

## **Minneapolis Youth Congress**

Transportation Pilot Project Report

June 2011

### **Background**

In January 2011, the Minneapolis Youth Congress and Metro Transit partnered to create a pilot project of 50 youth riders with "Go To" passes in Minneapolis. The project was designed to give Metro Transit insight into the youth rider experience on Minneapolis Metro Transit buses and trains. Each youth rider completed an initial survey that captured their own experience with riding public transportation and their thoughts about the public transportation system in general.

### **Youth Orientation and Data Tracking**

All youth riders completed the pilot project orientation which included public transportation rules and regulations, signed expectation forms, received maps and schedules for all routes and a tutorial of the tracking form to be completed monthly. The tracking form was completed and returned to each MYC meeting with a focused conversation around the youth rider experience.

Those questions included:

- What stood out to you about your rides in public transportation?
- What are some of the challenges for youth riding public transportation?
- What really worked for youth riders?
- How has this benefited you personally?
- What changes have you seen this month in youth ridership?

### **Data Analysis**

Analyzing the data from each of the youth riders, similar themes emerged. The following are the 5 areas that the Minneapolis Youth Congress members reported monthly.

#### **1. Initial Findings from ridership**

- Some people are rude and disrespectful
- Variety of people of different, ages, gender, culture riding the bus
- Ridership fluctuates with pending weather conditions
- Friendly and courteous people riding the bus/train
- Large number of people, specifically more youth riding bus/train(s)
- Actual physical environment of bus/train and bus/train stop(s)
- Welcoming and friendly bus drivers to most youth audiences
- Inconsistent fares for youth needs
- Bus kept a timely schedule
- New and existing relationships and social connections

#### **2. Challenges experienced by youth**

- Large number of people, specifically more youth riding bus/train(s)
- Perceptions and discrimination of youth by riders and drivers
- Negative bus driver etiquette
- Negative rider etiquette, both youth and adults
- Safety challenges and concerns for youth in evening hours/ after dark
- Lack of route awareness and appropriate stop notification

- Role of Transit Police in public transportation
- Inconsistent and unaffordable fare that leads to citations
- Inconvenient and untimely route schedules for youth (suburban connections, later evening times)
- Unwelcoming noise volume (music, talking, language)

### **3. Effective operations for youth**

- Bus kept a timely schedule and adapted to youth needs (school, handling of fare)
- Welcoming and friendly bus drivers to all youth audiences
- Actual physical environment of bus/train and bus/train stop(s) is clean
- Go To pass was efficient for youth
- Friendly and courteous people/drivers riding the bus/train
- Independence and mobility to freely move around the city
- Convenience and accessibility and ease of a Go To Pass
- Youth receive experiences with public transportation
- Offer different informational learning styles to access public transportation

### **4. Personal benefits to youth**

- Knowledge of how the public transportation system works
- Understand the privilege of having this opportunity
- Saves youth riders and their parents money to pay for other needed expenses
- Expanded access and attendance to school, employment and other opportunities
- Convenient “beep and go” process
- Honest gratitude by youth riders and their commitment to the community
- Reliable and consistent public transportation service
- Youth can offer helping hand to friends

### **5. Monthly changes observed by youth**

- More youth ridership
- Seasonal ridership (summer, school year, twins game)
- Ridership depends on geographical area in town
- Increase in positive behaviors of riders with each other
- Increased number of youth
- Specific route challenges
- Increased sense of ownership and belonging with Go To pass
- Negative rider attitude
- Youth depending on public transportation
- Improved Rider /driver relationships
- Increased rider frequency

## **Conclusions**

1. The experience with the "Go To" passes helped young people to be more familiar and comfortable with public transit. As a result, most indicated that they would not have difficulty getting around using the buses and trains. In fact, they stated that even though their passes have expired, they will still use public transit to get around.
2. Young people stated that they felt a sense of belonging by having a "Go To" pass. With that sense of belonging they felt less likely to break rules and felt more likely to be helpful and to exhibit good etiquette as riders. This prestige and sense of ownership led them to feel responsible to enhance the culture of the bus.
3. The "Go To" passes allowed the young people to go outside of their normal boundaries and to explore the city and surrounding communities. They realized that this is a great city to explore.
4. Because they had cards and could use them to go wherever they liked during the pilot period, Minneapolis Youth Congress members influenced other young people to ride as well when going to school activities, the malls or to work.
5. Minneapolis Youth Congress members liked the convenience of having a "Go To" pass.
6. Young people liked the variety of ways in place in which to learn about the routes – web program, paper schedules, phone assistance, etc. They found that this gave each learning styles a way to learn.
7. Young people felt that drivers and other riders mistrusted them from time to time because they are young. Minneapolis Youth Congress members reported that once a driver got to know them as a regular rider that sense of mistrust disappeared. Further, Somali young people felt discriminated against because they are Somali.
8. Young people reported that buses to and from the suburbs do not run late enough for them to get home from work or activities which run past 9 PM.
9. Young people noticed that bus stops in the inner city seemed to have less upkeep and that request for trash cans is slow.
10. Young people do not understand the role of transit police and would like to know.
11. It is suggested by participants that hand sanitizer be available on buses.

### **Recommendations**

1. A tutorial/orientation for young people about how to use public transportation – reading a schedule, creating a trip plan, bus etiquette, etc. This might be a video produced by young people.
2. Train drivers and the Transit Police about how to interact with and manage young people on the bus.
3. Develop a program about ridership which could be used in the schools. For example - in an early grade (K-6) have a transit ambassador visit each classroom to talk about riding on public transit, then in 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> grade take the class on a tour of the transportation center or to a bus rodeo, and in 8<sup>th</sup> grade take the class on a field trip using public transit. Each of these steps will prepare young people to be lifelong transit riders and will teach them to use public transit as high school students.
4. Create a youth fare – we recommend \$1.00 all the time for those under 18.
5. Develop “Go To” passes which specifically address the needs of youth.

### **Final Comments**

The Minneapolis Youth Congress enjoyed participating in this project and liked working with the staff of Metro Transit. We are committed to continuing the work in this area and offer our support in any way that it might be useful including further development of any of the recommendations and acting in an advisory capacity to the staff of Metro Transit.