



# San Francisco School Access Plan



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County Transportation  
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Final Report: May 2023

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# Acknowledgments

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# Executive Summary

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## Introduction

The school commute in San Francisco is difficult for students and caregivers, especially for young students and their families. The San Francisco School Access Plan identifies ways the city can support easy, safe, and sustainable school travel for kindergarten through 5th grade (K-5) youth, especially those who need to take long trips beyond easy walking or biking distance.

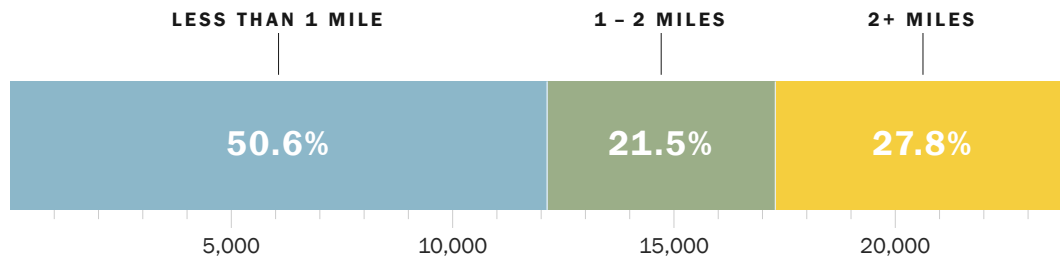
The Plan has three key goals:

1. Improve the quality and availability of transportation options to school and afterschool activities, especially for vulnerable caregivers and students
2. Ensure school related transportation options are safe
3. Reduce greenhouse gas emissions, localized congestion, and air pollution around school sites

## Summary of Current Conditions

Students entering elementary school in San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) apply to schools under a citywide choice policy, meaning that students can apply to any elementary school in the district. Forty four percent of K-5 SFUSD students travel outside of their neighborhood for school.<sup>1</sup> About half of students live more than one mile from their school and more than 25% live more than two miles from school (Figure 1). When surveyed, more than half of caregivers shared that getting to and from school is stressful often or daily. The most common reason caregivers shared for the stressful trip was that traveling to and from school “takes a long time.” More than half of K-5 SFUSD students are driven to school in a personal car.

**Figure 1. Distance from Home to School for K-5 SFUSD Students**



<sup>1</sup> 2017 SFUSD analysis, see Figure 6 for neighborhood boundaries

The impacts of long and stressful school commutes are not distributed evenly. A 2017 analysis by SFUSD found that Black students were more likely to travel outside of their home regions to attend school, while white students, as well as students living in northern and western San Francisco were least likely to travel. Foster and homeless youth also experience unique challenges which can include very long school trips across county lines.

## Existing School Transportation Programs

Transportation programs which focus on the school trip are limited in San Francisco.

### **SFUSD YELLOW SCHOOL BUSES**

SFUSD operates a fleet of yellow school buses. The majority of SFUSD's transportation resources serve the District's students who receive Special Education Services and have transportation included in their Individualized Educational Plans (IEPs). Remaining resources are dedicated to a fleet of 25 general education buses which serve 46 schools and approximately 2,000 students daily. Services align with SFUSD's General Education Transportation Policy.<sup>1</sup>

### **SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL<sup>2</sup>**

The Safe Routes to School (SRTS) program was created to make walking and bicycling to school safer and more accessible for children, including those with disabilities. The SRTS program is overseen by the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency (SFMTA) and provides outreach and educational programming to encourage sustainable transportation and safe travel at all 103 non-charter San Francisco public schools. San Francisco's school crossing guard program is a part of SRTS.

### **FREE MUNI FOR ALL YOUTH<sup>3</sup>**

The SFMTA currently offers free Muni to all youth 18 and younger with no application or sign-up process through the Free Muni For all Youth program. Muni fares for regular service are waived for students enrolled in SFUSD's English Learner and Special Education Services programs through the age of 22.

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1 <https://go.boarddocs.com/ca/sfusd/Board.nsf/goto?open&id=ALRLHC569513>

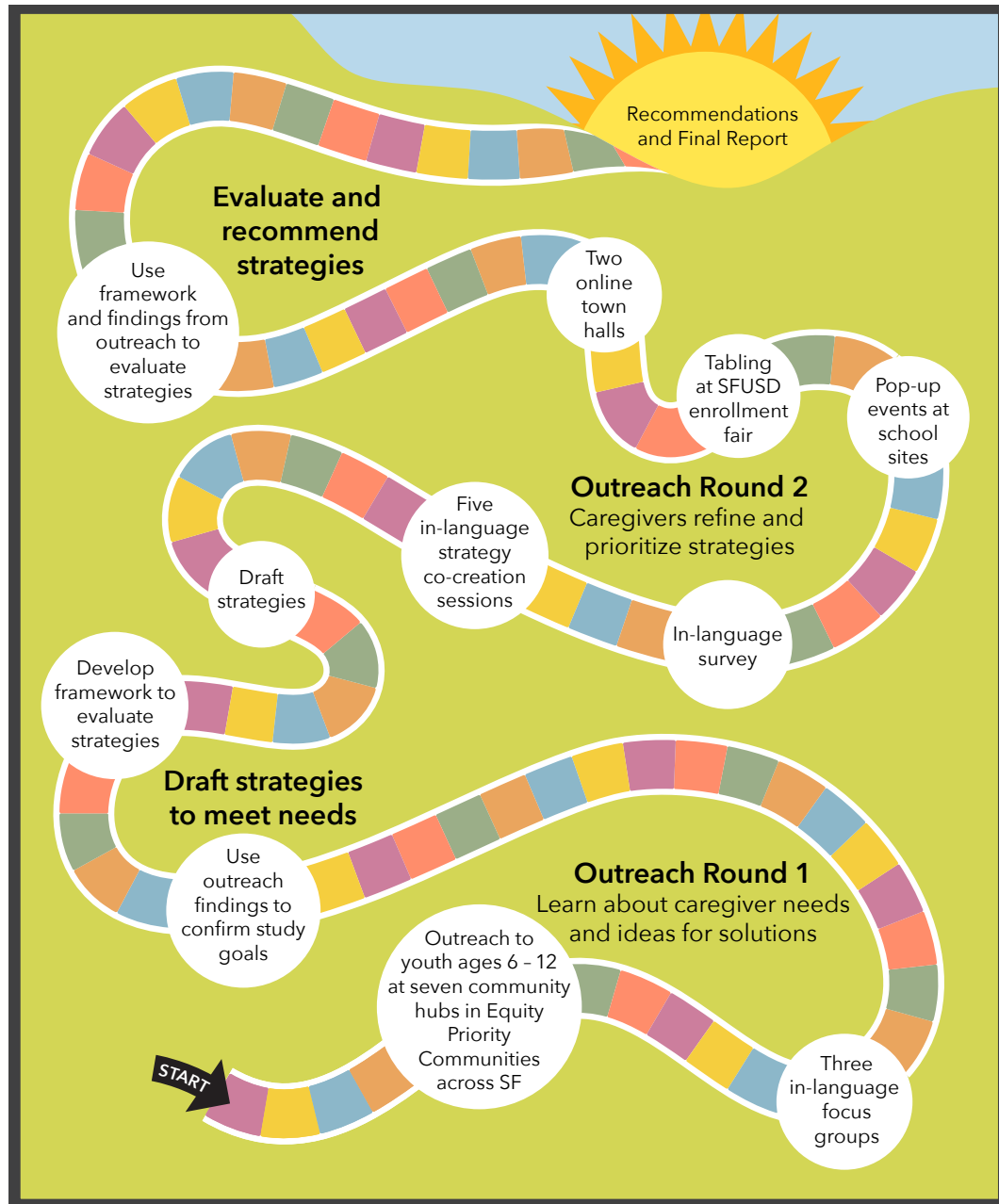
2 <https://www.sfsaferoutes.org/about/>

3 <https://www.sfmta.com/fares/free-muni-all-youth-18-years-and-younger>

# Public Engagement and Strategy Development

In order to develop useful, implementable transportation solutions which complement existing programs, the voices of people most affected need to be at the forefront of solution design. The School Access Plan included extensive public engagement which informed all study tasks including goal definition and strategy development (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Study Process Diagram





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## Recommendations

The School Access Plan identified six high performing strategies to support school transportation, shown below. The Plan also identified policy recommendations, strategies specific to Foster and Homeless youth, and a set of strategies which the city could pursue in the future after additional project development. These strategies as well as more details about the recommendations below can be found in chapter 5.

- **Infrastructure safety improvements:** San Francisco should expand investments in safe transportation infrastructure at school sites by expanding SFMTA's existing School Walk Audit program.
- **Transit safety trainings:** SFMTA, together with SFUSD, should conduct hands-on transit trainings for K-5 youth to familiarize students with the process of taking transit and how to do so safely.
- **Pick-up and drop-off zone guidelines:** Pickup and drop-off management plans are currently developed and implemented by individual school sites. The SFMTA should develop, or update as necessary, guidance for school administrators about best practices for loading zone management and informational materials for caregivers about expected behaviors and norms.
- **Shuttles – Yellow School Buses and Non-Profit Solutions:** San Francisco's city and county transportation agencies should look for opportunities to support SFUSD's existing yellow school bus program. The Department of Children, Youth, and their Families should consider including transportation programs in their standard grantmaking cycle to ensure equitable access and safe passage for youth attending afterschool programs.
- **Improve awareness of discounted fare programs for caregivers:** SFUSD and SFMTA should coordinate to ensure that caregivers enrolling students in school receive information about SFMTA's existing Lifeline Pass<sup>1</sup> for discounted Muni service.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.sfmta.com/fares/lifeline-pass>

- **Transportation coordinators:** SFUSD, SFMTA, and the Department of Children, Youth, and their Families (DCYF) should consider identifying individuals who can help caregivers navigate available transportation options. At the school district level, counselors in the SFUSD Educational Placement Center are often the first contact points for new enrolling students. SFMTA should work with SFUSD to ensure counselors are aware of transportation resources. At the school site, SFUSD and DCYF should consider piloting a transportation coordinator role through staff at one of San Francisco’s Beacon<sup>1</sup> schools.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.sfbeacon.org/about-us>

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CHAPTER 1

# Introduction and Plan Goals

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## Study Background and Purpose

The school commute in San Francisco is difficult for students and caregivers, especially for young students and their families. Like many cities around the country yellow school bus service in San Francisco is limited. Most parents and caregivers must arrange their own transportation to school and aftercare programs. The San Francisco County Transportation Authority's (SFCTA) 2016 Child Transportation Survey<sup>1</sup> found that caregivers are interested in alternatives to their current transportation options and that parents across all areas of the city and all demographic groups strongly believe the City should help improve school commutes.

At the direction of former SFCTA Commissioner Gordon Mar, the SFCTA developed the San Francisco School Access Plan (the Plan) to recommend strategies that the City and County of San Francisco pursue to improve sustainable transportation options for kindergarten through 5th grade (K-5) students. The Plan compliments San Francisco's existing Safe Routes to Schools Program<sup>2</sup> by focusing on caregivers and students who have trips to school and aftercare activities which are longer than a young child could reasonably walk or bike. The plan was funded through a Caltrans Sustainable Communities Planning Grant with matching local funds from former Commissioner Mar's office.

## Goals

Plan goals were developed with input from caregivers and students through in-language focus groups in addition to an interagency working group composed of representatives from the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency (SFMTA), the San Francisco Unified School District, the Department of Children, Youth and Their Families, and Caltrans.

Key goals for the School Access Plan include:

- Improve quality and availability of transportation options to school and afterschool activities, especially for vulnerable caregivers and students
- Ensure school related transportation options are safe
- Reduce greenhouse gas emissions, localized congestion, and air pollution around school sites

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.sfcta.org/sites/default/files/2019-03/Child\\_Transportation\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.sfcta.org/sites/default/files/2019-03/Child_Transportation_FINAL.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.sfsaferoutes.org/?ref=logo>

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CHAPTER 2

# Existing Conditions

The nature of the school commute is complex, however key trends can be observed in San Francisco. This Chapter highlights key trends affecting school transportation for K-5 age students, then catalogs existing programs designed to help families with the school commute and relevant guiding policies. Finally, the chapter discusses larger national trends affecting school transportation.

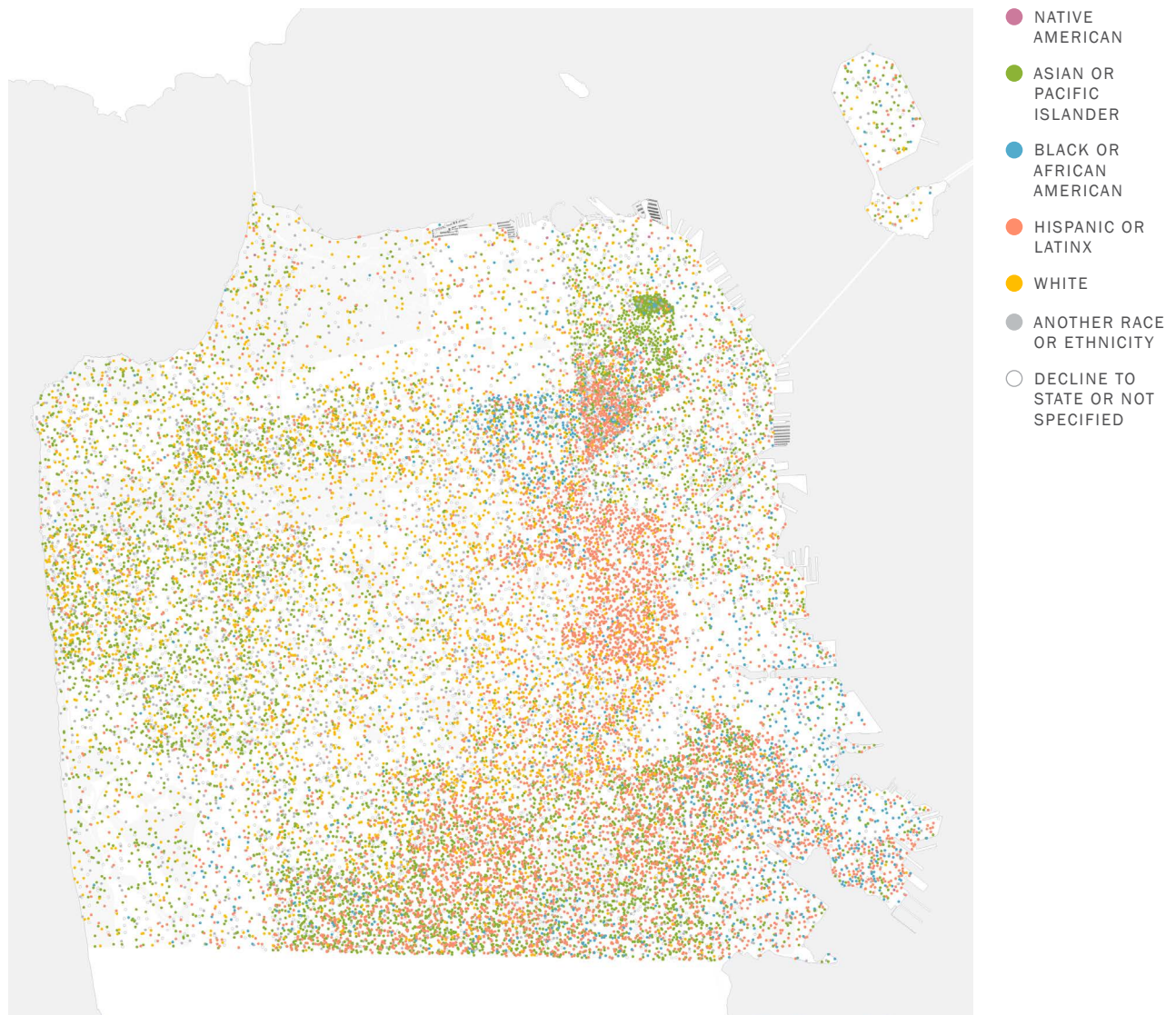
This analysis revealed that student home locations are not distributed evenly across San Francisco. This fact, combined with school application patterns, leads to many long school commutes. Students in the south and east tend to travel to the central regions for school. Most trips are taken by car for both kindergartners and 5th graders.

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## Where Do Students Live and Where are Schools Located?

Figure 3 shows the approximate home locations of K-5 SFUSD students by race. Elementary school aged children live across San Francisco, but tend to be concentrated in the Excelsior, Outer Mission, Mission, Bayview, Ingleside, Tenderloin, and Chinatown neighborhoods. Black and Latinx students tend to live in the South and East. White and Asian Students tend to live in the West.

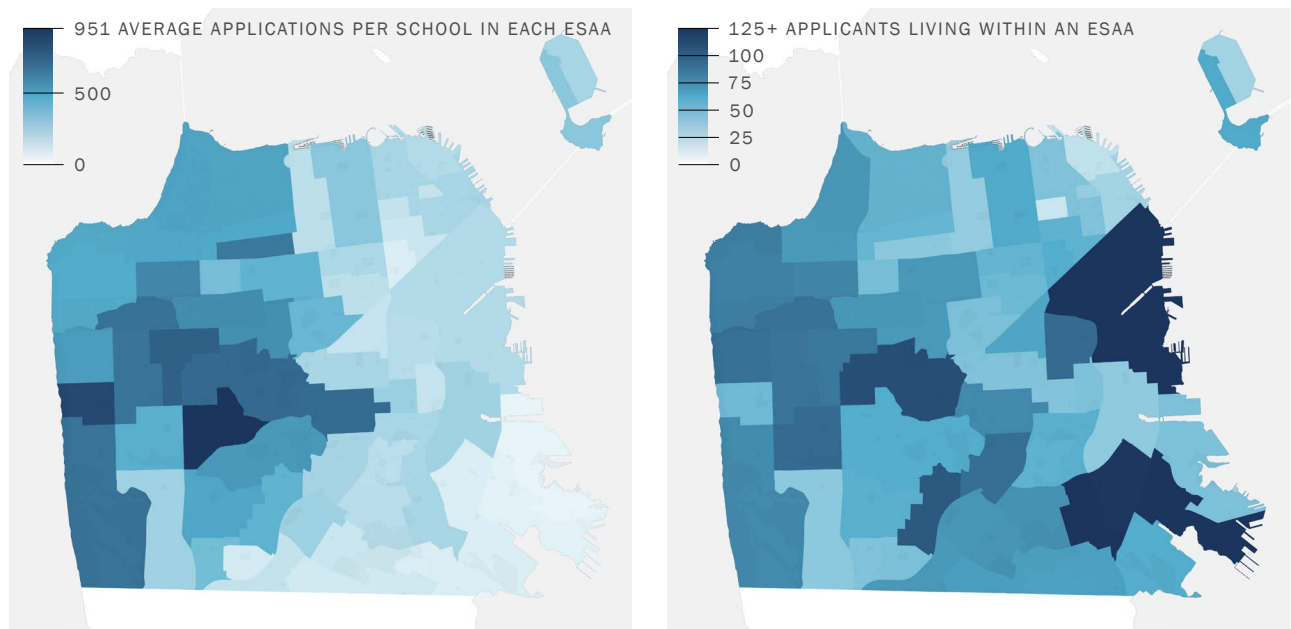
**Figure 3.** San Francisco K-5 SFUSD Home Locations



SFUSD has a citywide school choice policy, meaning that any student can apply to attend any school. Though students can apply anywhere, most elementary schools have a designated Elementary School Attendance Area (ESAA). Students living within an ESAA are not guaranteed admission to their ESAA school, but do receive preference in the admissions process<sup>1</sup>. Schools with certain specialized programs, such as K-8 instruction or language immersion programs do not have an ESAA.

Elementary school applications have a geographic pattern that differs from residential patterns. Applications tend to be concentrated in western San Francisco, though applicants are concentrated in Southeastern San Francisco (Figure 4).

**Figure 4. Applications and Home Locations by ESAA**



**NEW SCHOOL IN MISSION BAY**

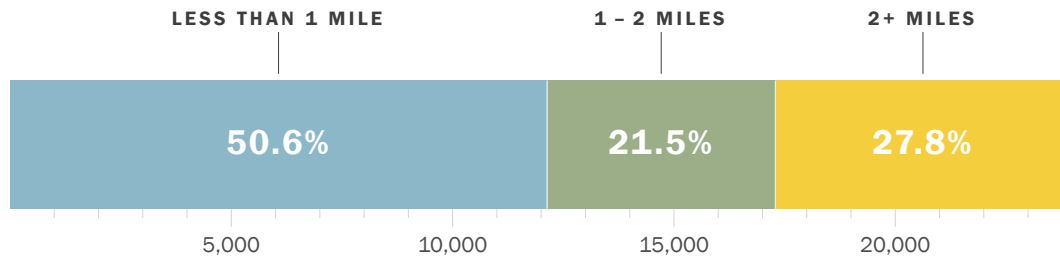
Of all SFUSD elementary schools, Daniel Webster had the most students within its ESAA applying to kindergarten in 2023. The growth in the student population is linked to new housing development in the Mission Bay and South of Market Neighborhoods. SFUSD is responding to this growth in the child population by building a new K-5 school in Mission Bay. Siting new facilities near residential growth has the potential to improve school transportation outcomes for families.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.sfusd.edu/student-assignment-policy/tiebreakers/attendance-area>

## Student Travel Patterns

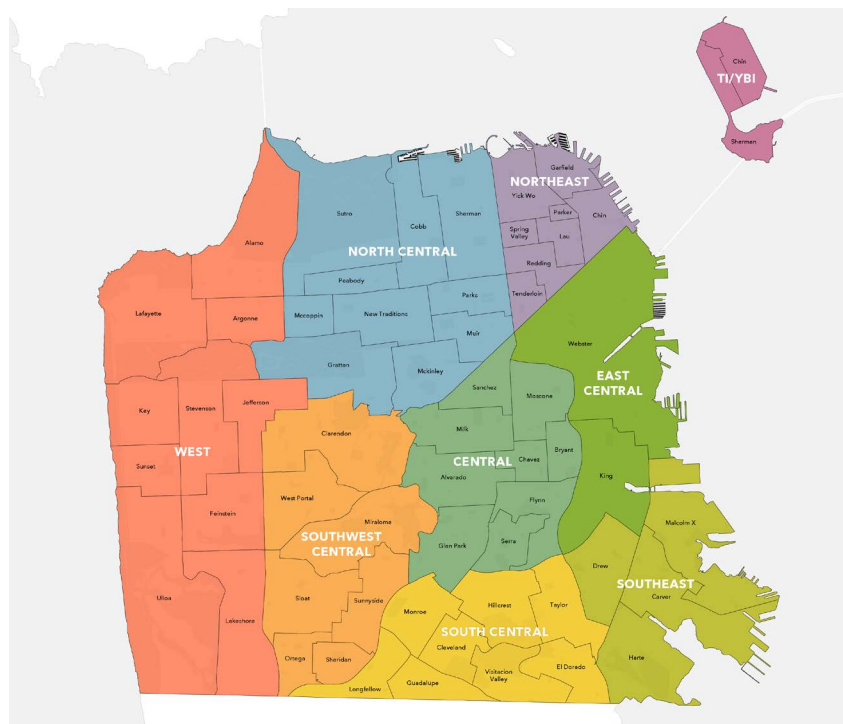
San Francisco’s citywide choice policy and the observed school preferences seen in Figure 4 have led many SFUSD students to travel outside of their neighborhood for school. Figure 5 shows that around half of elementary school students travel more than one mile to school. One in four students travel more than two miles.

**Figure 5.** Home to school distance for K-5 SFUSD students



A 2017 Analysis by SFUSD divided San Francisco into nine regions and analyzed student travel across and within regions (Figure 6). The analysis found that 44% of K-5 students traveled outside of their home region to attend school. White students were least likely to travel outside of their region to attend elementary schools (37%), while Black students were most likely to travel (52%).

**Figure 6.** San Francisco regions used in 2017 SFUSD travel analysis





### FINDINGS FROM 2017 SFUSD TRAVEL ANALYSIS

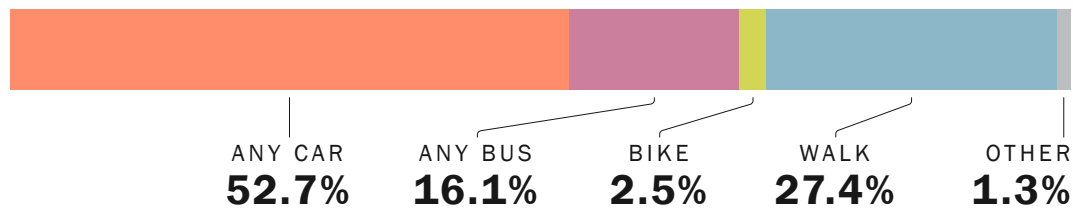
- In 2017, the Southwest Central and East Central regions had the highest percentage of elementary school students traveling into the region to attend school (58% each)
- The West region had significantly less inter-regional travel than other districts.
- Nearly 82% of K-5 students who live in the Southeast attended school in a different region, with more than 25% of students living in the southeast attending schools in the Central region.

**Table 1.** Interregional travel of SFUSD students (2017)

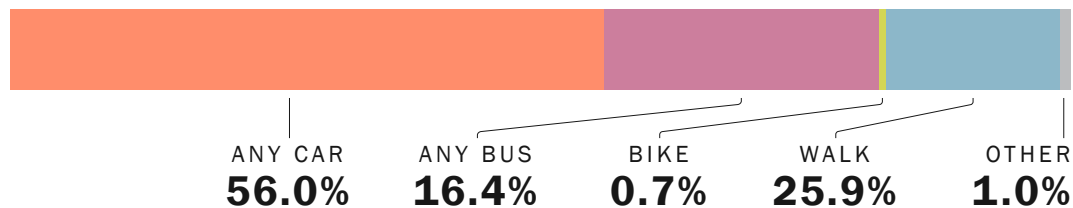
	STUDENTS ATTENDING SCHOOL IN REGION WHO LIVE ELSEWHERE	STUDENTS WHO LIVE IN REGION BUT ATTEND SCHOOL ELSEWHERE
Central	49%	37%
East Central	58%	64%
North Central	51%	27%
Northeast	41%	30%
South Central	28%	51%
Southeast	24%	82%
Southwest Central	58%	47%
Treasure Island / Yerba Buena Island	-	100%
West	33%	25%

Over 50% of SFUSD elementary school students in kindergarten and 5th grade travel to and from school by private car. Fifth grade students travel to school in very similar ways to kindergarten students.

**Figure 7.** Transportation mode share by SFUSD kindergarten students (2019)



**Figure 8.** Transportation mode share by SFUSD 5th grade students

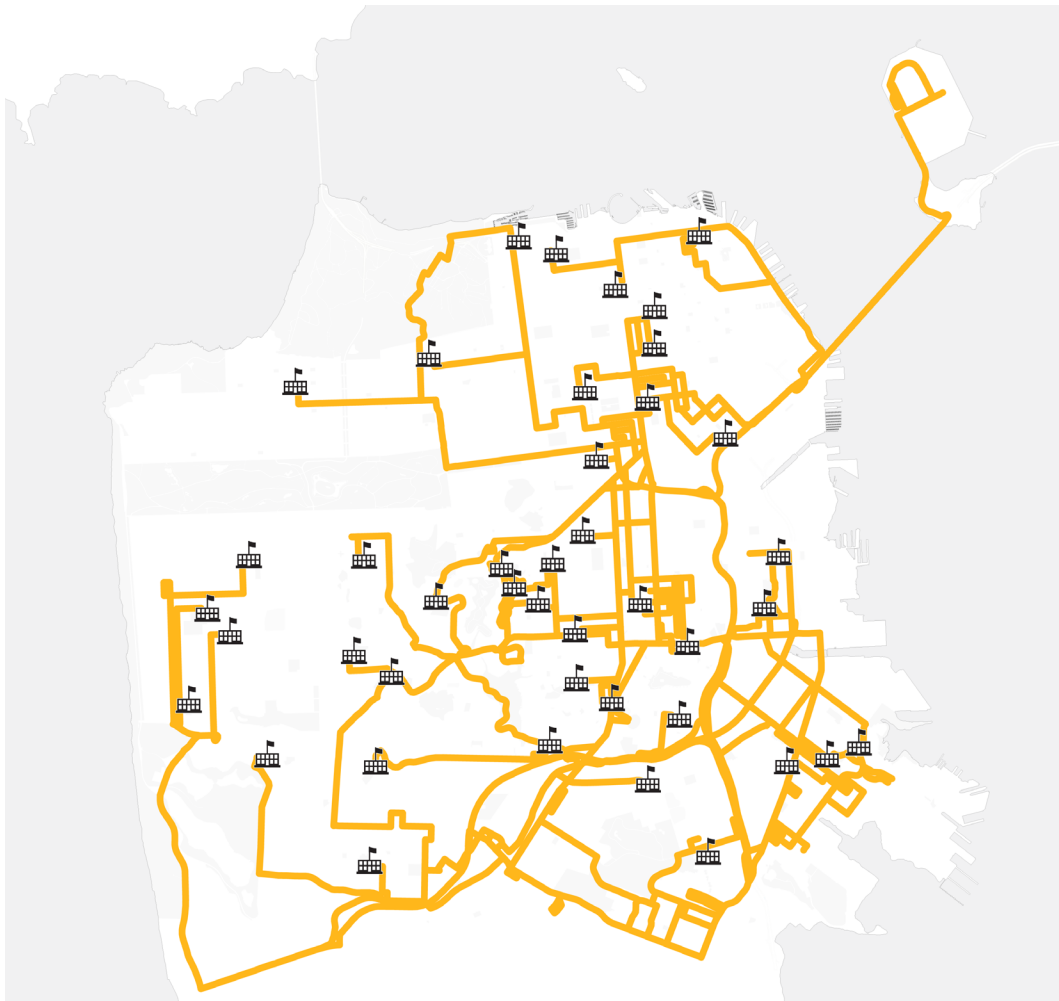


## Existing Programs to Facilitate Transportation

### YELLOW SCHOOL BUSES

SFUSD operates a fleet of vehicles with an approximate annual budget of \$30M. SFUSD is legally required to provide transportation to students who have transportation included in Individualized Educational Plans (IEPs). The majority of the department's budget funds 150 vehicles of various sizes used for IEP transportation. Remaining resources are dedicated to a fleet of 25 general education yellow school buses which serve 46 schools and approximately 2,000 students daily. More than 11,000 K-5 SFUSD students live more than a mile from school.

Figure 9. Map of SFUSD General Education Routes



Services align to SFUSD's General Education Transportation Policy<sup>1</sup> which prioritizes, among other things:

- Providing English Learners with access to language programs.
- Providing newcomers with access to newcomer programs.
- Providing low-income students living in areas of the city with the lowest average test scores with access to specialized schools and programs

SFUSD contracts with Zūm Transportation Services to operate the fleet. Zūm uses a unionized workforce and offers caregivers a mobile app where caregivers can view vehicle information and driver profiles as well as real-time bus locations. The app can notify caregivers when students are picked up or dropped off and allows caregivers to submit feedback.

## TRANSIT

### School Trippers

Muni's "school trippers" service provides extra afternoon buses on existing lines that begin their route at a school site, pick students up at the end of the school day, then continue along the route as normal. These provide capacity for the additional demand certain schools place on routes, leading to a less crowded trip for everyone. School tripper services currently serve only middle and high schools.

### Free Muni for Youth

The SFMTA has expanded the Free Muni for Low- and Moderate-Income Youth to all youth 18 years and younger, regardless of household income level. No application or proof of payment/Clipper card is required to ride Muni vehicles, with the exception of Cable Cars. Fares for regular service are waived for students enrolled in SFUSD's English Learner and Special Education Services programs through the age of 22.

### Muni Transit Assistant Program

The SFMTA's Muni Transit Assistant Program, (MTAP) trains members of the community in conflict resolution who then ride on specific routes with the purpose of diffusing and

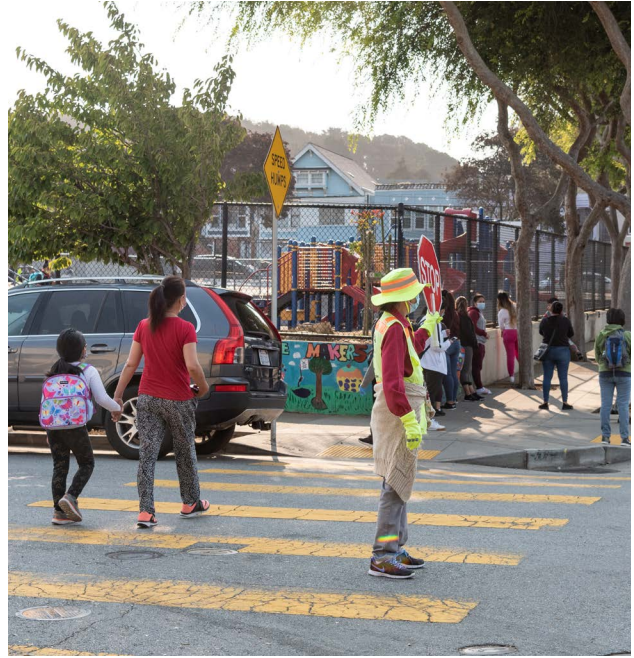


<sup>1</sup> <https://go.boarddocs.com/ca/sfusd/Board.nsf/goto?open&id=ALRLHC569513>

detering any conflicts, acts of vandalism, and who assist the bus operators as needed. The MTAP program is intended to function as workforce training, transitioning ambassadors to other roles within SFMTA after 2 - 3 years. Current MTAP staffing is concentrated on high schools.

### SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL

The Safe Routes to School (SRTS) program was created to help to make walking and bicycling to school safer and more accessible for children, including those with disabilities, and to increase the number of children who choose to walk, bicycle, take public transit, or ride in parental carpools. SRTS, currently implemented by SFMTA, includes a wide variety of programming including the crossing guard program, walk/roll to school week, bicycle education classes and more.



## COMMUNITY RESPONSES AND NON-PROFIT SOLUTIONS

### Tenderloin Safe Passage

Tenderloin Safe Passage is a coalition of mothers, youth, seniors, volunteers, and service providers who are building a culture of safety under the umbrella of the Tenderloin Community Benefit District. The program provides training in personal safety skills, including situational awareness; clear communication; calm, respectful confidence; harm reduction and positive engagement. The program also seeks to provide a positive presence on the sidewalks and at intersections: greeting people, responding to emergencies, assisting in crosswalks, and reducing harmful activities by being present and welcoming. The program is funded through a variety of sources including philanthropic sources and San Francisco's Office of Economic and Workforce Development.

### Mission Van Collaborative [defunct]

The Mission Van Collective was a program funded by the Department of Children, Youth, and their Families (DCYF) from 2002 to 2004. This program provided Mission District youth with van transportation to and from their after-school programs and on weekend field trips. The program was a collaborative effort of six Mission-based youth programs including Casa de los Jovenes, the Jamestown Community Center, Loco Bloco, Mission Girls Services, Mission Neighborhood Centers, and the Mission Science Workshop. The vans served approximately 400 youth per year between the ages 8 - 17.

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## Guiding Policies

### SFUSD GENERAL EDUCATION TRANSPORTATION POLICY

Because of resource constraints, SFUSD is unable to accommodate all families who request transportation. Service is provided according to SFUSD's General Education Transportation Policy 5101.1<sup>1</sup> which requires, among other things, that resources be prioritized to:

- Support choice in school assignment as a tactic for creating diverse learning environments including transportation to racially isolated schools that have been historically under-enrolled
- Support equitable access to the range of opportunities offered to students including
  - » Providing access to language programs for English language learners
  - » Providing access to newcomer programs for newcomers
  - » Providing students living in densely populated attendance areas with reasonable access to schools in less densely populated areas of the city.
- Provide limited school bus transportation to support reasonable access for attendance area residents to their attendance areas school

### SFUSD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL ASSIGNMENT POLICY UPDATE

Because the school which a student attends changes the trip they must take to get there, school travel is closely tied to issues of school choice. Since 2010, SFUSD has operated under a citywide choice policy; students have been able to apply to and attend any school in San Francisco, regardless of the students' home location. This resulted in many long school commutes across neighborhoods.

In 2018, the Board of Education passed Resolution 189-25A1<sup>2</sup>, directing the district to transition to a zone-based choice policy. The new policy has three goals.

- **Diversity:** Create integrated elementary schools that provide students with the opportunity to experience the rich diversity of the city of San Francisco.
- **Predictability:** Offer families of elementary school students a high degree of predictability about where their children will be enrolled in school.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://go.boarddocs.com/ca/sfusd/Board.nsf/goto?open&id=ALRLHC569513>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.boarddocs.com/ca/sfusd/Board.nsf/files/B68VSV72D33E/\\$file/189-25A1%20Community%20Based%20SA%20System.pdf](https://www.boarddocs.com/ca/sfusd/Board.nsf/files/B68VSV72D33E/$file/189-25A1%20Community%20Based%20SA%20System.pdf)

- **Proximity:** Create strong community connections to local schools and facilitate enrollment in an elementary school within a reasonable geographic distance.

The transition to a zone-based choice policy will affect the schools that students are eligible to apply to, and thus affect school commutes.

## National Context

Across the United States, yellow school buses are the dominant strategy employed to help caregivers and youth with the school commute, however the viability of yellow bus service is challenged in nearly all contexts.<sup>1</sup> A national driver shortage is threatening operator's ability to deliver service in the near-term, while structural challenges such as school choice programs, fuel costs, and school consolidation are increasing operating costs.

Facing challenges to traditional yellow bus services, some dense cities with robust public transportation networks are considering whether public transportation can play a larger role in the school commute. To reduce financial barriers to public transportation, some cities have developed and implemented reduced fare programs for students. San Francisco's Free Muni for All Youth program is one of the most comprehensive and user-friendly examples of such a policy.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://citiesandschools.berkeley.edu/reports/Beyond\\_the\\_Yellow\\_Bus.pdf](https://citiesandschools.berkeley.edu/reports/Beyond_the_Yellow_Bus.pdf)

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CHAPTER 3

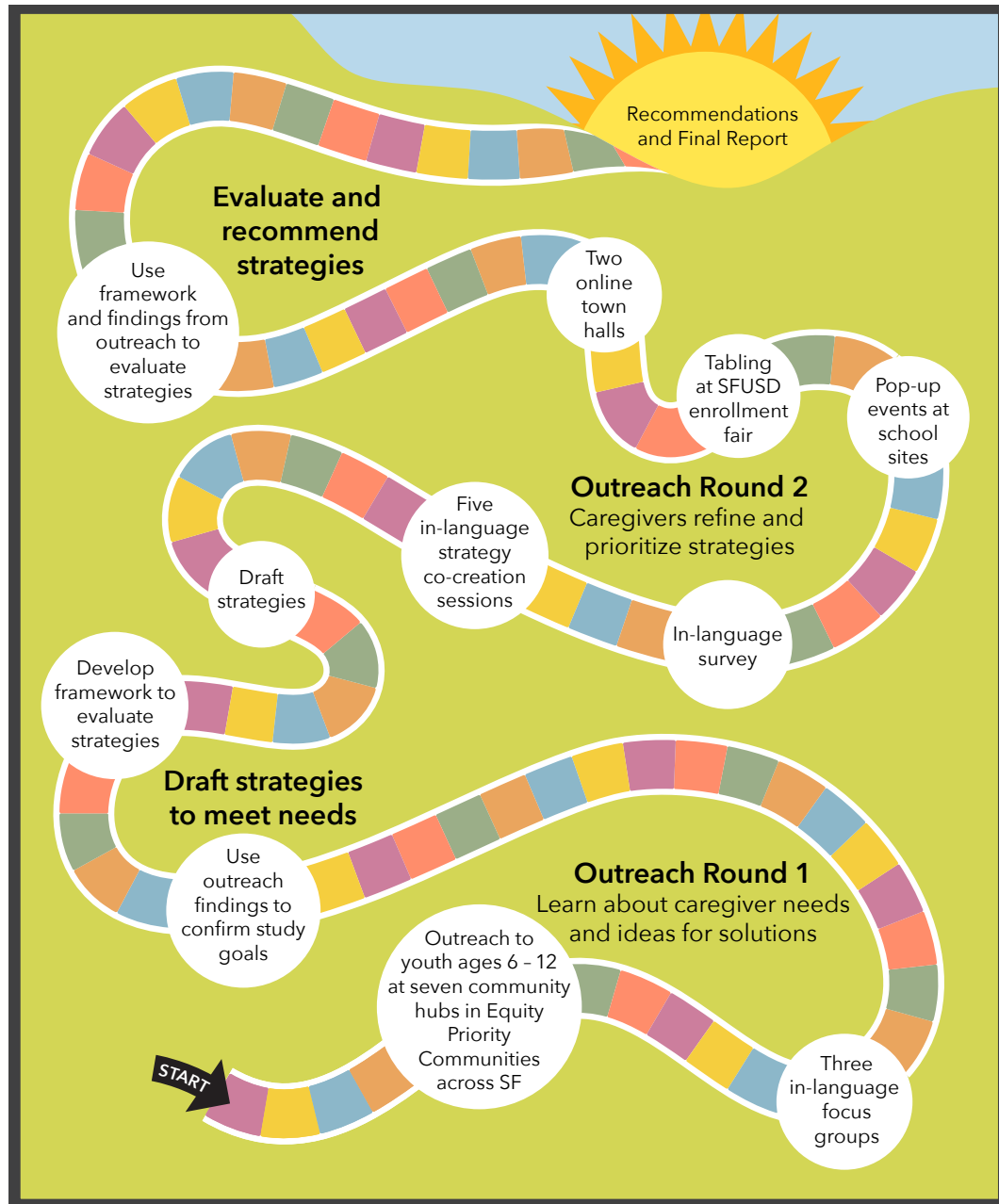
# Public Engagement

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# Study Approach

In order to develop useful, implementable solutions, San Francisco needs to ensure the voices of people most affected are at the forefront of solution design. The School Access Plan included extensive public engagement which informed all study tasks including goal definition and strategy development (Figure 10).

**Figure 10.** Study Process Graphic





## Who did we hear from?

### ROUND 1

The first round of outreach for the School Access Plan focused on hearing from students and caregivers about their transportation needs. Learnings were used to confirm study goals and develop a long list of draft strategies to address those needs (Chapter 4). The School Access Plan partnered with DCYF on outreach to youth ages 6 – 12 at seven Community Hubs<sup>1</sup> across San Francisco’s EPCs. Students participated in an art activity and were asked to draw the kind of transportation system they would like to use. Feedback was collected from students at the following Community Hubs:

- Boys and Girls Club of SF – Carver Elementary School (Bayview)
- Boys and Girls Club of SF – Tenderloin
- Cameron House (Chinatown)
- Chinatown YMCA
- City of Dreams (Bayview)
- Geneva Car Barn (Excelsior)
- HopeSF – Hunters View

Caregivers shared insight about transportation needs through a series of three in-language focus groups. Most participants were mothers, and many had more than one child in elementary school. Most participants used a car for their school trips.

**Table 2.** Caregiver Focus Group Participant Profile

NEIGHBORHOODS	LANGUAGE	PARTICIPANTS
Bayview, Tenderloin, Ingleside, Bernal Heights	Spanish	5
Vis Valley, Bayview, Ingleside, Outer Mission, Tenderloin	Cantonese	10
Bayview Hunters-Point Vis Valley, Outer Mission	English	6
<b>Total Participants</b>		<b>21</b>

### ROUND 2

The second round of outreach included workshops or “co-creation sessions” in which caregivers were asked to help refine and prioritize draft strategies. Participants were recruited from communities most impacted by inequitable K–5 school access in San Francisco including Black, Pacific Islander, Latinx, Chinese, and low-income caretakers, who live in key areas such as Bayview-Hunters Point, Chinatown, Outer Mission, Tenderloin and Visitation Valley. Only a subset of draft School Access Plan Strategies were brought to co-creation workshops with caregivers, as described in Chapter 4.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.dcyf.org/chicasestudy>

**Table 3. Co-creation workshop participants**

TOTAL PARTICIPANTS	HOUSEHOLD INCOME	RACE (SELECT ALL THAT APPLY)
35	Less Than \$20,000: 12	Black descended or African American: 4
	\$20,000 To \$49,999: 15	East Asian: 8
	\$50,000 To \$99,999: 2	Southeast Asian: 1
	\$100,000 To \$149,999: 3	Hispanic: 6
	\$150,000 To \$199,999: 1	Meztizo: 1
	Over \$250,000: 1	Caucasian: 2
		Native American: 1
		Native American/Pacific Islander: 1
		Prefer Not to Say: 14

To gather input from a larger caregiver community, the Plan included a survey which caregivers could complete online or on paper. The survey was available in English, Spanish, Chinese, and Filipino. It was promoted through direct emails to all SFUSD families via SFUSD’s newsletter, to community-based organizations, to parent advisory groups, and through ad placements in the San Francisco Bay View newspaper. SFCTA staff promoted the survey in-person at five pop-up events at school sites and at SFUSD’s annual elementary school enrollment fair.

In total, the survey had 366 responses – 288 in English, 43 in Chinese, and 35 in Spanish. The majority of respondents (75%) identified as female and most respondents (62%) had more than one child attending school in San Francisco. Respondent home locations roughly matched the distribution of SFSUD’s elementary school aged population shown in Figure 3. Twenty-two percent of respondents reported that their annual household income was less than \$50,000 and 22% reported that their annual household income was over \$250,000. Fourteen percent of respondents indicated that they prefer not to share their income. Most survey respondents (58%) typically have access to a car and an additional 22% sometimes have access to a car.

White respondents were overrepresented in the survey (42%). Sixteen percent of respondents identified as East Asian, 6% as South Asian, and 5% identify as Black descended or African American. Ten percent of respondents shared that they were of two or more races.

**THE SCHOOL COMMUTE IS OFTEN FACILITATED BY WOMEN**

A clear majority of School Access Plan survey responses, focus groups interest, and co-creation participants were women, suggesting that school transportation responsibilities in San Francisco are often the responsibility of female identifying caregivers. A growing body of research recognizes women can have unique travel needs which should be explicitly considered.<sup>1</sup> This reality was reflected clearly in outreach findings where participants shared concerns about personal safety when traveling, especially on transit. SFTMA’s Safety Equity Initiative<sup>2</sup> is an ongoing effort to create a safer environment for all Muni riders and SFMTA staff with a special focus on combating gender-based harassment and violence.

1 [http://libraryarchives.metro.net/DB\\_Attachments/2019-0294/UnderstandingHowWomenTravel\\_FullReport\\_FINAL.pdf](http://libraryarchives.metro.net/DB_Attachments/2019-0294/UnderstandingHowWomenTravel_FullReport_FINAL.pdf)

2 <https://www.sfmta.com/projects/safety-equity-initiative>

## What Did We Learn?

### ROUND 1

The intent of the first round of outreach was to confirm needs and inform strategy development. Caregivers shared that school pickup and drop-off is often a chaotic and stressful undertaking, especially for families with more than one school-aged child. Many participants named the lack of safety, particularly for non-vehicular options, as a major challenge. Caregivers were concerned about injuries that can occur from traffic violence (unsafe driving) and about personal safety, especially on transit. Caregivers discussed challenges to riding Muni including unreliable and long trips, transfers, and crowded buses. Caregivers who drive shared that traffic is a common challenge.

When asked what kinds of solutions they were interested in, caregivers saw value in increasing the availability of yellow school buses but shared an appetite for a multi-pronged approach which prioritizes safety, affordability, and improved communication between caregivers, the city, and SFUSD. Caregivers wanted to prioritize strategies which are quick to implement and have lasting impacts. Caregivers also shared about the need for continued, multilingual engagement through the project development and implementation phases of recommendations.

### ROUND 2

The second round of outreach consisted of strategy co-creation workshops and a survey. Learnings from the second round were used to shape, evaluate, and prioritize strategies. Chapter 4 identifies how findings from Round 2 shaped strategies. Detailed Summary Reports of the co-creation workshops and the Survey are available by request.

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CHAPTER 4

# Strategy Development and Evaluation

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## Draft Strategies

The School Access Plan developed strategies to support easy, safe, and sustainable school travel for K-5 youth, especially those who need to take trips that are beyond easy walking or biking distance. Based on learnings from the first round of public engagement (Chapter 3), strategies were developed in four categories:

- **Improved Transportation Options:** Strategies that increase transportation options to and from school and after-school activities.
- **Safety:** Strategies which ensure that school travel is safe for students and caregivers.
- **Affordability:** Strategies which lower the cost of transportation for students and caregivers, especially for vulnerable groups.
- **Communication and Information:** Strategies that expand access to information about transportation options and create opportunities for dialogue amongst caregivers, SFUSD and city transportation officials.

For each draft strategy, an implementation timeline and high-level cost estimate were developed. Potential funding sources were identified, alongside likely challenges to program success, and synergy with other strategies. Together this information was used to evaluate strategies and identify promising interventions to improve school transportation. Timeline and cost ranges for individual strategies could vary significantly depending on how the strategy is implemented. For the purposes of initial development and evaluation, strategies were divided into three cost ranges (\$: less than \$100k, \$\$: \$100 - 250K, and \$\$\$: 250K+) and three implementation timelines (short-term: 1 - 2 years, medium-term: 2 - 4 years, and long-term: 5+ years) More detailed estimates were developed for recommended strategies (Chapter 6).

### IMPROVED TRANSPORTATION OPTIONS

Improved transportation options expand existing services or introduce new ways to get students to and from school. These services and programs provide more mobility options for students with limited options today and could reduce the number of single-occupancy vehicle trips to and from school. Strategies in this category include carpool coordination, shuttles, aftercare programs, and an electric bicycle lending library.

#### Carpool Coordination

##### \$\$ – Short Term

Carpools can reduce the number of single-occupancy vehicle trips to and from schools and congestion in school pickup and drop-off zones. They can reduce the burden on caregivers by reducing the frequency each individual is responsible for the school commute. Carpools could be implemented in several ways. For example, they could be

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coordinated directly by SFUSD or agency staff, organized by caregivers, or coordinated through a third-party matching service.

Participants in focus groups were open to carpool solutions but shared that trust could be a barrier to successful implementation, as some don't have strong relationships with others at their school site after pandemic induced remote learning. The strategy may not work for caregivers who don't always have access to a car (42% of survey respondents).

## Shuttles

### \$\$\$ – Medium Term

Shuttles have been of consistent interest to community members and were recommended for further exploration by the SFCTA's 2016 Child Transportation Survey<sup>1</sup>. During co-creation workshops caregivers identified a number of features which they said should be included in a school serving shuttle including consistent routes, consistent drivers, and comprehensive driver training. Caregivers strongly preferred that the shuttle be operated by a non-profit, and many suggested that the shuttle be free. Although less critical to a shuttle program's success, caregivers in co-creation workshops also wanted a program to include real-time tracking, an adult assistant, and on-board cameras.

Survey respondents were very supportive of a shuttle program, with 70% of respondents sharing that they either absolutely or may use a shuttle. Most survey respondents (57%) said they would be willing to pay between \$1 and \$25 per week for shuttle service. Respondents with higher incomes were generally willing to pay more per week than respondents with lower incomes.

## Aftercare Programs

### \$\$ – Medium Term

Aftercare programs provide care for students after school hours at the school site or other community center. Although not a traditional transportation strategy, the School Access Plan considered whether improving access to such programs could improve the school commute by allowing caregivers more flexibility around pickup or drop-off timing.

About half of survey respondents shared that their child is already enrolled in before- or after-care programs, while 36% shared that they may or absolutely would enroll if programs were available. Though caregivers indicated they would use before-school and after-school programs, programs would be unlikely to change the way that respondents travel to and from school. About two-thirds (68%) of respondents indicated that they would travel in the same way that they do now if their child was enrolled in an aftercare program

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.sfcta.org/sites/default/files/2019-03/Child\\_Transportation\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.sfcta.org/sites/default/files/2019-03/Child_Transportation_FINAL.pdf)

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## Electric Bicycle Lending Library

### \$\$\$ – Medium Term

An electric bike lending library would lend motorized bicycles to caregivers. Bicycles would be ridden by the caregiver while children would ride as passengers. In the 2016 child transportation survey, caregivers who biked had a high satisfaction level with their school commute compared to those who traveled other ways, however bicycles are not often considered good tools for long or hilly trips. The recent advent of electric bicycles has opened the possibility that this sustainable travel option could serve many more trips. By creating an electric bicycle lending library, San Francisco could reduce barriers for caregivers to access this transportation option.

In co-creation sessions, caregivers shared that this strategy would work best if bicycles could be checked out for long periods of time – for example a full semester. Caregivers shared that bicycle pickup should be located near schools, and that bicycles should be able to carry multiple children. In the survey, co-creation sessions, and focus groups, community members expressed concern about dangerous drivers and inadequate bicycle infrastructure. Forty percent of survey respondents indicated that they would not be comfortable with their child riding in the passenger seat of an electric bicycle, while 24% said that they would feel very comfortable.

## SAFETY STRATEGIES

Four strategies were developed specifically to increase the safety and comfort of students traveling to and from school. Strategies in this category include: Muni transit ambassadors, infrastructure safety improvements, pickup and drop-off zone guidance, and transit trainings.

### Muni Transit Ambassadors

#### \$\$\$ – Medium Term

The Muni Transit Assistance Program (MTAP) deploys trained transit ambassadors on vehicles to defuse conflicts, prevent acts of vandalism, and assist bus operators. SFMTA hires ambassadors who have deep ties to San Francisco neighborhoods to increase feelings of community comfort. Ambassadors are currently deployed primarily on routes that serve middle and high schools. To increase safety for young students who ride Muni to school, the MTAP program could be expanded or re-oriented to prioritize stationing ambassadors on elementary school serving routes.

Caregivers in focus groups shared concerns about public transit which ambassadors could help address, including messy buses and conflicts between riders. Although a relatively small portion of caregivers take their students to school on Muni (16% of survey respondents), 37% of respondents said that it would make their school trip safer, suggesting that some caregivers may ride Muni more often if ambassadors were present.

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## Infrastructure Safety Improvements

### \$\$\$ – Long Term

Infrastructure safety around schools is meant to keep students and caregivers safe from conflicts with motor vehicles. SFMTA's school engineering program has a goal to construct one speed hump at every school in San Francisco and currently constructs approximately 20 per year. The program also conducts "walk audits" which bring agency staff, school administrators, and caregivers together to assess barriers to safe travel and identify infrastructure needed to support safety near an individual school site. SFMTA currently conducts approximately five walk audits per year. This strategy would expand SFMTA's existing walk audit program to serve additional schools.

Most survey respondents (52%) shared that infrastructure safety improvements would make their trip safer. Respondents shared that they are most interested in sidewalk improvements and protected bike lanes and intersections.

## Pickup and Drop-off Zone Guidance

### \$ – Short-Term

Currently, pickup and drop-off zone policies are developed by individual school sites. This strategy would develop guidance for school sites about best practices for loading zone management including information about support SFMTA is able to provide such as colored curb changes or parking enforcement. Guidance would also be developed for caregivers about expected behaviors and norms at their school site.

Focus group participants shared that traffic at pickup and drop-off is a common challenge and many survey respondents indicated that guidance would make their trip safer (46%). Respondents with an annual household income between \$20,000 and \$49,999 had the highest share of respondents report that guidance would make their school trip safer (59%).

## Transit Trainings

### \$ – Short-Term

Travel training is a tool that could be used to help inexperienced transit riders feel safe and comfortable using public transit for their school trip. Transit training could be offered to either caregivers or young students and cover a variety of topics, including how to board Muni buses, how to read maps, personal safety on transit, and fare programs like Free Muni for All Youth, Lifeline, and Clipper. Training could be one-time or recurring events. Events could take place at school sites as part of Safe Routes to School programming.

In focus groups, youth shared stories about feeling unsafe on buses. Caregivers shared stories of young students getting stuck in bus doors and having trouble boarding. Caregivers in co-creation sessions suggested that training would be more beneficial to students than to adults. Many reinforced that they would be unlikely to allow K-5



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students to ride public transit alone but shared that training could improve feelings of safety when they accompany their students on Muni.

## **AFFORDABILITY STRATEGIES**

The School Access Plan developed a set of strategies meant to improve the affordability of school transportation including improving the awareness of existing fare programs, expanding discounted fare programs, and offering stipends for school travel to caregivers.

### **Expand Discount Fare Programs**

#### **\$\$\$ – Medium Term**

Existing discounted fare programs, including Muni Lifeline and Clipper START, provide discounts to eligible caregivers but not all caregivers. Free Muni for All Youth allows students to ride for free, but many caregivers do not feel comfortable with their student riding transit on their own. Discounted fare programs could be expanded to reduce the monetary barrier for caregivers of K-5 students to ride Muni to school with their students. This strategy would provide free Muni trips to caregivers who accompany a student on transit to or from school.

When asked why the school trip is stressful, 21% of caregivers shared that the cost of the trip creates stress. More caregivers cited long trips (53%), inconvenient timing (49%), safety (25%), and “other” (30%) reasons for the school trip being stressful. Among income groups, respondents with annual household incomes below \$20,000 had the highest share of concerns about the cost of traveling to school (26%). When asked whether the cost of Muni is a barrier to using Muni for the school trip, 71% of caregivers reported that either Muni isn’t an option for them regardless of cost, or that paying the fare is not a problem for them. The share of caregivers who reported that cost was a barrier to using Muni was higher for caregivers with lower incomes.

### **Discount Fare Program Awareness**

#### **\$ – Short-Term**

Several discounted fare programs exist for vulnerable caregivers and students, however, not all caregivers are aware of these programs. SFUSD and SFMTA could coordinate to increase awareness of existing discount programs amongst caregivers and students by developing and distributing informational materials through the school admissions or orientation sessions. Existing discounted fare programs include Free Muni for All Youth, the Muni Lifeline Program, and Free Muni for Seniors Program.

Survey respondents who indicated that the cost of Muni was a barrier to riding were asked about their awareness of the Muni Lifeline pass program. 28% of respondents shared that they were unaware of the Lifeline program. 19% had some knowledge of the pass but requested more information.

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## School Travel Stipends

### \$\$\$ – Medium-Term

In some cases, students may not be able to afford transportation and may not be served by SFUSD's general education transportation or Muni. Some of San Francisco's peer cities have developed temporary stipend programs for students in these circumstances. A school travel stipend could cover a variety of transportation costs, including gas or maintenance of a personal vehicle, transit fares, shared ride fares, or shared bicycle or scooter trips.

Most survey respondents shared they would spend extra funds for school transportation on gas or maintenance for their own vehicle (41%) or on travel costs for the bus or train (20%).

## COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION

Clear communication and information are essential to spread awareness about school transportation options and build trust between the district, schools, and caregivers. The need to improve communication was frequently voiced by caregivers during public engagement. Strategies to address this need include implementing a transportation safety advisory group and identifying transportation coordinators.

### Transportation Safety Advisory Group

#### \$\$ – Near Term

SFUSD could create a Transportation and Safety Group that creates a space for caregivers to provide ongoing feedback to transportation and school officials about transportation issues. This strategy could be implemented as a district-wide committee similar to SFUSD's thirteen existing advisory councils, or at each school site.

Caregivers in focus groups emphasized that any groups created should include in-language access to enable participation from caregivers who don't speak English. Survey respondents with lower incomes were more likely to report that they would use a transportation advisory group than respondents with higher annual incomes.

### Transportation Coordinators

#### \$\$ – Near Term

A Transportation Coordinator is an individual or individuals who could help to facilitate school and aftercare transportation coordination with caregivers, ideally in-language. The Transportation Coordinator role could exist within the district and/or at school sites.

Caregivers in co-creation workshops expressed a preference for transportation coordinators at school sites, rather than centralized at the district. Survey respondents with an annual household income of less than \$20,000 had the largest share of

responses that were very interested in transportation coordinators (35%), while respondents with an annual household income of more than \$250,000 had the smallest share of responses that were very interested in this strategy (7%).

## Evaluation Methodology

In order to identify promising strategies the School Access Plan developed and applied an evaluation framework to draft strategies. The framework measured strategy performance across six objectives.

- 1. Transportation Benefits:** Improve quality and availability of transportation options to school and afterschool activities, especially for vulnerable caregivers and students.
- 2. Safety:** Ensure school-related transportation options are safe.
- 3. Climate:** Reduce greenhouse gas emissions, localized congestion, and air pollution around school sites.
- 4. Community:** Address the community's school access needs, especially for vulnerable caregivers and students.
- 5. Financial:** Maximize cost effectiveness and leverage existing resources.
- 6. Implementation:** Prioritize strategies that can be implemented quickly with lasting effects.

Most objectives are composed of multiple metrics, shown below. See Appendix A, available on request, for the full evaluation framework and results.

### TRANSPORTATION BENEFITS

#### Availability

Strategies that increase the number of available mobility options to school and afterschool activities score well.

#### Quality

Strategies that increase the frequency and reliability of mobility options to school and afterschool activities score well.

#### Affordability

Strategies that increase the affordability of mobility options to school and afterschool activities, especially for vulnerable caregivers and students score well.

#### Number of beneficiaries

Improvements that benefit many people are preferred to those that benefit few.

## SAFETY CRITERIA

### Personal security

Strategies which address caregivers and students need for improved personal safety score well.

### Infrastructure safety

Infrastructure plays a key role in a student's safety traveling to/from school. Mobility options which protect students from traffic violence score well.

## CLIMATE CRITERIA

### Mode split

Mode split directly influences greenhouse gas emissions and air pollution around school sites. Single-occupancy vehicles cause congestion and emit more pollutants per person. Strategies that carry more than one student are encouraged.

## COMMUNITY CRITERIA

### Community support

Input from co-creation sessions and the project survey are used to measure community support, accounting for cultural, practical, and financial challenges to success voiced by caregivers.

### Serves Priority Populations

Strategies score well if they benefit Equity Priority Communities or low-income families.

## FINANCIAL CRITERIA

### Cost

Is the overall cost within a range that can realistically be funded with available sources

### Cost per beneficiary

The likely range of strategy beneficiaries is compared to the cost of a program. If a program's total cost is low, but it serves few caregivers it might still have a high cost per user. Similarly, even though a program's total cost is high, if it reaches many people, it might still have a low cost per beneficiary.

### Funding availability and financial sustainability

To the degree possible, strategies and related projects should have stable sources of funding. In the case of pilot or demonstration projects, there should be reasonable likelihood of continued funding for operations. It is recognized that continued funding can never be guaranteed, as it is subject to budget processes, as well as decisions and priorities of funders.

## IMPLEMENTATION CRITERIA

### Implementation time-frame

Strategies that can be implemented in the near term are preferred, as long as they are also sustainable.

### Phasing

Strategies which can be implemented in phases score well

### Coordination

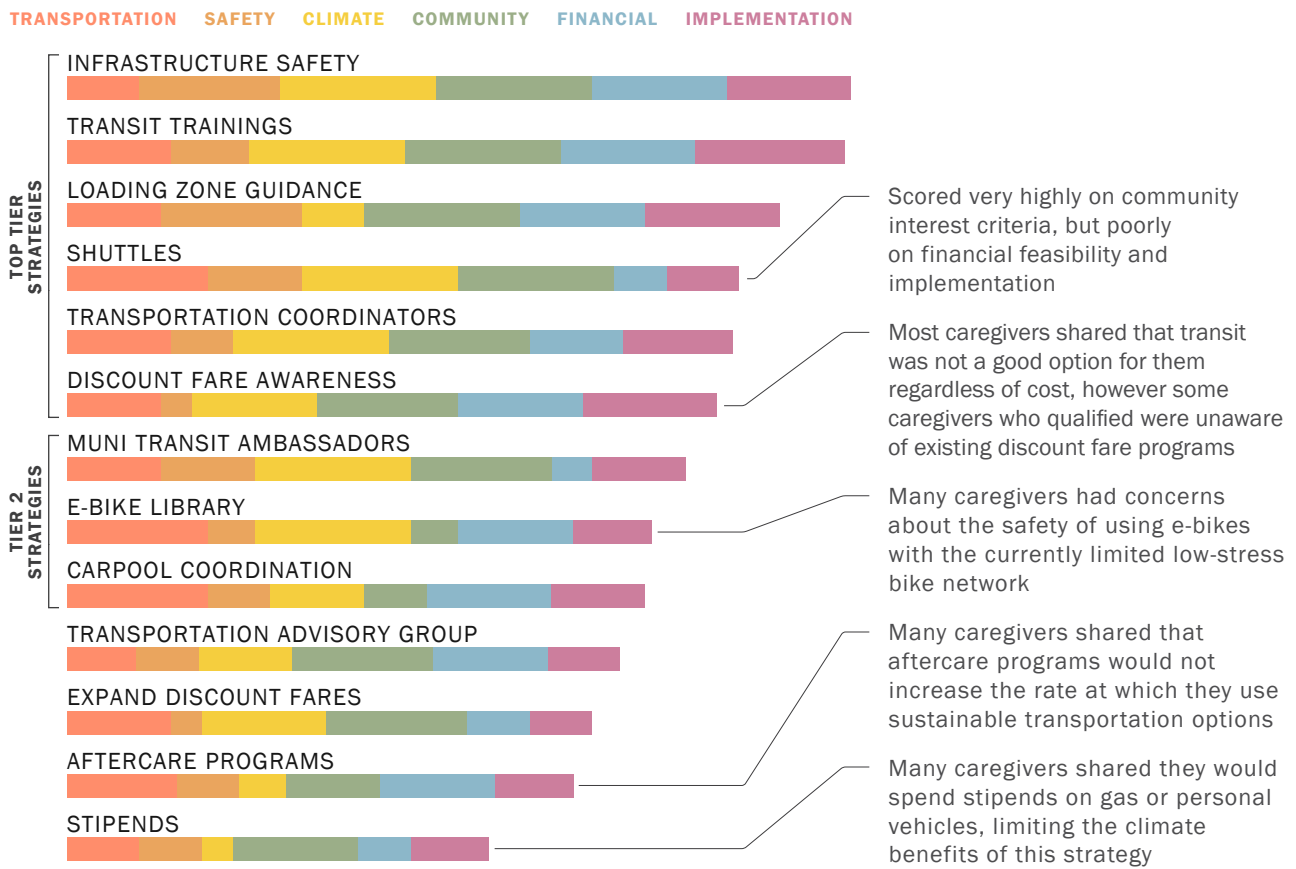
Strategies which create opportunities for constructive coordination across agencies and resource leveraging score well.

### Project champion

Support from a potential project sponsor (“champion”) will be critical to successful implementation. This includes support from lead and supporting entities, which may take the form of formal endorsement by organizations and individuals, support by elected governing bodies, and connections to adopted plans to carry out the strategy.

## Evaluation Results

Figure 11. Strategy Evaluation Results



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CHAPTER 5

# Recommendations and Next Steps

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## Tier 1 Strategies

Based on the strategy evaluation in Figure 11, the School Access Plan identified six high performing strategies, including shuttles, infrastructure safety improvements, pickup and drop-off zone guidance, transit trainings, existing fare program awareness, and transportation coordinators.

### INFRASTRUCTURE SAFETY IMPROVEMENTS

SFMTA should continue to implement infrastructure safety improvements around school sites and should expand its Schools Engineering Program to conduct additional walk audits which bring agency staff, school administrators, and caregivers together to assess barriers to safe travel and identify needed improvements. The current walk-audits program conducts 5 audits per year with an annual budget of approximately \$280,000. Program costs scale approximately linearly, thus expanding the program to serve 20 schools per year would require a budget of approximately \$1,000,000. SFMTA would need to add staff capacity to the schools engineering team to accommodate more than 10 walk audits per year.

**Next Steps:** The SFCTA and SFMTA should coordinate to increase resources and staff capacity to execute an expanded walk audits program. The agencies should develop a methodology for prioritizing school sites for an expanded program which considers demonstrated safety challenges, the extent to which the school serves students from Equity Priority Communities, and whether the school site has had recent infrastructure safety investments. A combination of local funding sources could be directed to the program including Proposition L and the TNC Tax. Longer-term, higher-cost engineering treatments recommended as part of the walk audit program may be installed as part of larger capital projects or separate programmatic improvement initiatives which could be funded through a combination of One Bay Area Grant Program, Proposition AA, Proposition L, General Obligation Bonds, and Safe Routes to BART for schools near BART. The SFCTA should also demonstrate an approach to school-centered network safety analysis through the upcoming Mission Bay School Access Study.<sup>1</sup>

### TRANSIT TRAININGS

SFMTA, together with SFUSD, should conduct transit trainings for youth to help young people feel comfortable riding transit and to cultivate the next generation of transit riders. SFUSD's Safe Routes to School Coordinator (a position funded through SFMTA's SRTS program) should build on SFMTA's previous experience with the "Step Up" education program to develop a field-trip curriculum for elementary school aged students which educators can use to teach youth the basics about riding transit safely. The curriculum could be designed as a stand-alone trip, or with lessons that can be built into existing SFUSD field trips which use transit.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.sfcta.org/sites/default/files/2023-02/SFCTA\\_CAC\\_PropKGroupedAllocationsMEMO\\_2023-02-22.pdf](https://www.sfcta.org/sites/default/files/2023-02/SFCTA_CAC_PropKGroupedAllocationsMEMO_2023-02-22.pdf)

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**Next Steps:** The SFMTA-funded Safe Routes to School Coordinator should incorporate transit training development into the work plan for upcoming SRTS grant applications. Once the curriculum is developed, the SRTS program should include information about curriculum availability in outreach to educators at school sites. SFUSD can also identify areas that transit trainings can be integrated into school activities. Curriculum development is estimated to cost less than \$100,000 and should be integrated into the scope of the existing SRTS program.

### **PICKUP AND DROP-OFF ZONE GUIDANCE**

Pickup and drop-off policies are currently developed ad-hoc by individual school sites. City agencies guide policies in several ways: The San Francisco Planning Department requires new schools and childcare facilities to develop a Pickup and Drop-Off Management Plan.<sup>1</sup> SFMTA and SFUSD staff have regular meetings to discuss emergent loading issues at specific school sites. San Francisco schools, however, would benefit from a more consistent process which ensures pickup and drop-off management plans are informed by best practices and guided by increased collaboration between SFMTA and school site administrators.

**Next Steps:** SFMTA and SFUSD should build on existing processes to ensure school administrators are able to implement effective and safe loading zones. This process should begin with SFMTA developing (or updating as necessary) two sets of informational materials. The first should describe best practices for loading zone management for an audience of school site administrators. Materials should describe what services the SFMTA is available to provide, for example curb painting and parking enforcement. The second set of informational materials should be designed for caregivers and should communicate expected behaviors and norms at school pickup and drop-off. These communication materials should be made available to school sites who can then distribute them to caregivers as needed. Materials development is estimated to cost less than \$100,000 and should be included in the existing Schools Engineering Program. Site-specific loading zone management policies should be developed through the walk-audit program and should include a caregiver communications strategy. The implementation of effective and safe loading zones will require ongoing commitment from school sites who manage loading zones on a day-to-day basis.

### **SHUTTLES – YELLOW SCHOOL BUSES AND NON-PROFIT SOLUTIONS**

Shuttle based strategies are very popular with community members across income levels, home locations, and racial groups. Many caregivers shared that shuttles could be a transformative transportation option and would work best with a variety of supplemental features including consistent routes and consistent drivers, real-time tracking, an extra adult assistant, and on-board cameras. Unfortunately, opportunities

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<sup>1</sup> [https://sfplanning.org/sites/default/files/forms/SchoolChildcareManagementPlan\\_SupplementalApplication.pdf](https://sfplanning.org/sites/default/files/forms/SchoolChildcareManagementPlan_SupplementalApplication.pdf)



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to develop new community shuttles are limited. Shuttle programs are expensive to implement, and few sources of ongoing operational funding exist. Though caregivers did express a willingness to pay for a shuttle, the cost of such programs far exceeds the revenues that could be generated from fare collection.

Because of significant constraints to implementation, the School Access Plan does not recommend City agencies develop new youth-serving shuttle systems at this time. Instead, the plan recommends three ways the City can respond to the strong community interest in shuttle strategies:

1. San Francisco should consider ways to fund an expansion of SFUSD's existing yellow school bus operations. SFUSD's bus service includes many of the features caregivers want in a shuttle service including consistent routes and drivers and real time tracking. The coming years will be an especially appropriate time to consider yellow school bus service expansion because SFUSD will be transitioning from the current citywide choice policy to a zone-based choice policy for students entering elementary school in the 2026-27 school year.<sup>1</sup> As the zone-based policy is implemented, SFUSD will be faced with the difficult challenge of reconfiguring bus routes to serve altered transportation patterns while maintaining services for students who enrolled under the legacy citywide choice policy and depend on current routes. Service expansion will help SFUSD serve both new trips and matriculating students during the years following the policy update.

**Next Steps:** SFUSD should coordinate with city transportation agencies to study and quantify the need for yellow school buses among priority populations in San Francisco, then define incremental service expansion opportunities. The California State Legislature has shown interest in recent years in expanding funding for school transportation. For example, State Assembly Bill 181 (AB181)<sup>2</sup> – the Home to School Transportation Reimbursement Program passed in 2022 – reimburses school districts with qualifying transportation plans a portion of their transportation expenses. SFUSD should pursue AB181 funding and the SFCTA should consider positions on school transportation related bills during upcoming legislative sessions. City agencies should collaborate with SFUSD to pursue funding opportunities as they arise.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.sfusd.edu/schools/enroll/student-assignment-policy/student-assignment-changes/march-2023-update>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/tn/tr/>

### ONE YELLOW SCHOOL BUS EXPANSION SCENARIO

**Context:** During the school year 2010 - 2011 SFUSD reduced the transportation budget by 44%, reducing the General Education bus fleet from 44 to 25 buses. In 2022, those 25 buses served 46 schools and approximately 2,000 students daily with a budget of \$4.1M. In 2022, more than 6,500 SFUSD students had school commutes longer than two miles, meaning that existing yellow school bus service was able to serve fewer than one third of students with long commutes.

**Expansion:** For an annual budget of approximately \$8.6M (\$4.5M increase<sup>1</sup>), SFUSD estimates they could operate 19 additional school buses, returning the fleet to the same size as 2010. The expanded fleet could serve 1520 new students, a 76% increase. The expanded budget would also fund two full-time positions within the SFUSD's transportation department to manage the expanded fleet. Expanded services would need to align to SFUSD's board adopted General Education Transportation Policy,<sup>2</sup> and would take approximately two years to implement. There currently no identified source of funding for such a service expansion, nor is this scenario recommended in any adopted plans. It is meant to be illustrative and describe one possible service expansion.

2. The Department of Children, Youth, and their Families (DCYF) should consider funding nonprofits to provide transportation for students to aftercare activities. DCYF has funded shuttle programs in the past, including the former Mission Van Collaborative (See Chapter 2). DCYF is currently updating their agency Services Allocation Plan which will describe goals, priorities, and approaches for the agency's upcoming 5-year funding cycle. Following the Services Allocation Plan, DCYF will release a Request for Proposals (RFP) inviting non-profit organizations to apply for funds and provide the services described.

**Next Steps:** DCYF should recognize the need for safe and sustainable youth-focused transportation in their Services Allocation Plan and reserve funds for transportation programs. Following RFP awards, DCYF should issue a Notice of Funding Availability to solicit proposals from non-profits interested in providing transportation which supports aftercare programs.

<sup>1</sup> Includes expected and contractual year-over-year cost increases

<sup>2</sup> <https://go.boarddocs.com/ca/sfusd/Board.nsf/goto?open&id=ALRLHC569513>

3. Where community shuttles are being developed or piloted, operators should consider including trips to school or aftercare activities for K-5 youth in service plans.

**Next steps:** The demand responsive shuttle currently being piloted in District 10<sup>1</sup> and ongoing planning for an on-demand microtransit shuttle in District 4<sup>2</sup> should consider including youth-focused trips to their service plans.

## TRANSPORTATION COORDINATORS

A Transportation Coordinator is an individual or individuals who could help to facilitate school and aftercare transportation, ideally in-language. The Transportation Coordinator role could exist at either the school district level or at school-specific sites and could be responsible for a variety of activities such as:

- Developing informational materials that describe school transportation options and resources
- Consulting with caregivers about school transportation through one-on-one calls or in-person meetings
- Helping students and caregivers plan school trips
- Coordinating carpools
- Coordinating bus pools by pairing/grouping students to ride transit together
- Distributing pickup and drop-off guidance
- Helping caregivers enroll in Muni Lifeline and other discount fare programs
- Helping organize community engagement for SFMTA walk audits
- Monitoring caregiver travel choices and assisting with research into the effectiveness of existing transportation programs

**Next steps:** The school Access Plan identified two pathways for implementing transportation coordinators:

1. Enrollment counselors in SFUSD's Educational Placement Center are often the key point-of-contact for families enrolling in a new school, especially newcomer families. Enrollment counselors do not have the capacity to take on significant new transportation coordination responsibilities, but counselors do currently consult with

1 [https://www.sfmta.com/sites/default/files/reports-and-documents/2022/04/5-5-22\\_cac\\_item\\_9\\_our\\_community\\_our\\_shuttle\\_program\\_slide\\_presentation.pdf](https://www.sfmta.com/sites/default/files/reports-and-documents/2022/04/5-5-22_cac_item_9_our_community_our_shuttle_program_slide_presentation.pdf)

2 <https://www.sfcta.org/projects/district-4-microtransit-business-plan>

enrolling families on an ad-hoc basis about transportation issues. SFMTA should develop an annual training for enrollment counselors to ensure they are aware of all available transportation resources and information. SFMTA should ensure simple resources are available for counselors to distribute and should designate a clear point-of-contact at SFMTA for counselors with inquiries. Improving district-level transportation coordination in this manner is estimated to cost less than \$100,000. Costs should be absorbed into existing operating budgets or piloted with funds from a multi-pronged grant proposal as described below.

2. Beacon Centers<sup>1</sup> are schools in San Francisco which have integrated non-profit services and other community resources at the school site. Today, 27 San Francisco schools are designated Beacon Centers, and each has a dedicated Beacon Coordinator. The Beacon Coordinator's role is to strengthen the linkage between the school and other community resources. The transportation coordinator role should be piloted with a Beacon Coordinator (or other Beacon staff) at the school site. The pilot should help define key roles and responsibilities for the coordinator and develop a model that could be implemented at other school sites. The cost of this strategy is variable but could be piloted for less than \$100,000 for a single school site with funds from DCYF's standard grantmaking process, or through a coordinated grant proposal as outlined below.

### **IMPLEMENTING COMPLEMENTARY STRATEGIES**

The most effective implementation of School Access Plan strategies will likely involve implementing multiple complementary strategies simultaneously. In addition to advancing individual strategies as described in "next-steps" sections, the City of San Francisco (via SFMTA, SFUSD, DCYF, and SFCTA) should pursue a coordinated approach to implement transit trainings, discounted fare awareness, and transportation coordinators. Implementing these three strategies in a coordinated fashion will help address the needs of caregivers who don't take transit because cost is a barrier, the needs of caregivers and students who avoid transit because they concerned about personal safety, and the needs of caregivers who require more hands-on guidance from trained transportation coordinators. This coordinated implementation approach can improve transit usage by students and caregivers, reducing single occupancy vehicle usage, and supporting San Francisco's mode shift goals. The Bay Area Air Quality Management District and California Air Resources Board operate several grant programs which could fund a proposal that packages together such a multi-pronged approach in a single funding request.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.sfbeacon.org/aboutbeaconcenters>

**FARE PROGRAM AWARENESS**

Several existing discount fare programs exist for vulnerable caregivers and students, however, not all caregivers and students are aware of these programs. SFUSD and SFMTA should coordinate to increase awareness of existing discounted programs amongst caregivers and students.

**Next Steps:** SFMTA should develop informational materials about existing fare programs and coordinate with SFUSD to distribute those materials during the annual school enrollment process. SFUSD and SFMTA should also explore whether the Lifeline program application process could better integrated with SFUSD's Multipurpose Family Income Form. Materials development and coordination with SFUSD is estimated to cost less than \$100,000 and should be funded within the existing discount fare program budgets or through a coordinated grant proposal as outlined below.

## SUMMARY

**Table 4. Top Scoring Transportation Strategies with Cost, Funding Strategy, and Implementing Agency**

	<b>COST</b>	<b>FUNDING STRATEGY</b>	<b>IMPLEMENTING AGENCY</b>
<b>Shuttles</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Variable depending on service design.</li> <li>• ~\$160,000 per year per SFUSD yellow school bus</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assembly Bill 181 (2022) – operating funds</li> <li>• Various air quality grants exist that can subsidize vehicle purchase costs.</li> <li>• DCYF NOFA (following DCYF Services Allocation Plan – operating funds)</li> </ul>	<p>SFUSD – Yellow Bus Services</p> <p>DCYF – Aftercare Transportation</p> <p>SFCTA + SFUSD – Continue to monitor state and federal legislatures for new funding opportunities</p>
<b>Infrastructure Safety Improvements</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ~\$60,000 per walk-audit, including implementation of approximately six low-cost improvements</li> <li>• An expansion of the walk-audit program beyond 10 audits per year would require expanding staff capacity within SFMTA's Schools Engineering Group</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Safe Routes to BART for schools near BART.</li> <li>• State Active Transportation Program</li> <li>• Local funds such as Proposition L, Proposition AA, General Obligation Bonds, and local TNC Tax.</li> <li>• Longer-term, higher-cost engineering treatments recommended as part of the walk audit program may be installed as part of larger capital projects or separate programmatic improvement initiatives</li> </ul>	<p>SFMTA</p>
<b>Pickup/ Drop-off Zone Guidance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• &lt; \$100,000 for Citywide guidance about school loading zone best practices</li> <li>• Site specific loading management policies should be built into the SFMTA's existing walk audit program.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• California Office of Traffic Safety Grants</li> <li>• Incorporate site-specific loading zone management policies and communication materials into existing SFMTA walk audits</li> </ul>	<p>SFMTA</p>
<b>Transit Trainings</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• &lt; \$100,000 for curriculum development.</li> <li>• Variable costs for implementation. Curriculum could be incorporated into existing field trips with little resource investment or through expanded SRTS programming.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Include in future SRTS grant applications</li> <li>• Local or regional air quality funds such as the Transportation Fund for Clean Air (TFCA)</li> <li>• Packaged into CARB STEP grant.</li> <li>• CARB Community Air Protection Program (Bayview/Hunters Point specific)</li> </ul>	<p>SFMTA + SFUSD</p>
<b>Fare Program Awareness</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• &lt;\$100,000</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Existing discount fare program funding envelope</li> <li>• Packaged into CARB STEP grant.</li> <li>• Local or regional air quality funds such as TFCA</li> <li>• CARB Community Air Protection Program (Bayview/Hunters Point specific)</li> </ul>	<p>SFMTA + SFUSD</p>
<b>Transportation Coordinators</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• &lt; \$100,000 for district-level training and coordination</li> <li>• \$100,000 – \$250,000 for pilot of site-level transportation coordinator. Variable depending on number of sites and role responsibilities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• California Community Schools Partnership Program Extension Grant</li> <li>• DCYF annual funding – Beacon Community School Grants</li> <li>• Local or regional air quality funds such as TFCA (for transit or carpool encouragement activities)</li> <li>• Packed into CARB STEP grant.</li> <li>• CARB Community Air Protection Program (Bayview/Hunters Point specific)</li> </ul>	<p>SFUSD + SFMTA – District-level coordinators</p> <p>DCYF – School site level coordinators</p>

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## Tier 2 Strategies

In addition to the Tier 1 strategies described above, the School Access Plan identified a set of strategies which have potential to improve sustainable school transportation but require additional project development, including an expansion of SFMTA's MTAP program, the establishment of an electric bike lending library, and a carpool coordination program.

### **MUNI TRANSIT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM EXPANSION**

Expansion of the Muni Transit Assistance Program (MTAP) scored well in community support evaluation metrics. The perception of safety on Muni is a clear barrier for some caregivers who might otherwise take their students on Muni and an expansion of the MTAP program could alleviate some of those concerns. MTAP expansion to all school-serving Muni routes, however, would be challenging to implement, as staffing the existing program has been difficult. The SFMTA should pursue a data collection effort which identifies priority areas for targeted MTAP expansion. An MTAP expansion could be pursued after the data collection identifies expansion scenarios which maximize the number of beneficiaries to program expansion cost.

### **ELECTRIC BIKE LENDING LIBRARY**

E-bike lending libraries scored well in the transportation benefits metrics and climate metrics, but did not score well in the safety and community support criteria. There was some community interest in e-bike programs, however many caregivers shared that there is not enough safe and protected bicycle infrastructure to make e-bike options a safe and reliable transportation option. This strategy should be pursued in the future in tandem with city efforts to expand the low-stress bicycle network such as the Active Communities Plan<sup>1</sup> or Mission Bay School Access Study.<sup>2</sup>

### **CARPOOL COORDINATION**

The Plan evaluated three different versions of the carpool strategy: carpool coordination by SFUSD and/or schools; coordination by third-party matching services; and coordination by caregivers. Carpool coordination by caregivers scored the highest of the three options. Agency experience with carpool coordination has seen limited benefits – it requires significant effort and consistent support at program startup. Once carpools form, it can be difficult to maintain a continuous pool of interested families. Third party carpool matching services may suffer from a lack of caregiver trust and are not guaranteed to persist from year-to-year. The carpool coordination strategy should be considered when the transportation coordinator role is established at a school site. This person can work with caregivers to share information about carpool

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.sfcta.com/projects/active-communities-plan>

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.sfcta.org/sites/default/files/2023-02/SFCTA\\_CAC\\_PropKGroupedAllocationsMEMO\\_2023-02-22.pdf](https://www.sfcta.org/sites/default/files/2023-02/SFCTA_CAC_PropKGroupedAllocationsMEMO_2023-02-22.pdf)

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options and connect caregivers who are interested. Carpooling strategies could also be more effective after SFUSD transitions to a zone-based assignment policy because there will likely be more overlap in caregiver travel patterns. There are also concerns within SFUSD about unclear legal liabilities that could fall on organizers of carpools. These concerns will need to be addressed before the carpool coordination strategy is implemented, potentially by developing a legal notice for transportation providers absolving the district of liability.

## Strategies for Foster and Homeless Youth

Foster and homeless youth experience some unique transportation challenges. The School Access Plan worked with SFUSD's Foster Youth Services Coordinating Program and program for Students and Families Experiencing Homelessness to develop three strategies which address those unique challenges.

### **DEVELOP A FORUM FOR REGIONAL COORDINATION OF SCHOOL-OF-ORIGIN TRANSPORTATION**

Many foster youth who attend SFUSD schools receive home placements outside of San Francisco. If a foster student wishes to remain at the school they attended prior to the home placement (their "school-of-origin") SFUSD and the San Francisco Human Services Agency (SFHSA) are legally obligated to provide reasonable transportation accommodations. Some long trips overlap geographically with trips made by school districts or child welfare agencies in other counties. For example, other school districts may be providing transportation to a non-public School in San Francisco or driving through San Francisco to provide school-of-origin transportation to Marin.

Currently, school districts and child welfare agencies coordinate on an ad-hoc basis, but coordination relies on individual staff relationships with no forum or framework for collaboration. Establishing such a forum could allow child welfare agencies to define a strategy for transportation when school-of-origin trip needs overlap. As a first step to implement this strategy, SFUSD, should identify which local educational agencies provide transportation to non-public schools in San Francisco or Marin county (with travel through San Francisco). SFUSD should coordinate with those agencies on a forum for regional cooperation.

### **CONSIDER ALLOWING SFUSD EMPLOYEES TO PROVIDE SCHOOL-OF-ORIGIN TRANSPORTATION**

As described above, many foster youth in San Francisco receive placements outside of San Francisco county but wish to remain at an SFUSD school-of-origin. These trips can be very long and difficult, but the SFHSA and SFUSD are legally obligated to provide reasonable transportation accommodations.



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Some long school-of-origin trips overlap geographically with commute patterns of SFUSD and SFHSA employees – especially trips which begin in the East Bay. If SFUSD employees were allowed to drive foster students some school-of-origin transportation could be provided efficiently and effectively, however concerns about SFUSD liability have prevented district employees from providing transportation in personal vehicles. These concerns could be addressed by developing a legal notice for transportation providers absolving the district of liability, or by establishing a sanctioned program to provide job training and compensation to SFUSD employees who are well positioned to provide school-of-origin transportation. Precedent does exist for SFUSD employees providing transportation in personal vehicles for field trips or mentoring. Any program or policy would need to be designed with input from foster students, families, SFUSD's transportation department, the San Francisco Health and Human Services Agency, union representatives, and SFUSD employees interested in providing transportation.

### **TRANSIT FARE PAYMENT REFORM**

The School Access Plan identifies three distinct problems related to transit fare payment for foster and homeless youth:

1. Although SFMTA has Free Muni for All Youth, many foster students commute into San Francisco and must pay transit fares on other operators. SFUSD purchases and distributes loaded Clipper cards to foster and homeless students who must pay transit fares. Some operators offer youth discounts, however Cubic (the company who maintains Clipper) does not allow SFUSD to purchase youth-rate cards, leading SFUSD to pay more for student transportation than they should. SFUSD and the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) should coordinate and request Cubic sell youth-rate cards to local educational agencies.
2. SFUSD does not have a way to load clipper cards which have already been distributed. Youth or caregivers are either given cards with very high balances (subject to theft/loss), or district staff must repeatedly distribute new cards. MTC, Cubic, and local educational agencies should coordinate and investigate whether a process could be implemented which either allows for Clipper invoicing or creates a budgeting system within SFUSD which can be used to proactively refill Clipper cards.

3. Homeless caregivers who accompany their children on Muni are eligible for SFMTA's All-Access-Pass,<sup>1</sup> however SFUSD is unable to distribute these passes. Instead, caregivers who meet the eligibility criteria must apply for a pass with SFMTA, creating an additional bureaucratic hurdle. SFUSD and SFMTA staff should develop a process which allows SFUSD to distribute the All-Access-Pass to eligible caretakers during the school enrollment process.

## Policy Recommendations

### **SFUSD'S ELEMENTARY SCHOOL ASSIGNMENT POLICY UPDATE SHOULD CONTINUE TO CONSIDER TRANSPORTATION OUTCOMES**

"Proximity" between students' home and school locations is one of three core goals of SFUSD's elementary school assignment policy update which posits that increasing proximity will "create strong community connections to local schools and reduce the number of families with elementary students traveling across the city." SFUSD should continue to consider transportation outcomes throughout their policy development process and collaborate with SFMTA and other city agencies on policies or programs which respond to the new policy.

The Elementary School Assignment Policy Update should also consider whether revisions to the district's existing General Education Transportation Policy are necessary for the policy's continued relevance under a zone based assignment system. If the Assignment Policy Update process determines that revisions should be considered to existing policy, the SFUSD transportation department should conduct an analysis of expected student home and school locations, estimate the size of priority student populations, and develop metrics to measure how different levels of service and service configuration scenarios meet any updated policy goals. Completing such an analysis could require building transportation planning capacity at SFUSD (see below) or partnerships between SFUSD and other city transportation agencies.

### **BUILD TRANSPORTATION PLANNING CAPACITY AT SFUSD**

The transportation department within SFUSD has a significant number of day-to-day operational responsibilities including transportation support for caregivers with questions about yellow bus service, managing the Zūm contract, and solving a wide variety of transportation issues as they arise. These daily responsibilities leave the department with little capacity for proactive long-term transportation planning, however such planning will be increasingly important in coming years.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.sfmta.com/fares/access-pass>

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State interest in school transportation is clear. For example, the state’s 2023 active transportation discretionary grant program<sup>1</sup> prioritized projects which explicitly met the needs of students. AB181 (2022) requires that districts adopt a Transportation Services Plan in order to receive reimbursement for transportation expenses. To ensure San Francisco caregivers benefit from state programs and the most efficient use of existing resources, SFUSD should invest in the capacity of their transportation department. This investment will be especially important as the transition from a citywide elementary school choice policy to a zone-based choice policy in the coming years requires re-thinking current yellow bus service patterns.

### **CONTINUE TO SUPPORT SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOLS PROGRAMMING**

Although the School Access Plan focuses on long distance trips caregivers consistently articulated needs which align with SRTS Program goals. The SFCTA, SFMTA, and SFUSD should continue to pursue competitive grants for SRTS programming. SFMTA should also continue with recent efforts to expand programming to include public transit, as transit has the potential to serve longer school trips which are especially difficult for caregivers.

### **CONSIDER UPDATING SAN FRANCISCO’S TRANSPORTATION DEMAND MANAGEMENT (TDM) MENU OF OPTIONS**

One challenge to implementing the e-bike lending library strategy is a lack of secure bicycle storage as many caregivers, especially low-income caregivers may not be able to store bicycles inside their homes. San Francisco’s TDM policy incentivizes developers to provide on-site secure storage for bicycles,<sup>2</sup> including cargo bicycles, however the policy predates the widespread adoption of *electric* bicycles. The next TDM policy update should consider charging facilities for electric bikes, especially in affordable housing developments, as affordable housing is more likely to house SFUSD students than market rate developments.<sup>3</sup>

### **THE METROPOLITAN TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION’S COORDINATED HUMAN SERVICES AND PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION PLAN SHOULD CONSIDER THE NEEDS OF YOUTH**

The Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) is the regional transportation coordinating agency for the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area. In accordance with federal law, MTC authors and regularly updates the region’s Coordinated Public Transit and Human Services Transportation Plan (Coordinated Plan),<sup>4</sup> which identifies strategies to meet the mobility needs of seniors, people with disabilities, and people

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1 [https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill\\_id=201320140SB99](https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=201320140SB99)

2 [https://default.sfplanning.org/transportation/tdm/TDM\\_Measures.pdf](https://default.sfplanning.org/transportation/tdm/TDM_Measures.pdf)





3 <https://sfplanning.org/resource/family-friendly-housing-report>

4 <https://mtc.ca.gov/planning/transportation/access-equity-mobility/coordinated-public-transit-human-services-transportation-plan#:~:text=MTC%20has%20adopted%20a%20plan,place%20to%20live%20and%20work>

with low-incomes. MTC should go beyond federal requirements and include youth as a focus population for the next coordinated plan update. This would ensure that the unique mobility needs of youth are considered at a regional level and that strategies are identified to address those needs.

## Conclusion

The school commute in San Francisco is difficult for students and caregivers, especially for young students and their families. Many students travel long distances to school, and existing city programs do not meet the needs of all such students. San Francisco city agencies and SFUSD can improve the availability, quality, and safety of transportation to school and afterschool activities through coordinated implementation of the strategies and policies outlined in this plan. Successful implementation will require interagency collaboration, dedicated funding, and ongoing engagement with caregivers.

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**San Francisco  
County Transportation  
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APPENDIX

# Cover art by Ms. Arevalo's First Grade Class

Room D202 at Dolores Huerta Elementary

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A School Picnic

2019

# School Access Plan







# School Access Plan



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Plan de acceso al escuela



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# School Access Plan





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