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Free public transport for SA high school students would ease cost of living pressures

A poll of more than 912 South Australian high school students reveals free access to public transport would ease cost of living pressures on many families, while also enabling some students to participate in school, sport and other extra-curricular activities they currently forego.

Students described the stress of finding money to pay for their bus and train fares to get them to and from school, work, sport, and other extra-curricular commitments as being at an all-time high. Other stresses associated with finding fares included managing MetroCard levels so as not to risk incurring fare evasion fines, having an over reliance on parents and carers for transport, and struggling with a general lack of mobility and autonomy as a result.

Members of the SA SRC's Free Fares for our Future campaign are highlighting that current fare subsidies, although in existence, do not go far enough, particularly for less financially secure young people whose families do not have sufficient funds to absorb cost of living pressures. These young people are foregoing involvement in sport, school excursions and other social and recreational opportunities that their peers enjoy because the cost of their transport to and from school must be prioritised over these other expenses.

To ensure their campaign is representative of young people across the state, the poll asked students in Years 7–12 to share their thoughts on whether making public transport free would change the way they use it, and how free public transport would benefit them.

SA SRC Campaign members canvassed their peers' opinions throughout March, April and May at 24 secondary schools across South Australia representing Government, Catholic and Independent sectors. The schools polled were in 16 local government areas, with responses coming from students in various year levels and with different genders.

Students in less well-off families would benefit significantly from free public transport, allowing bus and train fare costs to be allocated to other worthwhile expenses such as school excursions, sports, and extra-curricular activities that will benefit their overall health and wellbeing.

Many young people are also extremely concerned about the climate crisis and would like to see greater uptake of public transport to reduce the impact of climate change by helping to reduce air pollution and traffic congestion, particularly around school drop-off and pick-up zones.

The SA SRC Free Fares for our Future campaign operates on the premise that 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, sport and social opportunities in the same way their peers do.

The SA SRC Free Fares for our Future campaign is one of five key issues identified by SA SRC representatives for student-led action this year with the other four being: Fitness for Free; Seeing Ourselves; Our Future Our Vote; and Greening Our Canteens.

Details of the 2024 SA SRC Campaigns can be found at:
<https://civicsandcitizenshipsa.com.au/young-people/sa-src/>

Quotes attributable to Commissioner for Children and Young People, Helen Connolly: Affordable, reliable and safe transport is critical to young people's capacity to connect to school, sport, healthcare, work, volunteering opportunities and social activities, which we know are crucial to their sense of self and to their overall health and wellbeing. Many families are currently unable to meet cost of living increases. By making access to essential public transport free, these families will be able to allocate limited household incomes to other essentials such as food, sport and extra-curricular activities which enable children to learn skills, connect with their peers and develop their interests and talents.

Quotes attributable to members of the SA SRC Free Fares for our Future Campaign:

Hannah Somerville

Public transport costs can burden students, making education less accessible. We have the opportunity to reduce financial strain and promote equal opportunities for all students to commute effortlessly.

Toby Dimmock

No student should be without access to their schooling. Rising transport fees isolate students from education.

Jessica Ishimwe

Every student has the right to education. Yet for many, financial constraints can make regular attendance challenging. By implementing free public transport, we can ensure no student misses a day of school.

Belinda Wang

When most students in South Australia frequently use public transport, disproportionately affecting them from a financial standpoint, it is imperative that students be provided the ability to commute to and from school with ease.

Download the [SA SRC Free Fares for our Future Campaign Position Brief here](#).

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