indicate that the vast majority of youth

know where fare instruments can be purchased near their home or residence. Still, a significant number of them reported that inflexible payment options discouraged them from taking SEPTA, and 1 in 5 experienced an incident in the past month when they didn't take SEPTA as planned because tokens were sold out or unavailable nearby.

### *Understanding the Problem*

For non-commuter students, tokens are typically the most cost-effective way to ride SEPTA on an occasional basis. They are available for sale at various retail stores on their campuses, and in some cases (at the University of Pennsylvania, for example) directly through the school at dormitory information centers and other common buildings. While buying tokens on campus or where they live is the most convenient option for students, universities have little incentive to expand sales, market them more effectively, or ensure that they are consistently well-stocked with fare instruments. On the other hand, youth



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interested in taking SEPTA who forget or are unable to purchase tokens ahead of time find it inconvenient to make sure they have the four dollar bills on hand that are necessary to complete a round-trip. The fact that many stations lack token machines and subway attendants do not give change means that even youth with adequate cash on hand must ride SEPTA at a loss or find other means of transportation. Both of these problems can discourage the inexperienced user from taking SEPTA more regularly, making them think that riding is complicated, difficult, or onerous. Easy access to fare instruments in areas with large youth populations, on the other hand, makes riding SEPTA a simple and convenient decision.

## *Short-term Solution I:*

***Have attendants at subway booths make change until the implementation of New Payment Technologies.***

Where Survey respondents offered their ideas on fare policy, their most common feedback was to recommend the implementation of a “SmartCard” system similar to that used in other cities—a project that many youth apparently do not know is currently underway at SEPTA. Another one of their most common responses, however, was to inquire why subway station attendants accept exact cash payment, yet do not make change for customers who have denominations of bills larger than \$1. The YAC felt that the question was legitimate, and requested information from SEPTA staff on the policy. The reason that attendants do not make change, the Council was informed, is that “queuing issues arise as customers needing transfers, seniors and the disabled must wait in line while sales transactions occur, often causing customers to miss trains.” As a result, SEPTA has chosen instead to “continually invest towards the development and expansion of [its] external sales network.”

Having considered this argument, the YAC still strongly believes that allowing attendants to make change for passengers is a good customer service policy that addresses greater concerns that the status quo seeks to prevent. That is to say, youth (and almost certainly other passenger groups) are frustrated by the inconvenience of not being able to use the cash they have on hand to enter the system, but not a single rider surveyed complained about the time it takes to enter a station. One could just as easily argue that the presence of token machines at some subway stations causes customers to queue up and miss trains, but there are probably few

customers who would wish to see them removed on that account. The utility gained by offering customers more payment options is simply greater than that lost

**“Accessibility!!! If I have to choose between going to an ATM to get cash, then making change to buy tokens, or just drive, I’d rather drive.”  
—Temple University graduate student**



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by risking the formation of lines. Since attendants already accept coins and bills throughout the day, SEPTA should make the simple internal change of authorizing them to dispense change as well, at least until New Payment Technologies are implemented. For the price of only one additional trip to stock each station as the system opens, the agency can improve riders' experiences and achieve greater efficiency with the same number of employees.

## *Short-term Solution II:*

### ***Encourage colleges to keep fare instruments available and well-stocked for the convenience of students***

While SEPTA can take action to see that payment at entry to the system is more convenient, colleges and universities have the power to improve the sale of fare instruments on their campuses.

As with the sale of discounted student passes (see Recommendation #1), the YAC plans on engaging in conversations with university administrations and student governments to begin advocating for such changes. While schools do not stand to gain financially from this improvement, their publicized sustainability commitments and student demand for dependable and convenient token sales are strong arguments in its favor.

## *Long-term Solution:*

### ***New Payment Technologies***

The long-term solution to developing a modern and convenient fare system lies in the implementation of New Payment Technologies, an improvement that was requested by a large number of youth in the Survey. The YAC fully supports the transition to this system as soon as is practicable, and believes that the variety of payment options it supports will eliminate several disincentives to take SEPTA that youth currently encounter, especially in regard to

spur-of-the-moment trips. However, as stated above in Recommendation #1, the YAC also urges SEPTA to see that this future system is conducive to the sale and expansion of discounted youth passes.

## **5. “Extend high school pass privileges for student workers”**

### *Understanding the Issue*

Public high school students in Philadelphia (and some other jurisdictions) currently enjoy the use of a special SEPTA pass to carry them to and from school. SEPTA staff thoroughly describe the program as follows in their response to a Request for Information from the YAC: *Under Commonwealth law, the School District in which the student resides is responsible for*

*transporting the student between home and school. There is no requirement for extra-curricular or personal transportation. The majority of the School Districts in the SEPTA Service area elect to use Student Weekday passes. These passes are purchased by the School Districts from SEPTA at a 25% discount. The discount is applied as the passes are valid only between 5:30 AM [and] 7:00 PM, not valid on weekends and holidays, and blocked out on weekdays that school is not in session.*

### *Understanding the Problem*

While high school students echoed many of the same recommendations that college students expressed in regards to improving service, the YAC paid special attention to one issue of unique interest to them. While these students reported using their provided passes regularly, upperclassmen who leave for jobs after school complained that they could not use these same passes to travel home after work. A significant number of students noted that while passes become invalid after 7:00PM, they typically have to travel

**“High School Transpasses expire too early. I have after-school programs, and it takes a lot of buses to get home.”—16 year old Parkway Northwest High School student**



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**“Change the 7:00 time limit for the school Tranpass to 8:00!”—15 year old Motivation High School student**

home between that time and 8:00PM.

While a modest adjustment in the permitted usage hours of the high school pass could solve this mismatch, the trend in recent years has been toward restriction, rather than expansion, of pass hours. As cases of flash mobs and crime perpetrated by youth have come to the public attention, public officials have seized on the pass as the vehicle which makes such disturbances possible, and thereby moved to restrict its use.

*Short-term Solution:*

***Extend pass privileges to 8:00PM for working students***

Although the YAC understands the legitimate concern over misuse of pass privileges by a small minority of high school students, it believes that restricting its usage provides only a symbolic solution to the problem while punishing upstanding youth. Rather, the School District of Philadelphia should seek to facilitate students’ accessing and retaining employment by ensuring that their trip to school in the morning ends with a safe trip home from their after-school work. While paying for one trip a day may seem trivial, the barriers that student-workers already face in poor areas of the city make this a worthwhile investment. Furthermore, the modest one-hour extension that students explicitly requested on the survey means that the District can meet this need with a targeted change at a minimal cost. Both costs and the potential for misuse can be mitigated by requiring students that receive the extension of pass privileges to provide proof of employment.

*Long-term Solution:*

***Make high school students eligible for future discounted youth passes***

As is stated in Recommendation #1 above, the YAC’s long-term vision for a comprehensive program of discounted youth passes includes making them available to all young people within a given age range, regardless of school affiliation. Such a change would spread the benefits of these passes more equitably, placing them within the reach of youth with limited educational attainment who have the greatest need for them.



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## ***Other Recommendations***

While the YAC did not study and collect feedback on the following issues extensively, each of them occurred frequently enough in the Free Response section of the Survey that they may be considered significant or of interest to youth.



## 1. Improve employee attention to good customer service skills

Some youth reported being treated poorly by SEPTA subway attendants and vehicle operators—being met with irritation or annoyance when they asked for assistance with navigating the system. The YAC has already addressed one side of the issue by including a component in its presentations at Philadelphia high schools on treating SEPTA staff respectfully. Nevertheless, SEPTA should follow up internally by ensuring that all employees are trained in proper conduct and good customer service skills.

## 2. Improve attention to cleanliness on the system

As the results above indicate, improving cleanliness in SEPTA stations and vehicles ranked quite highly among youth priorities for improvement. While the YAC did not elevate it to a Core Recommendation as it is a systemic, rather than a youth-specific issue, its effect on youth ridership should not be ignored. Survey respondents consistently mentioned dirt, trash, and unpleasant odors as problems which deter them from using SEPTA at times. Furthermore, these conditions lend stations and vehicles a seedy appearance that make youth more likely to perceive them as dangerous. The YAC believes that improving attention to cleanliness is key to creating a first-class riding experience for all passengers, and is especially important for encouraging youth to become regular users of the system. Current SEPTA General Manager Joe Casey has made great strides in this area already, both through the Passenger Etiquette campaign and through the physical cleaning of stations and vehicles. While changing public habits can take time, the YAC's recommendation to increase the presence of security personnel in stations can serve the dual purpose of deterring littering and

identifying violators.

## 3. Consider new bus routes to connect poorly-linked destinations

While the Philadelphia Youth Rider Survey was not developed for service planning, some respondents took the opportunity to call attention to areas with logical connections that are poorly served by SEPTA bus routes. The example most frequently cited by college students was the need for service between

University City and Fairmount, an up-and-coming neighborhood with a growing population of graduate students. It is useful to note that the University of Pennsylvania's Climate Action Plan specifically identifies the "Fairmount District" and the "Art Museum" as "underserved local neighborhoods" in terms of public transit. SEPTA should continue to pay close attention to ridership patterns and demographics in areas with large student populations to determine if they would be well-served by new routes.

**“On early dismissal days the charter buses don’t run, so I have to take two or more different routes that take me double the amount of time to travel home from school.”—15 year old Motivation High School student**

## 4. Offer high school charter bus service on early dismissal days

Some high school students specifically expressed concern over the fact that high school charter buses do not always run on scheduled early dismissal days. In order to provide consistent and safe transportation to all high school students, the YAC recommends that both SEPTA and relevant schools work together to eliminate these gaps in service.

## Recommendations for Further Study

As the first service evaluation report produced by the SEPTA Youth Advisory Council, A Philadelphia Youth Rider Agenda is a significant milestone in youth involvement in public transportation. The YAC is carrying this momentum forward by initiating a second Youth Rider Survey, due to be released in 2011, to study the needs of youth living in the suburban counties outside of Philadelphia. Surveys in future years will also seek to test the effectiveness of any improvements to youth service made as a result of this report and its recommendations. While the conclusions of these documents are of greatest importance to local youth and SEPTA leadership, we believe they can also serve as a starting point to encourage broader research into youth transportation needs.

At the regional level, transit authorities themselves may wish to engage in exploratory research into how youth use public transportation in their area, and how they can better serve this customer demographic. At the federal level, the National Academies' Transit Cooperative Research Program (TCRP) has amassed an impressive array of studies investigating different aspects of transportation networks, their management, and their planning. As the country seeks to move toward more sustainable means of transportation in the near future, we believe it would be both useful and timely for the TCRP to develop a report on youth and public transit. Such a study could benefit from the professional leadership and designated research budget that are unavailable to a volunteer organization like the YAC, and utilize these resources to draw valuable conclusions about the emerging generation of youth and their mobility needs.



“Youth should be given a chance  
to take an active part in the  
decision-making of local,  
national and global levels.”  
—United Nations Secretary-General  
Ban Ki-moon



