

## **For Immediate Release**

Contact:  
Danielle Glagola  
(831) 420-2550  
[dglagola@scmttd.com](mailto:dglagola@scmttd.com)



## **METRO launches countywide Youth Ride Free pilot program**

*Free fares for all youth, in grades K-12, begins March 1, 2023*

JAN. 27, 2023 —SANTA CRUZ, CA— Santa Cruz Metropolitan Transit District (METRO) today announced its Board of Directors has approved METRO’s first-ever Youth Ride Free pilot program, which will launch March 1, 2023, and will be available throughout Santa Cruz County.

The Youth Ride Free pilot program eliminates fares in order to increase access and encourage ridership for youth in grades K-12. The program will enable youth to ride on all METRO routes (excluding Highway 17) anywhere, anytime. According to a survey conducted by METRO in 2019, just 9.7% of METRO riders are under the age of 18, despite making up 19% of the population of Santa Cruz County.

“Our local youth represent the future of transit and they need better access to METRO,” said Santa Cruz METRO Board Chair Larry Pageler. “This pilot program is a big step toward reducing barriers in ridership. A key goal for the Youth Ride Free program is to help develop lifelong transit riders, while meeting METRO’s overall goal of increasing transit ridership.”

How the Youth Ride Free pilot program will work for youth:

- Riders in 8<sup>th</sup> Grade and under may be asked by the driver to identify their grade level or the school they attend. Students may be asked to provide a student ID, if one is available.
- Riders in Grades 9-12 will be asked to show a student ID to the driver. Riders without a student ID get a special pass from their school or at the Pacific Station Customer Service Window in Downtown Santa Cruz.

In the coming weeks, METRO plans to distribute more information on the pilot program to increase awareness and promote the program. Please stay tuned for additional details.

### **About Santa Cruz Metropolitan Transit District (METRO)**

Established in 1968, METRO’S mission is to provide environmentally sustainable transportation to Santa Cruz County. METRO directly operates county-wide, fixed-route and Highway 17 commuter service, with connections to Santa Clara County and Monterey Salinas Transit at our Watsonville Transit Center. The agency also operates ParaCruz paratransit service. Today METRO operates a fleet of 94 buses on at least 24 fixed routes and 32 paratransit vehicles.

Every ride on a METRO bus takes cars off the road, significantly reduces greenhouse gas emissions, and supports economic opportunity and quality of life in our community. Moving into the future, METRO strives to meet the following goals:

- Increase transit ridership to 7 million trips annually within the next five years
- Transition to a zero-emissions fleet with a mix of hydrogen and battery electric buses
- Develop 175 affordable housing units at METRO-owned transit centers over the next decade

For more information, visit [scmtd.com](http://scmtd.com).

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