



Route to Success: Sustainable & Equitable Transportation for Students

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Abstract

Connected, affordable, and accessible transportation is critical for students to get where they need to go. As public transit agencies reckon with the challenges of changing transit habits, away from class 9-5 commuters and towards travel throughout the day, student transportation needs to be reevaluated to best serve students. As a population mostly unable to legally drive, students are heavily dependent on school transportation programs. Transportation that is fast, convenient, and safe plays a critical role in the schools students are able to attend, literally driving access to educational opportunity. Even more, transportation allows students to participate in community service, receive tutoring, attend after school extracurriculars, work part-time, or visit friends & family.

The School District of Philadelphia has nearly 200,000 students (The District) it provides transportation to annually, making it a unique transportation provider. However, in a city with extreme racial and educational segregation, The District's transportation offerings reinforce existing inequities and limit access. This report summarises existing trends in student travel and highlights the need for more equitable & sustainable transportation programs that prioritizes low-income students, students in households without a vehicle, and students with long commutes to school. Because the District serves majority Black & Hispanic students (totaling 75% of all students), addressing systemic disparities in educational access via transportation can have long lasting impacts.

“Transportation plays a key role in the contemporary context of educational choice and opportunity”

- *Center for Cities + Schools, University of California Berkeley*

01 School District of Philadelphia: Transportation Challenges

The Philadelphia School District catchment area is for the entire of Philadelphia county, where there are nearly 200,000 students, 331 schools and a transportation budget of about \$192 million.¹

There are several key regulations that shape how student transportation programs are provided. According to both Pennsylvania and Federal Law, districts are not required to provide student transportation; however, if it is provided, it must be free. In Pennsylvania, transportation must be provided to charter school students with no exceptions. This means that transportation programs must all be fully-funded and cannot utilize user fees or other charges to student households to fund them.

A Federal Transit Administration regulation often referred to as "The Tripper Rule" serves to protect private school bus businesses from competition with public transit agencies, who

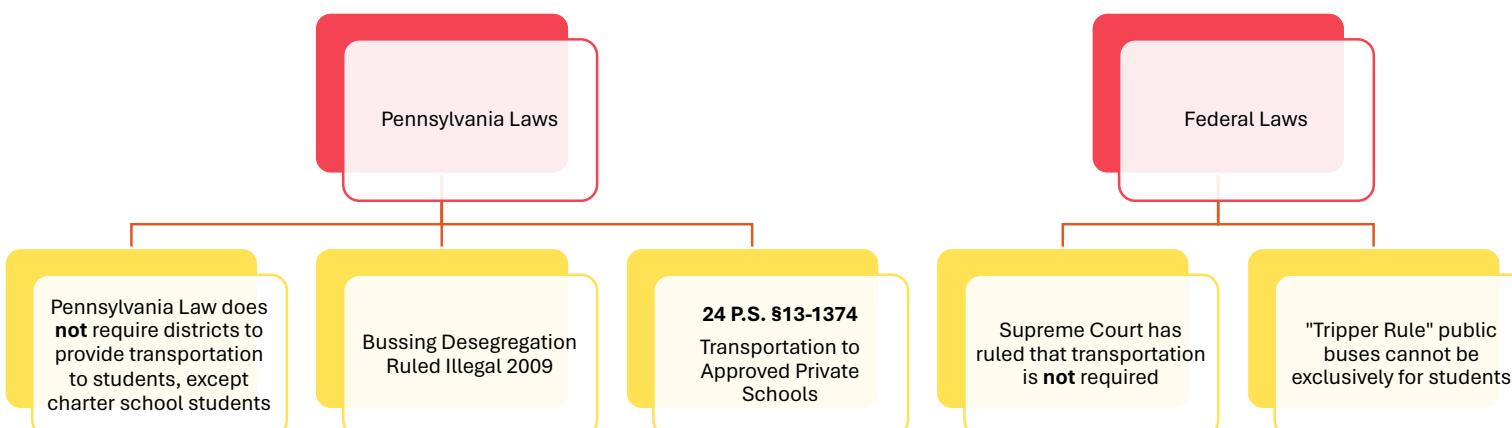
are not able to provide public transit solely for students. As a result, transportation needs exclusive to students have largely been a focus of School Districts when transit passes are not available or useful to students.²

Several laws in Pennsylvania provide key Bussing desegregation ("bussing") was ruled illegal in 2008.³ The District's transportation options therefore serve as de facto vehicles for educational opportunity for disadvantaged and minority students. For Philadelphia schools to be as diverse and provide educational opportunity across jurisdictional boundaries, The District must engage in providing transportation programs with as many options as possible to its most disadvantaged students. Although "bussing" was ruled illegal, transportation programs will be de facto desegregation tactics if they are wide-reaching in their connectivity, accessibility, and affordability.

1 Guide to school budgets 2023-2024, accessed May 6, 2024, <https://www.philasd.org/budget/wp-content/uploads/sites/96/2023/03/2023-24-Guide-to-School-Budgets.pdf>.

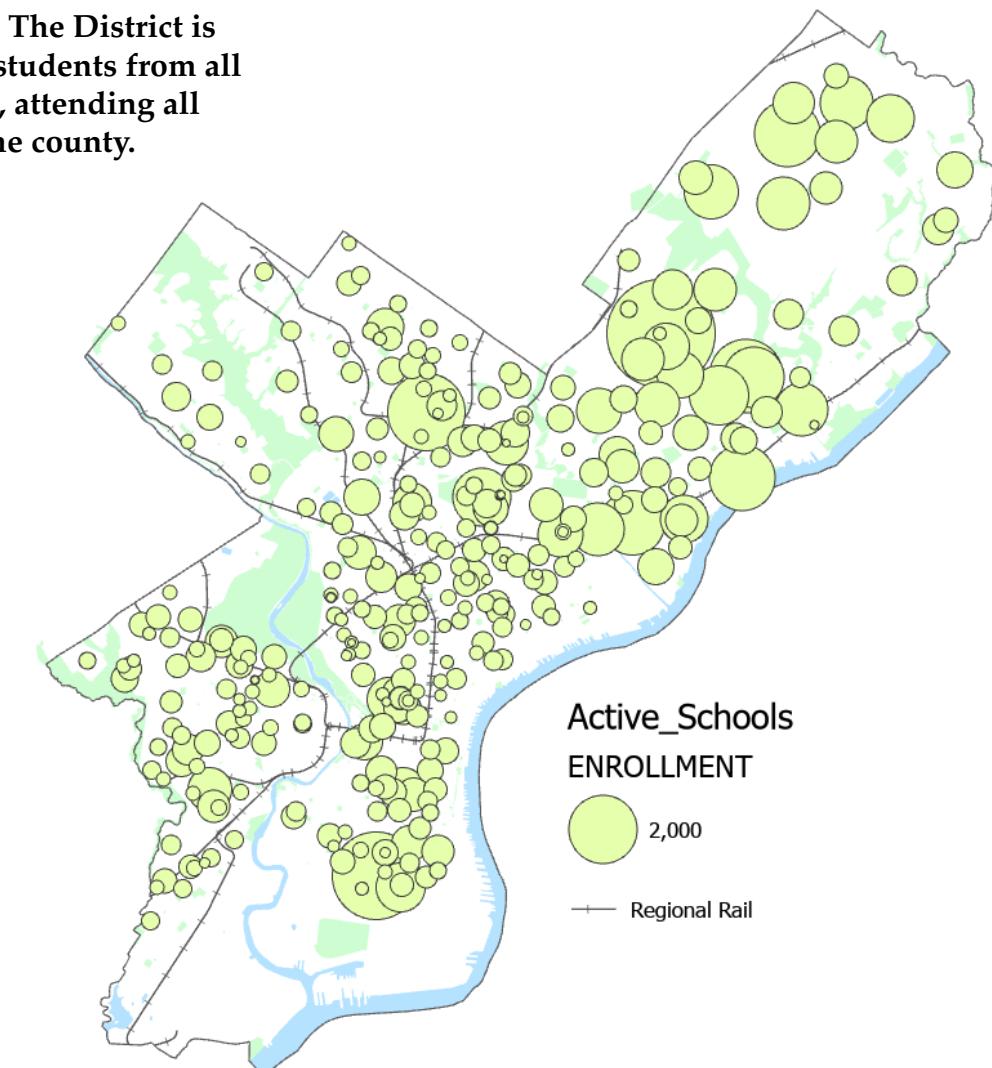
2 "Final Policy Statement on FTA's School Bus Operations Regulations," Federal Register, September 16, 2008, <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2008/09/16/E8-21601/final-policy-statement-on-ftas-school-bus-operations-regulations>.

3 Malik Morrison, "An Examination of Philadelphia's School Desegregation Litigation," Penn GSE Perspectives on Urban Education, 2024, <https://urbanedjournal.gse.upenn.edu/archive/volume-3-issue-1-fall-2004/examination-philadelphia-s-school-desegregation-litigation>.



Most interestingly and unique to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, transportation must be provided to approved schools up to 10 miles outside the district, meaning that the district must provide transportation to Philly students who are studying just outside of Philadelphia at religious or private schools.

These regulations mean that The District is providing transportation to students from all socioeconomic backgrounds, attending all school types, even outside the county.



**\$192 million transportation budget
197,000 students
331 schools**



Image: The Inquirer



Bus Driver Shortage Forces Schools to Cut Service, Pay Parents to Transport Kids

Image: Wall Street Journal

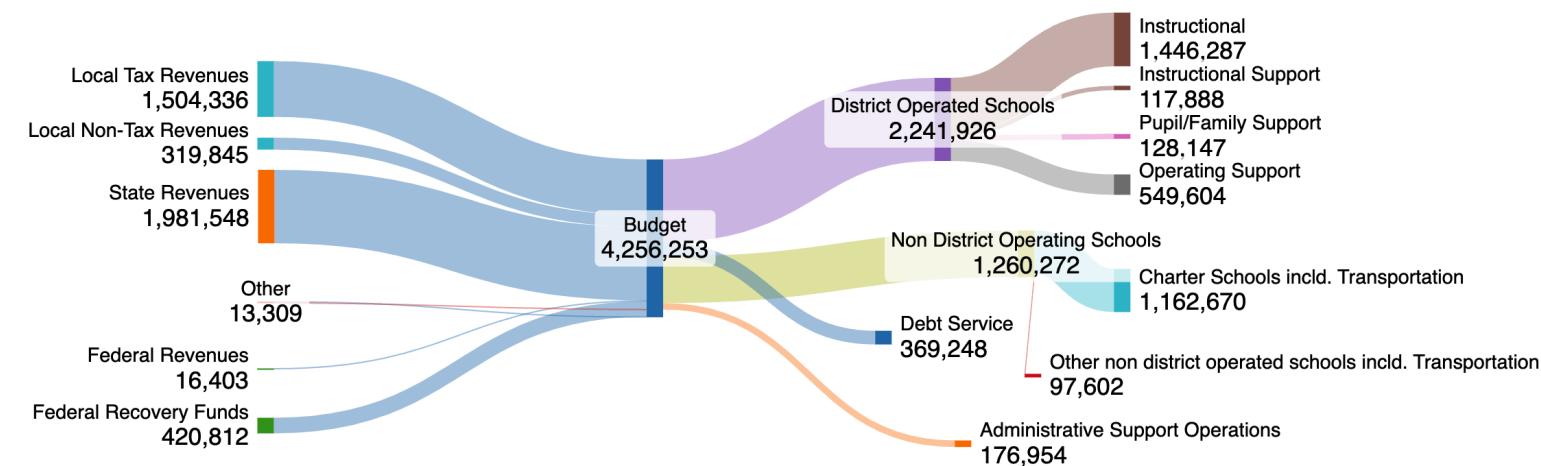
For 2023, the District had a budget of roughly \$4.2 billion annually, which increased to \$4.5 billion for 2024. The District receives a combination of local (\$1.86 billion), state (\$2.074 billion), and federal funding streams (\$559.7 million). SEPTA Transit Passes are provided to each student at the beginning of the year, and for each tap, the state directly reimburses SEPTA. Thus, if each student receiving a pass used the 8 taps available to them at \$2, it would cost upwards of approximately \$4.4 million, or if they used 2 taps a day, \$1.1 million, annually. The District owns and operates its own fleet of school buses at significant cost, spending \$37 million annually to maintain vehicles and pay bus operators. It is unique for a major city with public transit to provide bussing services not just to its own students, but to private and charter students. Chicago, New York, Boston, Baltimore, and Washington D.C. do not provide bussing services unless there is a special circumstance.¹

In addition to budgetary constraints, The District is prone to politics, with its 9 member board appointed by the Philadelphia mayor and subsequently confirmed by City Council. Board members serve concurrently with the Mayor and City Council, resulting in boards coaligned politically with the interests and desires of a single administration. This can create cohesion in short-term policies, but also means that board and policy continuity across administrations is unguaranteed. The 9 board members oversee budgetary decisions for the school district including for capital budgets and the operations of public and charter schools across Philadelphia. As required by the Pennsylvania Sunshine Act, the Board make decisions at public monthly action meetings in addition to meetings on student performance progress, public hearings, budgetary meetings, and occasional committee meetings.²

¹ Vincent, Jeffrey M., Carrie Makarewicz, Ruth Miller, Julia Ehrman, and Deborah L. McKoy. Beyond the Yellow Bus: Promising Practices for Maximizing Access to Opportunity Through Innovations in Student Transportation. (Berkeley, CA: Center for Cities + Schools, University of California, 2014).

² "Board of Education," The School District of Philadelphia, accessed May 5, 2024, <https://www.philasd.org/schoolboard/meetings/#1669753464384-0e43283c-35c6>.

School District of Philadelphia Budget (in 000s)



Overall, The School District of Philadelphia provides critical transportation services to students. Since more than 1/3 of all Philadelphia households lack a car,¹ District transportation during the week is a lifeline, offering far more than just transportation to school. These services are essential to ensure that students reach educational opportunity, jobs, extracurriculars, and their broader social network throughout the week.

However, these programs come at significant cost to The District. Philadelphia is home to diverse communities with different needs, both in terms of financial incentives, programmatic offerings, and infrastructure available. While some parts of Philadelphia are incredibly walkable and transit-friendly, others resemble

more classic suburban development, with longer walking distances and sparse transit. Philadelphia is racially diverse and also significantly segregated by race and income,² making different student transportation needs an equity issue.

The District is responsible for providing free and equal transportation to students; yet even the transportation offerings currently available are not equally distributed, further entrenching disparities across Philadelphia.

The challenges since 2020 have exacerbated these issues. Public health concerns have made The District, students, and parents concerned about students using yellow buses or public transit. A national bus operator shortage

¹ Holly Otterbein, "Philly Is One of the Most Car-Free Cities in the U.S.," Philadelphia Magazine, March 3, 2015, <https://www.phillymag.com/citified/2015/03/03/philly-is-one-most-car-free-cities-us/>.

² Dale Mezzacappa, "Philadelphia Area Schools among Most Segregated in Country," Chalkbeat, May 23, 2022, <https://www.chalkbeat.org/philadelphia/2022/5/23/23137855/philadelphia-area-schools-among-most-segregated-country/#:~:text=Within%20Philadelphia%20itself%2C%20the%20Black,schools%20accounting%20for%20another%2019%25>.

"Nationally and locally, student transportation to school is an "increasingly expensive and challenging endeavor" for school districts to manage"

- Center for Cities + Schools, University of California Berkeley

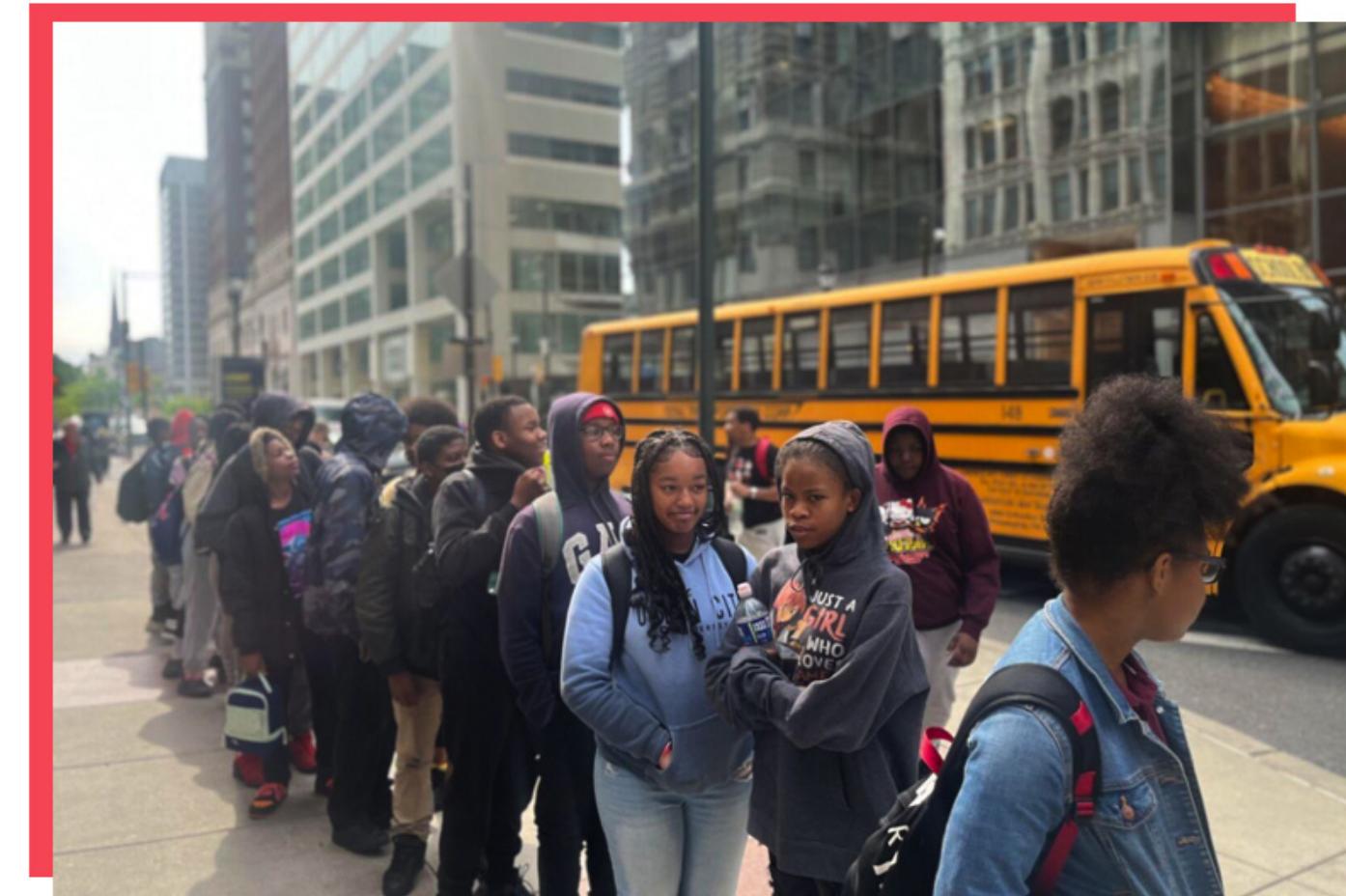


Image: The School District

has made it difficult to retain yellow bus drivers.³ Increased unreliability and decreased frequency on SEPTA has made students late to school. With unclear policies for getting a SEPTA-related excuse for tardiness, students

³ Asia Mieleszko, "Philadelphia Schools Are Making Student Transportation Worse," Strong Towns, October 3, 2023, <https://www.strongtowns.org/journal/2023/9/22/how-philadelphia-schools-are-making-student-transportation-worse>.

⁴ Toga Mohamed Zahiya Daniels, "SEPTA Delays Makes Students Late, Causing Anxiety," Billy Penn at WHYY, May 2, 2024, <https://billypenn.com/2024/01/29/philly-students-septa-delays/>.

02 How Kids Get to School: Existing Incentives & Programs

There are four main ways that Philadelphia students get to school - school bus, driving, public transit, and walking or biking.¹

The District offers yellow school bus services, transit passes to SEPTA, or monthly stipends to parents for driving their students to school. Although nearly 41,000 students utilize yellow bussing services, only 1/3 of schools served are public, approximately 1/4 are charter schools, and more than half serve private schools.

Nearly 41,000 students utilize typical yellow school buses, but these are mostly for charter school students, special needs students, and

some elementary schools; it may include Philly students who are eligible for public school in Philly but go to private school up to 10 miles outside the city.

The Parent Flat Rate Program is a program where the district pays \$300 a month for a household to drive their student to school, and to receive the incentive a household must own a car. There are no carpooling requirements or verification that the money is spent on car related expenses. While the lack of application typically reduces onerous administrative burdens, this program has come under scrutiny for using public dollars to subsidize private

1 "Office of Transportation," The School District of Philadelphia, November 1, 2019, <https://www.philasd.org/transportation/about/#:~:text=The%20School%20District%20of%20Philadelphia%20Department%20of%20Transportation%20Services%20operates,employees%20and%20special%20needs%20students>.



School Bus

- Typically charter school, special needs or some elementary students,



Parent Flat Rate Program

- \$300/month to parents for driving students to school
- Household must own car



SEPTA

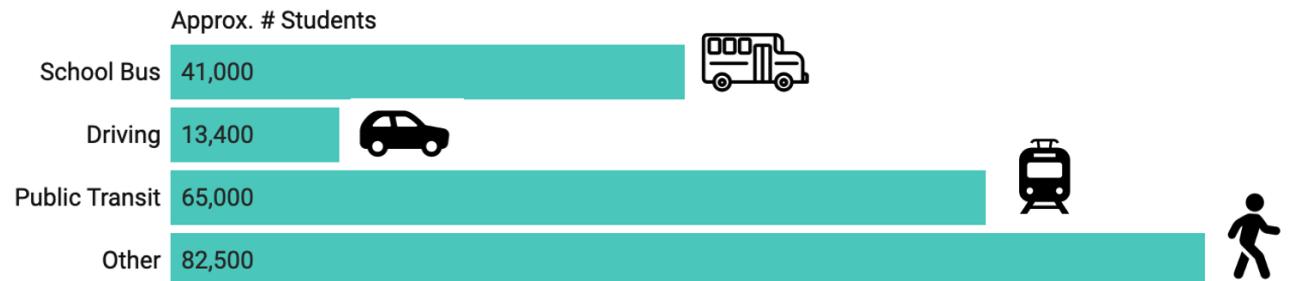
- Students eligible for student fare must live > 1.5 miles from their school
- Covers 8 taps a day for free



Other (Walk or Bike)

- No data, but likely elementary students going to district schools on foot.

Student Travel to School, Philadelphia



School Bus provided to charter, public, and non-public schools

vehicle ownership.

Middle and high school Students who live more than 1.5 miles from their school are eligible for a SEPTA student pass. These passes are distributed at the beginning of the academic year and allow up to 8 taps a day for free on any mode, except regional rail. For students who want to utilize regional rail, they may opt to pay out of pocket a discounted \$10/week, or roughly \$300 for in-session school days.

Most students in elementary school walk to their neighborhood school with their parents, but there is little data on this. There isn't data for 83,000 students which is most likely walking, but a

significant runner up is the 65,000 students who use septa passes.

Transportation choice is critical to educational access. While neighborhood schools have an average commute of 21 minutes, magnet and special admission high schools have nearly twice the commute time.² Students who choose a special admission school must grapple with longer commutes in exchange for better educational opportunities. Additionally, research suggests that longer commutes correlate to higher absenteeism, a problem in Philadelphia where nearly 46% of all district students are chronically absent as of 2023.³

2 How Long Will It Take Me to Get to School? Transit Times to School District of Philadelphia High Schools, August 2020, <https://phledresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/PERC-HowLongDoesItTakePhiladelphiaHighSchoolerstoGet-toSchool.pdf>.

3 Julie K. Brown, Dylan Purcell, and Kristen A. Graham, "Chronic Absenteeism Is Surging in Philly's Early Grades, Putting Thousands More at Risk of Lasting Academic Harm," The Inquirer, May 31, 2023, <https://www.inquirer.com/education/inq2/chronic-student-absenteeism-growing-problem-education-philly-20230531.html>.

School Type	Average Commute
Neighborhood High Schools	21.7 minutes
Citywide High Schools	30.8 minutes
Special Admission High Schools	38 minutes
Average for all students	28 minutes

Funding for these transportation programs yields wildly different subsidies per pupil, with spending for students whose households already have access to vehicles receiving thousands of dollars in direct payments from The District.

The Flat Rate Program paid \$36 million in payments to just 13,400 households last year. This subsidy to driving directly contradicts the City of Philadelphia goals of reducing VMT in the Climate Action Plan.¹

Households without a car receive no additional support for any challenges getting their students to school, including delays in SEPTA or yellow bus operator shortages.

In short, this program funding matrix is deeply inequitable, funding households with enough wealth to already have a car. As of 2024, Philadelphia households spend on average \$4,753 on car premiums, or \$381 a month.² The Flat Rate Program nearly funds annual car payments despite significant research showing that car usage significantly burdens environmental justice communities through increased wear and tear on roads, poorer air quality, and higher fatality & serious injury rates.³ Mounting academic and professional research demonstrate that private car usage has significant social costs to society - nearly 40% of motorist's expenses is covered by taxpayer dollars.

In stark contrast, SEPTA passes provide

¹ Philadelphia Climate Action Playbook, January 2021, <https://www.phila.gov/media/20210113125627/Philadelphia-Climate-Action-Playbook.pdf>.

² Ariana Perez-Castells, "Philly Will See Increase in Car Insurance Rates, per Bankrate," <https://www.inquirer.com/business/car-insurance-premium-increase-philadelphia-2024-20240207.html#loaded>.

³ Stefan Gössling, Jessica Kees, and Todd Litman, "The Lifetime Cost of Driving a Car," Ecological Economics 194 (April 2022): 107335, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecolecon.2021.107335>.

Existing Transportation Program Funding (annually)

School Bus	SEPTA Passes	Flat Rate Program
\$30.5 million Bus Operators	\$34 million (earmarked for 2024, up to 8 taps)	\$36 million Payments to Households
\$6.9 million Vehicle Maintenance		
\$8 million special ed attendants		
41,000 students	65,000 students	13,400 students (all ages)
\$759 per student	\$523 per student	\$2,686 per student

October 2023 SEPTA Student Ridership:

Over 1.3 million total taps systemwide

876,405 Bus rides

339,093 L and B line rides*

26,153 Regional Rail rides

*Also known as the Market-Frankford and Broad-Street Lines

transportation to 65,000 students, nearly 5x as many students for 1/5 of the price. SEPTA provided anonymized student ridership data for October 2023 across all of its modes, revealing the wide geographic scope across which students utilize the transit system. In October 2023, SEPTA reported 710,564 unlinked average daily ridership across all modes. Approximately 43,000 of these rides were made by students, or nearly 6% of total ridership.⁴

Bus is the most frequently used mode amongst students, comprising nearly 60% of student rides across SEPTA. Most interestingly, student ridership by line reveals that students are using

the SEPTA across jurisdictional boundaries. Some of the highest ridership routes - upwards of 35,000 students per month - go beyond Philadelphia's boundaries. Although it is unclear where students tap on, the regional nature of bus routes cannot be understated. Students are able to utilize SEPTA, a regional transportation system, across municipal boundaries.

In contrast to overall high bus ridership, ridership on the dedicated 400 series is very low. SEPTA operates a 400 series in coordination with The District to avoid overwhelming and disrupting regular bus routes. This 400 series complies with the previously mentioned "Tripper Rule"

⁴ Data courtesy of SEPTA.

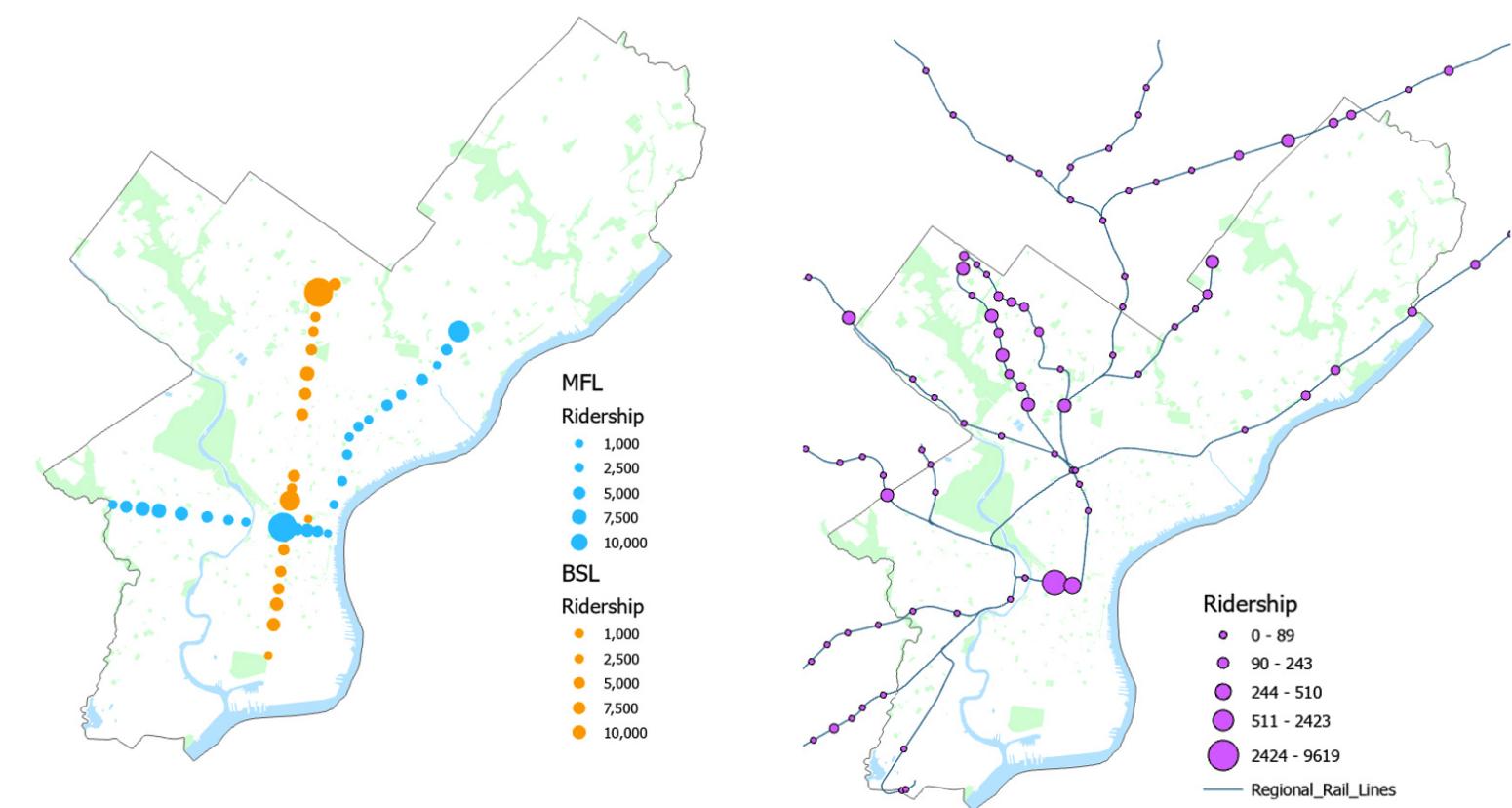
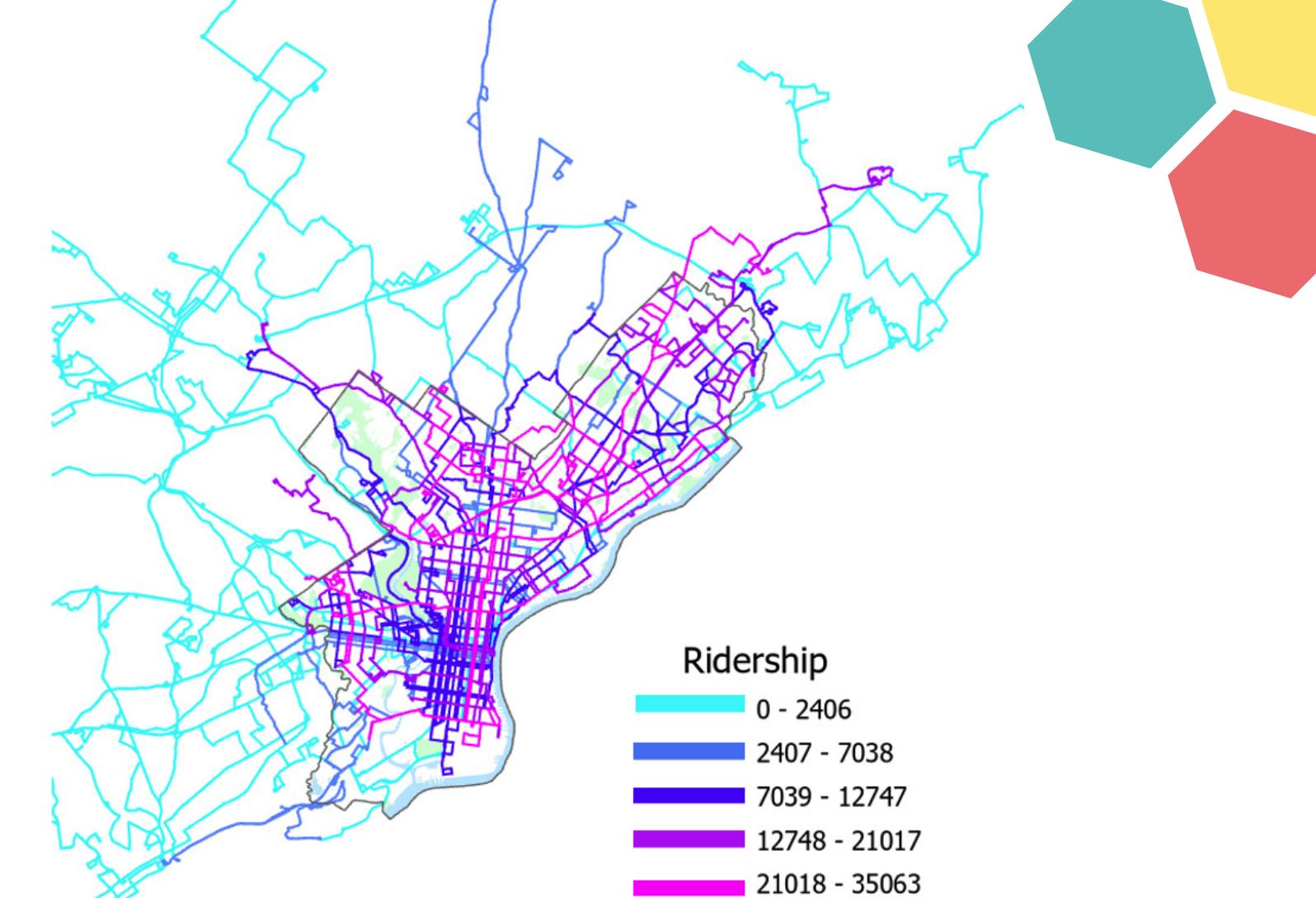
- although it is targeted towards students, ending near schools, the general public is permitted to board this series. 400 series buses typically only operate when school is in session and run when students are getting to and from school. Across the 29 buses within this series, only 3,461 students rode it in October 2023. Route 477 has the highest ridership of 400 series buses, with only 1,293 students monthly. Low ridership on this series suggests that most students are utilizing regular transit services they are familiar with, not necessarily student specials.

Additionally, students utilizing the Metro lines within Philadelphia, the L and B (also known as the MFL & BSL, or Market-Frankford & Broad-Street Lines respectively), have robust ridership. In particular, ridership is strongest at

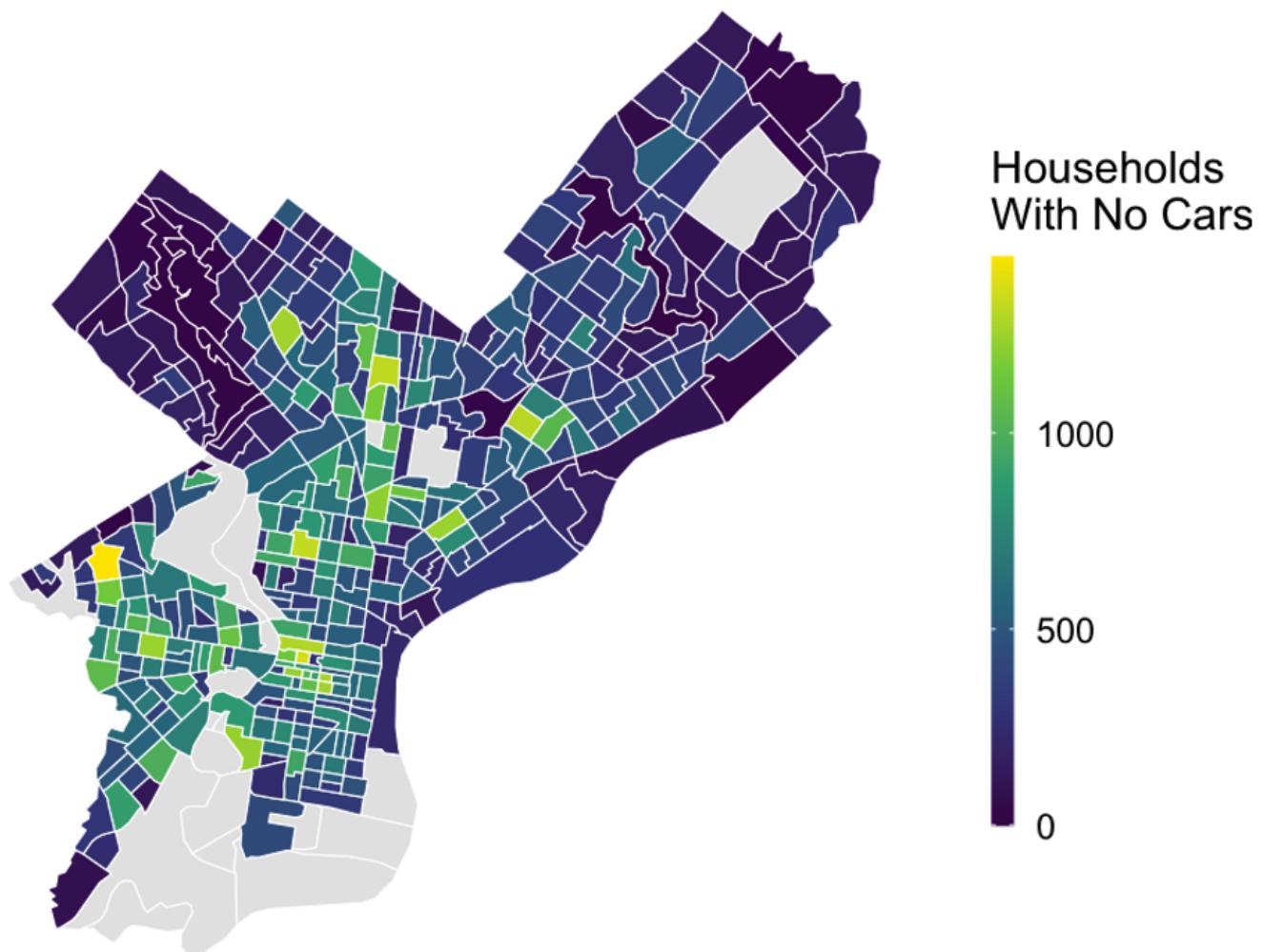
city hall and the northern termini, suggesting that students are traveling from the edges of the transit system to access school.

Similarly, Regional Rail has higher ridership at Suburban Station. However, in contrast, ridership is more evenly distributed across the system, with slightly higher ridership along the Chestnut West & East lines. Ridership is very low in West Philadelphia, neighborhoods with predominantly Black communities even though there are a few Regional Rail stops. Ridership is also low in North Philadelphia neighborhoods that have high Hispanic and Black

communities. Similarly, it is interesting that regional rail ridership is so low considering that The District must provide transportation to students wishing to travel outside the city. This is an untapped opportunity for students.



Number of Households Without Any Cars



Data Source: U.S. Census Bureau, ACS 2022

Given disparities in car ownership throughout Philadelphia, The District must consider how its transportation policies provide advantages to students in some neighborhoods more than others. Given growing criticism over the

inequities of this program, The District should reevaluate its priorities.¹

¹ Asia Mieleszko, "Philadelphia Schools Are Making Student Transportation Worse," Strong Towns, October 3, 2023, <https://www.strongtowns.org/journal/2023/9/22/how-philadelphia-schools-are-making-student-transportation-worse>.



Image: City of Philadelphia, Safe Routes to School

03 Pilot Program: Regional Access

The District should adopt a three-pronged pilot centered on Regional Access. The aim of the program is to provide sweeping, regional connectivity to Philadelphia students, improving school attendance, reducing commutes, and equitably transporting all students. Most critically, a framework for student transportation programs must be established within The District that highlights three values: Mobility, Sustainability, and Equity. Current transportation offerings fail to demonstrate their utility across these

values. The Parent Flat Rate program has no published metrics on reducing student absenteeism. The calculated 1.5 distance to school reduces the number of students eligible for transit. No program measures key metrics for academic success or student commute. Accordingly, within this framework The District should collect and publish metrics per mode to indicate a program's success. Metrics could include, but are not limited, to the following benchmarks:

Mobility	Sustainability	Equity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"># trips taken on transit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"># of students previously taking school bus or driven to school now using regional rail pass	<ul style="list-style-type: none"># of low-income students who participate
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Minutes reduced for student commutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Metric tons of GHG avoided	<ul style="list-style-type: none"># of students in households without a car who participate
<ul style="list-style-type: none"># of students who no longer need to transfer to get to school		<ul style="list-style-type: none">Reduced absenteeism



Regional Rail

- Free Regional Rail Access to all Students in CC & Zone 1

Regional Rail access should be granted to all students eligible for SEPTA passes to travel for free within Center City and Zone 1. Free access may see increased ridership from students who have been taking longer bus routes or transferring across modes to access the same destinations (either from Center City or to Center City) as Regional Rail lines. For instance, Route 23 has 16,981 student riders a month. The route parallels the Chestnut Hill West Regional Rail line but takes approximately 1 hour 11 minutes, while Regional Rail takes 53 minutes. Free Regional Rail access would also be good specifically for Middle School Students who may feel unsafe on the regular Metro system.



Expanded SEPTA Pass Eligibility

- Eligibility to students who live more than 1 mile away

The District should expand SEPTA pass eligibility to all students who live more than 1 mile from school. While industry standard suggests that 1.5 miles is acceptable to most high school students, it remains a far and uncomfortable walk for many middle school students. Increasing eligibility would enable students to access not only school, but afterschool activities that may be more than 1 mile away. Consider after school needs as a possible eligibility for SEPTA passes as well.



Microtransit Pooling

- Special on-call transit for students without a car, more than ½ mile from transit stop

Lastly, The District should explore a Microtransit Pooling pilot program. This program can replace transportation for students where SEPTA or yellow school buses are not viable to get to school. A contracted, vetted vendor can provide special on-call transit to eligible students similar to rideshare. Microtransit can provide more flexible, one-time rides to students than yellow buses and address bus cancellations in transit deserts, or unique circumstances wherein a child's parents cannot drive them to school one day. This is intended to be a stop-gap, not daily transportation. Parents would be able to use an app to call or schedule a ride for their student if other transit means fall through. Additionally, parents can coordinate with other households to carpool.

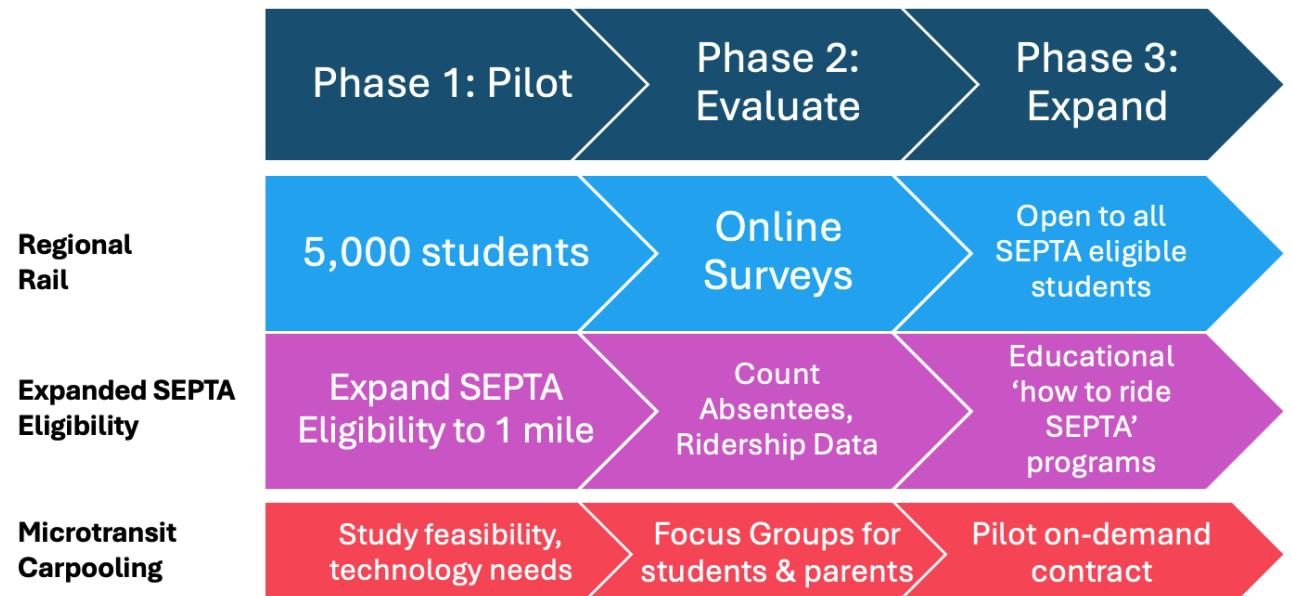
Funding for transportation programs would stay largely the same, with a majority of funding coming from redistributing the Parent Flat Rate program. While there would be no change in funding for yellow school buses, it is possible that ridership would decrease for students where regional rail could substitute service. Although n-call transit would be significantly costly per student, it would serve to improve outcomes for disadvantaged students instead of households with a car. Students should apply once at the beginning of the year to participate in the microtransit program and have continuous access throughout the year once approved. Additionally, costs are redistributed by lowering the number of available taps students can utilize a day. Students currently receive 8 taps a day, which is likely more than necessary. By lowering the ceiling of allowable

taps, more students can have access to SEPTA while still having enough taps to get to school, go to an extracurricular or job, and go home.

Each program component should be broken into three phases: pilot, evaluate, and expand. Because there is little publicly available data on student ridership, pilots should be implemented with the intent to receive immediate feedback via surveys, focus groups, and data collection. By highlighting metrics for success early in the process, the utility of each program will be self-evident when the programs are up for reapproval.

Regional Rail

The District should reach out to 5,000 middle and high school students to receive free Regional Rail access. These students should be a



School Bus	On-Call Transit	Transit	Regional Rail Pilot
No change in funding	New funding ↑	\$10 million ↑	\$3 – 6 million ↑
\$30.5 million Operators \$6.9 million Vehicle Maintenance	\$15 million contract	\$44 million [up to 4 taps]	\$3.3 - \$6 million
35,000 students	5,000	85,000 students	10 - 15,000 students
\$759 per student	\$3,000 per student	\$523 per student	\$338 per student

mix of students currently using Regional Rail and students who request access because they would use it instead of other transit if it were free. The District can then assess via surveys and ridership data if Regional Rail ridership increased, if commute times decreased, and if students had easier or safer access to school. Afterwards, the program should be open to all SEPTA eligible students, although it is likely many students would not utilize it. Implementation should be very direct because students can already tap student fare cards on Regional Rail, and The District & SEPTA already collaborate to remotely activate and deactivate farecards on an individual basis as needed.

Expanded SEPTA Eligibility

The District determines SEPTA eligibility using ESRI's GIS software called COMPASS.

COMPASS determines eligibility based on actual route distance - not as the crow flies - for student distance to school. Because The District already uses this software, changing settings to 1 mile from 1.5 should be technically manageable. As the final phase of this pilot implementation, The District should strongly consider developing educational "how to ride" programs in partnership with SEPTA and the City of Philadelphia Safe Routes to School program. For many students, traveling to school on SEPTA is their first experience taking public transit independently, and that likely comes with both student and parental concerns of safety, such as navigating the system, interacting with the public, and other personal safety issues. Additionally, students are often negatively perceived as rowdy, disruptive, and loud to both general

passengers and bus operators on SEPTA. The Office of Transportation and Infrastructure Systems in the City of Philadelphia coordinates the Safe Routes to School Program, which mainly focuses on biking and walking to school. Additionally, SEPTA 400 series is not a well advertised program.

How to Ride educational programs should focus on the following issues:

- Navigating SEPTA's system and what to do if lost
- Procedures for safety incidents while riding on SEPTA, including how to contact bus operators and who to call in case of an emergency
- Improving treatment of bus operators
- Trip planning, including resources ahead of time and in real time

This program would target middle and high schoolers who already are eligible for SEPTA.

Microtransit Carpooling

Lastly, The District should explore a Microtransit carpooling program as a stop-gap measure for students with no viable alternatives to get to school. The District should perform a feasibility study to examine how many students this program could serve and exactly at what cost. However, the intent of this program is to support students stranded from getting to school without the means to pay for taxis. Although a study should determine in more granularity the populations most well-suited to this program, possibility eligibility is as follows:

- Students who live more than 1.5 miles from

a transit stop & from school

- Household does not have a car
- Households is below income thresholds
- Extenuating circumstances
- Open to all ages

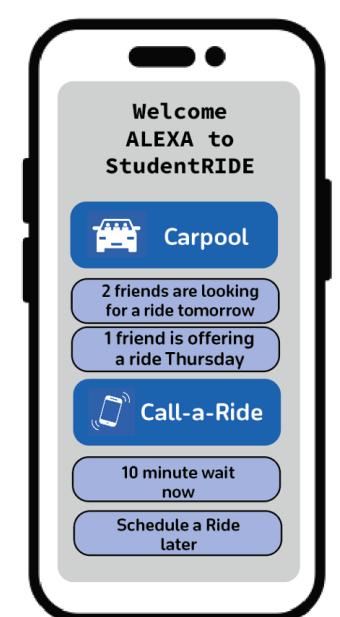
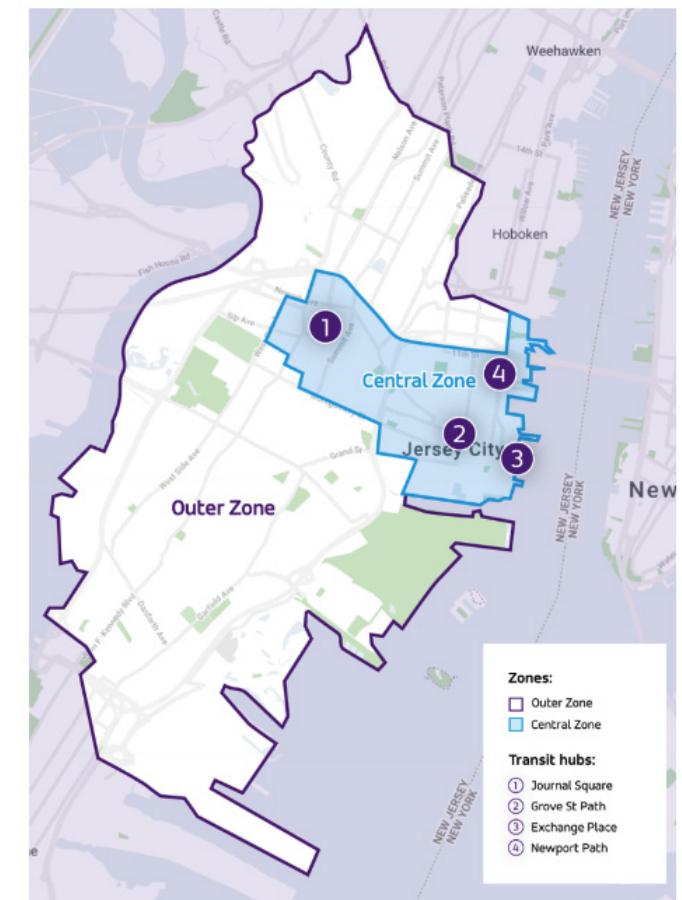
Focus groups and deep community engagement should be done to identify which students have transportation needs that are not met. It should be noted students with special needs and disabilities have separate transportation programs as identified through their Individualized Education Plan (IEP). Therefore, this program can help mitigate parental concerns as the Parent Flat Rate program is discontinued of households where mass transit, school bussing, or walking/biking are not available. This is a great opportunity for The District to understand in-depth the transportation needs for Philadelphia households and shape other future programs to improve attendance.

This Microtransit On-Demand program would allow parents to call a ride for their student on an app similar to popular rideshare programs. However, this would be distinct in that it would be heavily subsidized or free and through vetted drivers. Sharing rides with other students would be encouraged but not required. Additionally, this program would be a curb-to-curb drop off model instead of a door-to-door model. In essence, students would be picked up at "virtual" bus stops and dropped off at high frequency transit station or hub. The intent of this program is not to provide daily, regular transportation, but rather address student needs that may be unusual or have unreliable transportation. Smaller vehicles and curb-to-curb routing

would reduce costs compared to diesel-heavy yellow buses.

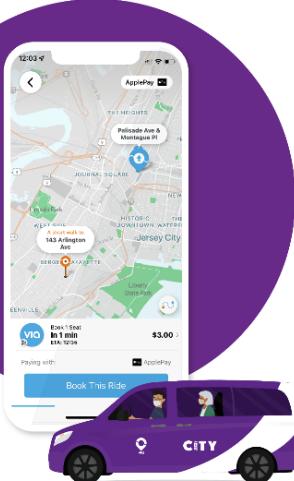
This program is inspired by a Jersey City Microtransit pilot. Jersey City subsidizes rideshare company Via for residents who want to access transit hubs in downtown. Rides cost less than \$5 and operate during certain service hours, which would serve students who have different start-times well.

Additionally, all parents would be able to use a central app to coordinate carpools across The District. According to parents who wish to remain anonymous, many households pool funds together to charter private buses or vans to get their kids to school, costing thousands of dollars annually per household. While households are free to self-organize, this leaves students from financially disadvantaged households out of carpool and vanpool coordinations. An app mockup below demonstrates how households could utilize it to coordinate carpools with nearby students in addition to Microtransit for eligible students.



Get affordable, fast, on-demand rides anywhere in Jersey City.

Commute, run errands, or connect to the PATH without needing a car with Via Jersey City.



Stakeholders across the city stand to benefit from these programs. For SEPTA, not only can ridership increase, but it can foster a new generation of better educated riders who continue to safely use SEPTA into adulthood once they gain skills to confidently navigate the system. The District can gain more equitable student educational and transportation outcomes by targeting funds towards the most underprivileged students. More sophisticated transportation programming can improve educational benchmarks and make higher education more accessible to more students. Additionally, more students using SEPTA means more efficient transportation funds, streamlined

programming, and less money to maintain costly and diesel polluting school buses. Students and families can gain more educational opportunities through more transportation choices. Although SEPTA continues to face safety issues, as any public transit agency will, increased mode share choice will enable parents and students to make decisions they are comfortable with. Lastly, private and charter schools may benefit by attracting more students without access to a car. New York City implements an equity transit program where both public and private school students gain free transit fare cards.¹ Because many private school students are on significant scholarships, giving them

¹ Vincent, Jeffrey M., Carrie Makarewicz, Ruth Miller, Julia Ehrman, and Deborah L. McKoy. Beyond the Yellow Bus: Promising Practices for Maximizing Access to Opportunity Through Innovations in Student Transportation. (Berkeley, CA: Center for Cities + Schools, University of California, 2014).

SEPTA



Ridership can increase;
Foster new generation of riders

The School District of Philadelphia



More equitable & efficient
distribution of transportation funds

Students & Families



More educational opportunity;
Safer commutes to school

Private & Charter Schools



Attract students without access to
cars

Challenges	Opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Negative perceptions of students - Students are often <i>negatively perceived as rowdy or noisy on transit</i> Many student needs – District must accommodate <i>diverse and complex student transportation needs</i> Data Unavailability – For students participating in the <i>Flat Rate Parent Program</i>, <i>there is no data available on trip patterns</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Compatibility – Program precedents <i>already exist</i> Safety – Regional Rail & Microtransit may be perceived as <i>safer</i> Trip Simplicity - Can optimize <i>one-seat ride</i> opportunities when possible, reducing transfers & long walks Independence – Encourages students to <i>participate in extracurriculars, tutoring or jobs</i> Congestion Management - Reduce car trips & <i>unsafe traffic congestion at school pickup/drop-offs</i>

transit access can also increase their economic mobility after school. Having both private and public students take transit is an equalizer, demonstrating that no class is above taking transit. Finally, a Regional Access program will come with many opportunities, but also several challenges. As previously stated, students are often perceived by the public as disruptive on transit, meaning more students on public transit may face public backlash or concerns about safety. Additionally, The District is legally required to accommodate diverse and complex student transportation needs. Deep, thoughtful engagement will be necessary to avoid angry confrontations at board meetings. Moreover, data on student travel, metrics correlating student transportation with academic success, and other transportation behaviors is not widely available. The District must collect more data to understand correlations between travel behavior and

academic performance.

Despite these challenges, much more could be gained by The District. These proposed pilots are already compatible with technology through student fare cards. Regional Rail and Microtransit may gain more acceptance amongst parents and educators as safer alternatives while still being cost-effective. This Regional Access program can also optimize one-seat ride opportunities for transit users and increase student independence outside of school. Lastly, car pickups and dropoffs create unsafe traffic congestion for students walking and biking to school. Reducing car usage near schools should be a city and District priority to meet Vision Zero goals near school zones.

04 Moving Forward: Mobility & Equity Framework

These initiatives can help address the inequities present in the Philadelphia school system while being cost-effective, politically popular, and feasible.

Getting to school is some of the first autonomy into adulthood that students experience, whether walking with a friend 7 minutes to school or taking a 30 minute train more than a few miles. Students have remarkable creativity, ingenuity, and insight. Giving students autonomy to help design transportation programs that serve them and improve their independence is a wonderful

opportunity to engage in learning exercises and enrich their sense of the world around them. An image became popular on the internet recently of a children's drawing of their trip to school via car and via walking. This image highlights how transportation alternatives that provide students with autonomy enrich their understanding of the city around them. Students in Philadelphia should take part in shaping a future where they are able to move through the city in a way that benefits them.

To conclude, The District needs to center mobility & equity in its transportation program design. Mobility & Equity Justice framework should be the basis of decision making when it comes to the transportation decisions of Philadelphia students.

Moving forward, The District should also explore the following supplemental goals and programs:

- Provide clarity on 400-Series through educational outreach and coordination with SEPTA

- Engage students and parents in transportation program design
 - Reexamine bus operator recruitment including pay, paid CDL training, and other incentives
 - Collect more data on student travel
 - Develop partnerships with private schools to provide SEPTA passes to private school students

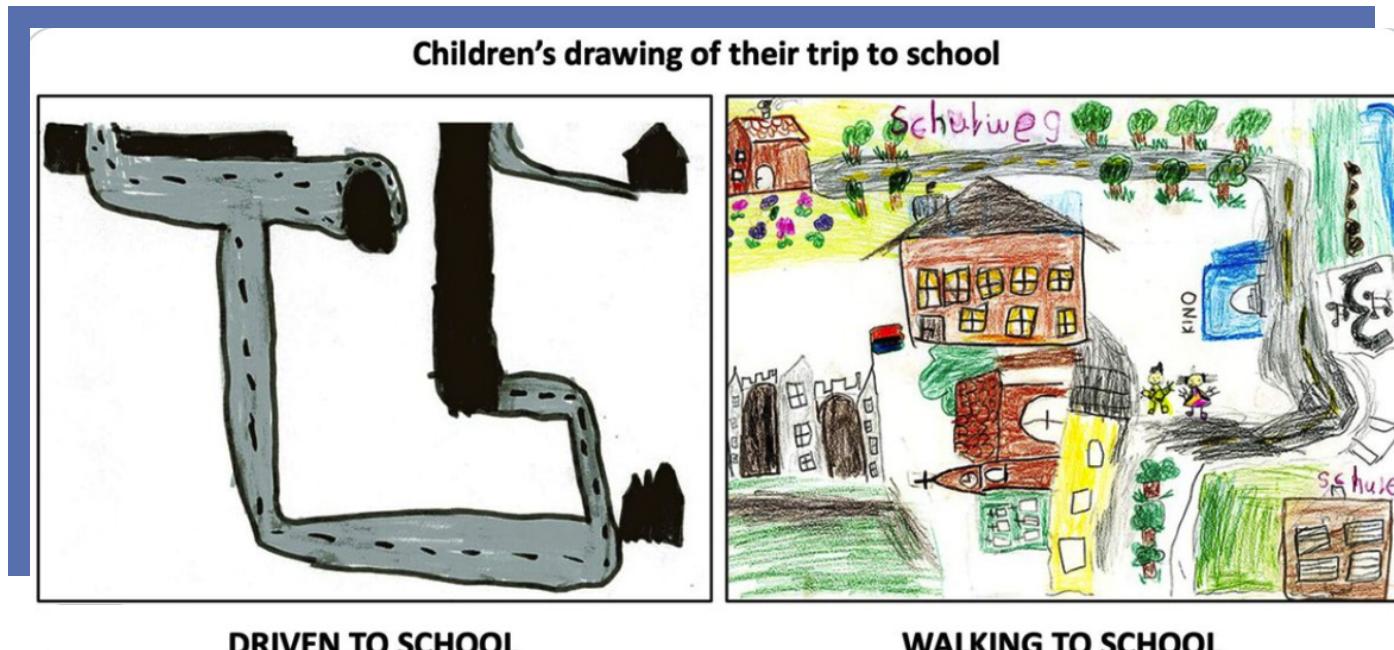


Image: Hayden Clarkin, X



Image: WHYY

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