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Youth ridership on MTS has grown 47% in two-year span

San Diego – In celebration of summer and all that San Diego has to offer to community members, the San Diego Metropolitan Transit System (MTS) launched a new summer promotion encouraging more youth to explore their neighborhood by transit.

The Y\$2K Summer Challenge, a youth ridership promotion, is a chance for youth to make the most out of the summer break and win prizes along the way by riding transit. Youth 13 to 18 can participate in the Y\$2K Summer Challenge and could be one of 10 lucky winners to walk away with one of many cool prizes – including a beach cruiser, electric scooter, gift cards and more.

“Whether it’s going to the beach, the park, the mall, or the library to enjoy their summer break, it’s a chance for our city’s youth to ride transit and win prizes along the way,” said Stephen Whitburn, MTS Chair and San Diego City Councilmember. “Youth ridership numbers indicate that the Youth Opportunity Pass is an important resource for our community, and we want to celebrate that success and impact student riders have created with the Y\$2K Summer Challenge.”

Y\$2K encourages more youth to sign up for the free Youth Opportunity Pass program (YOP). With YOP, youth ride MTS buses and Trolleys, as well as North County Transit District services, for free with a Youth PRONTO card. MTS is currently going through a verification process for all youth riders, who must provide proof of their age to receive or keep using the free pass. The deadline to get verified was recently extended to Sept. 30. As of June, nearly 30,000 youth riders have been verified, about 60% of active youth riders.

“The cost of transportation should never be the barrier standing between a young person and the opportunity to achieve their potential,” said Sean Elo-Rivera, MTS Board Member and San Diego City Council President. “That is why families and youth fought so hard for so long for Youth Opportunity Passes and appreciate them so much today. All San Diego youth now have a way to get to education, healthcare, and recreational opportunities that will help them become happy, healthy and well-prepared to reach their goals.”

In April 2022, the month before YOP launched, there were about 438,000 youth trips. In April 2024, two years after the program launched, there were about 644,000 youth trips. That represents a 47% increase from two years ago.

“We know that when we open up mass transit to our youth, we are not only giving access to school, jobs, beaches and all that San Diego has to offer, but we are also preparing them to become the next generation of mass transit riders,” said Richard Barrera, Board of Education

Trustee for San Diego Unified School District. “This generation already cares deeply about protecting the environment – and they know the environmental benefits of keeping cars off the road.”

“Providing accessible transportation options is crucial for empowering our youth,” said David Baker, Program Director for Housing Our Youth at the YMCA of San Diego County. “The Y\$2K Summer Challenge is not only a creative and fun way to encourage the use of public transit, but the Youth Opportunity Pass also eliminates barriers for young people to access education, work opportunities, healthcare, and other essential services, contributing to a more equitable region in San Diego.”

Here’s how Y\$2K works. In the month of July, students will have the chance to participate in up to four social media challenges. To enter the contest, students must post a video or photo carousel completing a public transit challenge to their TikTok or Instagram account between July 1-31. The entries with the most views for a challenge will have first pick at one of four Grand Prizes. Additionally, MTS staff will vote for their favorite posts across all challenge entries and select six runner-up winners.

Prizes include a Nintendo Switch, new Beats Studio Pro headphones, an electric scooter, a beach cruiser, gift cards and more. To see a full list of prizes, contest rules and challenge details, visit www.sdmts.com/y2k.

About MTS

The Metropolitan Transit System (MTS) operates 97 bus routes and three Trolley lines in 10 cities and unincorporated areas of San Diego. MTS is a leader in advancing initiatives to create a greener, cleaner and better-connected transit system in San Diego. Each weekday more than 250,000 passenger trips are taken throughout the MTS system taking people to work, school, health appointments and other essential trips. In FY 2023, MTS served more than 68 million riders. For service schedule updates, news, alerts and more information on how you can use public transportation, go to www.sdmts.com.

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