

#JustTransitForAll – Youth Leaders Working Towards a Safe and Affordable Transit

The Need: Civic engagement to advocate for the county’s youth transportation needs

Public participation is hard. It can be an especially daunting task for our youth. When you factor in school, work, jobs and home responsibilities, building relationships with local decision makers can be downright impossible. According to a 2017 Youth Leadership Institute (YLI) transit survey, 95% of youth respondents had never been to a SamTrans Board meeting.¹ There is a need for government to work towards reducing barriers to encourage such valuable participation. While school is in session, youth ridership peaks at just under 300,000 a month.² A majority of those trips were to and from school.

“SamTrans is very appreciative of the early involvement and engagement of the Youth Leadership Institute in the development of recommendations that went in to the final Youth Mobility Plan. It was very important to have a key stakeholder be involved in the planning process. And SamTrans is continuing to engage the YLI to assist in the development and in the eventual launch of the Youth Ambassador Program.” –April Chan, SamTrans

The Solution: Youth leadership development in policy advocacy

Setting youth up for success: The focus in 2016 for YLI was to better understand the transportation needs of the most vulnerable populations in Half Moon Bay and South San Francisco. With YLI’s initial San Mateo County transportation advocacy efforts half way through its four-year planning and development strategy, the early work has paid off, and YLI is now leading a countywide coalition to bring together diverse voices to advance community-supported transportation solutions. Transportation Equity Allied Movement Coalition (TEAMC) membership and principles can be found on the YLI San Mateo Chapter website: <http://yli.org/san-mateo/teamc/>

In 2017, TEAMC helped youth leaders develop the skills to work with local government agencies such as the local transit operator, SamTrans. Twenty-five youth participated in the second annual School for Public Transportation, which is a six-part training series that includes peer-led recruitment, public speaking, community-based research, and social media communication strategies.





The School has already started to develop the next generation of civic leaders. Michelle Buzbee, an alumna of the School, was hired as a program coordinator for YLI and was recently appointed to the SamTrans Citizen Advisory Committee.

Leveraging local partners: As it enters its third year, TEAMC membership includes 28 community-based organizations and over 20 youth leaders and continues to build on its early partnerships with organizations such as Urban Habitat, San Mateo County Union Community

Alliance, TransForm, and community foundations in San Francisco and Silicon Valley, as well as local collaboratives such as Get Healthy San Mateo County.

The Essential Ingredient for Success: Understanding the needs and creating compelling narratives for them

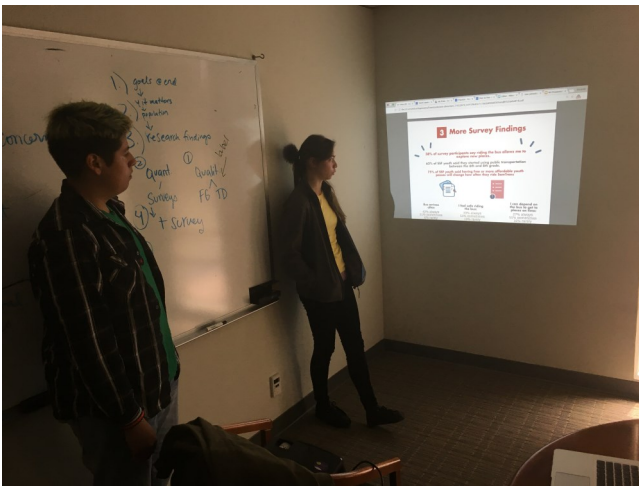
Lead with a needs assessment: By implementing a community-led survey to understand its transportation needs, TEAMC members established a meaningful understanding and connection with the communities of Half Moon Bay and South San Francisco and their needs. By leading from within the community with data, TEAMC is in a unique position to advocate for a public transit system that works for the county's most transit-dependent people.



“The benefits of developing the capacity of the Youth Leadership Institute to engage in transportation planning and policy are clear when we look at current efforts to increase resources and attention to public transportation in San Mateo County. Urban Habitat's experience regionally is that groups on the ground who can identify community needs are in the best position to help shape planning, policy, and investments that are both equitable and achieve the broadest range of co-benefits (public health, the environment, and mobility choices) for all residents.” —Bob Allen, Urban Habitat

Design a compelling narrative: Equally important to collecting good data is presenting data in a way that resonates with the audience. Effective communication is a powerful tool. Storytelling can be a great way to make a lasting impression and effect change. Part of the School training included producing and distributing a video diary series on youth who rely on public transit. Through the leadership series, youth leaders were able to work with SamTrans planners on the development of a Youth Mobility Plan. The plan will guide the agency's planning efforts to ensure youth public transit needs are met.

Challenge: Building a local transportation equity coalition from scratch



In San Mateo County, the average person spends 54% of his/her/their income on housing and transportation expenses.³ Not even accounting for time spent commuting, housing and transportation take up a tremendous amount of social and financial capital. Transportation intersects with where we live, whom we interact with, and how healthy we are. Therefore, it is important to address transportation needs in the broader context. Investing in our youth to carry the message of our most vulnerable communities ensures that

long-term transportation investments are informed by people who can benefit in the near term as well as the long term.

Looking to the Future: Youth providing a roadmap to good transportation policy

Over 70% of San Mateo County residents drive alone, and the average commuter in San Mateo County spends over one hour a day commuting.⁴ That is over 240 hours a year sitting in congestion, not in the classroom, at home, or in the office. There is a need to better understand not only how people move about their lives but also how to provide safe and affordable options to driving. By playing a key role in the development of the County's 2017 Youth Mobility Plan, youth leaders now have an opportunity to continue crafting strategies to ensure that policies are created with their input and needs accounted for. Similar to a "train the trainer" model, one of the strategies that was created in the Plan was the future creation of a Youth Ambassador Program, which provides support from SamTrans to youth leaders interested in being a local champion for their communities' public transit needs.

"Being part of YLI as a youth participant and now staff member motivated me to be the youngest person to apply to the SamTrans Board of Directors. I did not get the position, but this led to my appointment to the SamTrans Citizens Advisory Committee, where I now serve as Chair."

—Michelle Buzbee, Youth Program Coordinator at Youth Leadership Institute and SamTrans Citizens Advisory Committee Chair

More recently, a number of TEAMC members have been participating in the County's development of a potential half-cent sales tax ballot measure for November 2018. Their participation ensures that the transportation needs of the County's most vulnerable residents are met and accounted for.

Citations

1. Youth Leadership Institute Final Report (2018).
2. SamTrans Youth Mobility Plan (2017). Page 45. <http://www.samtrans.com/Assets/Youth+Mobility+Plan+2017.pdf>
3. Center for Neighborhood Technology (2018). <https://htaindex.cnt.org/map/index.php?mapR=103,-122.4014192999999,37.4337342,9,county,2877>
4. Metropolitan Transportation Commission Vital Signs (2017). <http://www.vitalsigns.mtc.ca.gov/commute-time>