

What young people think about making public transport free for high school students

Members of the South Australian Student Representative Council (SA SRC) want all South Australian high school students to have free access to public transport.

Affordable, reliable, and safe transport is critical to young people's participation, inclusion, and wellbeing. Young people rely on public transport to connect to school, sport, healthcare, work, volunteering opportunities and social activities. Yet the cost of South Australia's public transport is prohibitive for many students and their families. This places disproportionate pressure on many school students, particularly those from low-income families and more senior school students who are living independently.

While some fare subsidies already exist, they don't go far enough, which is why removing

cost barriers for high school students using public transport will help to reduce inequality. It will also help less financially secure young people reach their full potential by ensuring they have access to education, work, sporting, and social opportunities in the same way their peers do.

In addition, some school students who cannot afford to pay public transport fares may incur a fine for 'fare evasion'. Any unpaid fines can then accumulate late payment fees to create a cycle of increasing debt that places further disproportionate anxiety and financial pressure on the student and their family.

Many young people are also extremely concerned about the climate crisis. They would like to see greater uptake of public transport as one way to reduce the impacts of climate change; helping to reduce air pollution and traffic congestion, while improving the overall wellbeing and safety of school students.

About the SA SRC

The SA SRC is an initiative of the Commissioner for Children and Young People, supported by the Foundation for Young Australians. The 2024 SA SRC cohort comprises 150 students from 80 schools representing 44 South Australian electorates.

The Year 10, 11, and 12 students, drawn from across the state, work together to create genuine, student-led change within their communities. The SA SRC brings together passionate young people who want to create a better future for themselves and for future generations of South Australians.

About the Commissioner for Children and Young People

Established under the *Children and Young People (Oversight and Advocacy Bodies) Act 2016*, the Commissioner for Children and Young People promotes and advocates at a systemic level for the rights, interests, and wellbeing of all children and young people in South Australia. The work of the Commissioner is guided by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and informed by the experiences and issues of South Australian children and young people.

What we did

To ensure the Free Fares for Our Future campaign is representative of young people across the state, SA SRC members undertook a poll at schools throughout South Australia between March and May 2024.

Students in Years 7-12 were asked how often they use public transport, whether making public transport free would change the way they use it, and how free public transport would benefit them.

Who responded?

A total of 912 students from 24 secondary schools across South Australia responded to the poll, representing all three school sectors (Government, Catholic and Independent). Schools were located in 16 local government areas, and responses came from students in various year levels and with different genders.

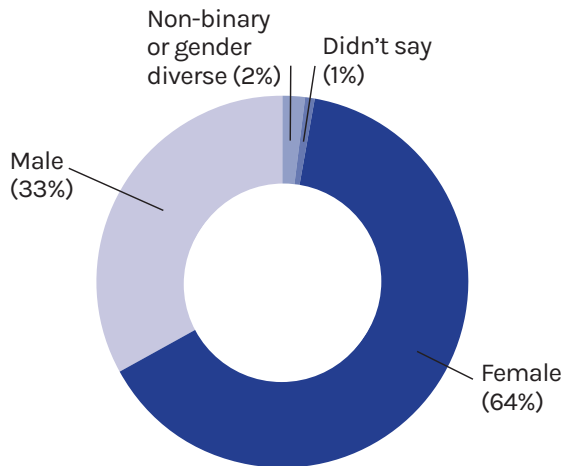


912
students

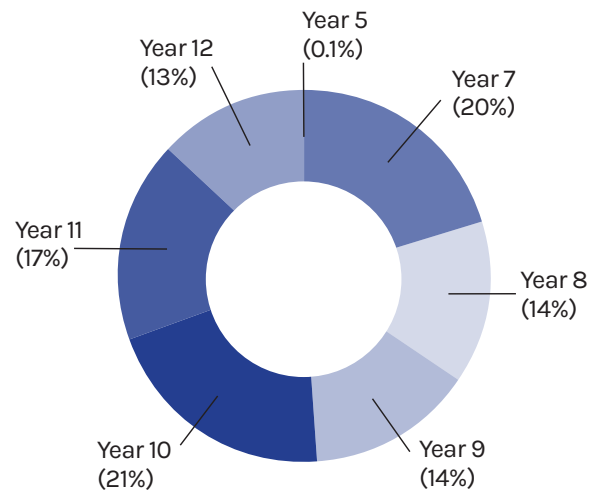


24
schools

Gender



Year level



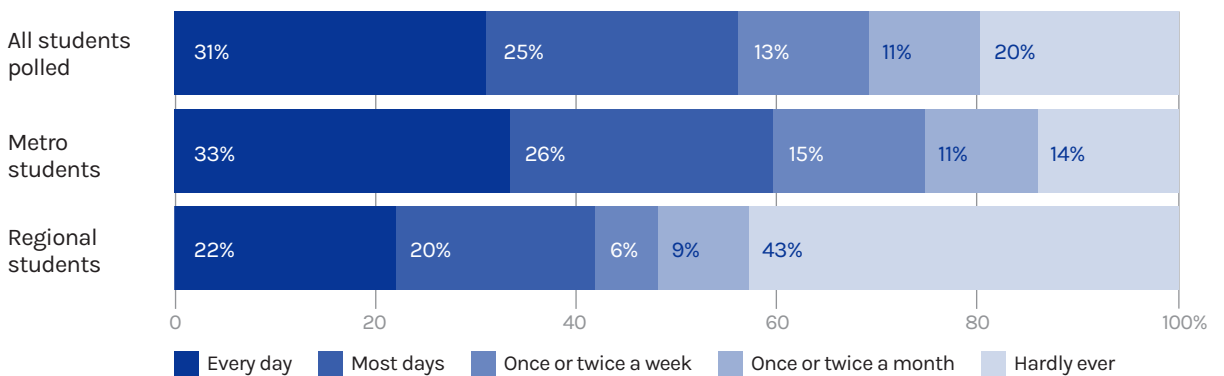
How often do students use public transport?

More than half (56%) of all students who participated in the poll use public transport 'every day' or 'most days'. Another 13% reported using public transport 'once or twice a week' and 11% of respondents said they use public transport 'once or twice a month'.

Students in metropolitan areas reported using public transport more often than students in regional areas, with only 14% of metropolitan

students reporting that they 'hardly ever' use public transport compared to 43% of regional students. This reflects the limited availability or lack of transport options in regional communities, which disproportionately impacts regional students. While it is important that more action is taken to address this, the focus of the SA SRC Free Fares for Our Future campaign is to remove public transport fares for all high school students.

How often do you use public transport?

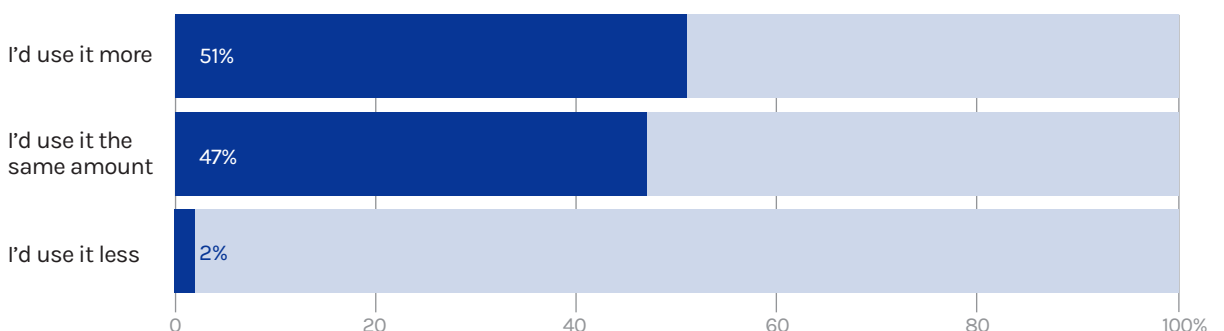


Would free public transport change the way students use it?

Most students (51%) reported that they would use public transport more often if it was free. While just under half (47%) said that their use of public transport would stay the same, only 2% of respondents said they would use it less.

Students in metropolitan areas who currently use public transport less frequently than once a week, were more likely to indicate they would use it more if it was free. By contrast, students in regional areas were more likely to say their use of public transport would remain the same, reflecting the limited availability of public transport where they live.

If public transport was free, would this change the way you use it?



How would free public transport benefit students?

Regardless of where they live or how often they use public transport, students identified a range of ways that having access to free public transport would benefit them.

We would have more money to afford other essentials, like food and the cost of education, and we would be able to save more money for the future.

“ I don't live with parents so I could use that money for things I need for school.” - Year 11

“ It would help me afford meals.” - Year 10

Free public transport would ease cost-of-living pressures for young people, particularly for bigger families and recently arrived refugees and migrants.

“ It will help me with the cost of every day living in this financial crisis specially when you have more than 2 siblings.” - Year 8

“ Public transport is already [a] big part of my life since my parents don't have a car yet. (They're recent immigrants) so I rely on the free city connector to get me to school every day, but other than that, whenever I go to the beach or to a mall or anywhere, I always take a paid bus. Free public transport would save a lot of money and since most highschoolers don't have a steady income, they can't earn to fund their metrocards and public travel as much as adults can.” - Year 8

We could focus more on our education because we would not need to work as much to cover transport costs, or rely on parents or others to get us to school.

“ As a student, I've had to go out and get a job in order to be able to pay for my bus fares without burdening my parents, especially now that my younger siblings have begun to use public transport for high school as well. By getting this job, I've been lacking with my academics, but I can't afford to quit my job either since bus fares are a daily expense. Having free public transport would allow me to quit my job and be able to focus entirely on my studies without the stress of worrying on how to get to school.” - Year 10

“ It would help my Mum to take more shifts because she wouldn't need to drop me off and I would feel happier because it supports my friends as well.” - Year 7

“ I wouldn't have to walk the 40-minute walk to get to school, and it would just be easier.” - Year 7

It would be easier for us to get to important places and activities safely, independently, and quickly. We would be able to spend more time with friends, play sports and participate more fully in other extracurricular activities, school, and work.

“ I could go out with friends more and have a bit more freedom to move (my parents would know obviously).” - Year 8

“ I will be able to go home earlier instead of waiting for the 98C to come at half past 4.” - Year 9

“ Currently public transport is the only way I can get around. Making it free would save [me] about \$60 a week.” - Year 10

We would not be as stressed about recharging or losing our Metrocards. We would not need to worry about missing out on events or opportunities or getting fined or yelled at when our Metrocards run out.

“ I wouldn't have to worry about losing my metro card, accidentally leaving it somewhere, or my card getting declined, causing me to miss an event like school.” - Year 7

“ When my metro card runs out and I don't realise, the bus driver won't get angry at me - as a high school student I would also not be able to afford the fine if I get given one for not validating my card.” - Year 12

We would use public transport more often and it would benefit the environment because there would be fewer cars on the road and less carbon emissions.

“ It would benefit me because I like the environment and public transport is a good way to cut carbon emissions, so I think it would be fair not to pay to save the environment one ride at a time.” - Year 8

For more information

For more information about Free Fares for Our Future and other SA SRC campaigns please contact Niav Andrews, Engagement and Participation Officer, at Niav.Andrews@sa.gov.au