



# Y-PLAN Transportation Policy Brief

Transportation provides access to all other arenas of life. Y-PLAN scholars suggest improvements to provide greater and more equitable connection, safety, dignity and opportunities.

## Y-PLAN Youth InSight: Transportation

### INTRODUCTION

Transportation is about opportunity. Most people utilize transportation not because travel itself brings them joy, but because they want to access other experiences through transportation. Because transportation affects access, it is deeply enmeshed in debates about equity. The “micro-mobility revolution” - the influx of bike and scooter-share options - has created more choices for how people navigate their lives, and it is crucial to ensure all those choices are available to all people ([Forbes](#)). Transportation access is closely tied to the environmental justice movement. These issues will only become more urgent as the threat of climate change intensifies and poor and non-white communities face the imminent risks.

Transportation is also about independence. Its systems affect our decisions about if, when, and how we visit certain locations. Private automobiles dominate the American transportation landscape. We own more cars than ever before, more of us are driving, and we are taking more trips per day by car ([AAA](#)). According to Evelyn Bloomberg, an Assistant Professor of Urban Planning at the University of California, Los Angeles, families with access to a car are more likely to secure and keep a job, suggesting the importance of car ownership to economic success ([Mineta Transportation Institute](#)). A 2016 Pew Study found that young adults, aged 18-29, are almost twice as likely as any other age group to

utilize public transit. When looking at race, that same study found that in urban areas black and Hispanic people are twice as likely to utilize public transit as white peers - 34% of black people, 27% of Hispanics, and 14% of whites ([Pew Research Center](#)). Crucially, these findings all focus on adults, above the age of 18.

**What do these findings suggest for young people under 18, especially those who are low-income and live in urban areas, who are less likely to have a driver's license and access to a car than adult peers ([Slate](#))?**

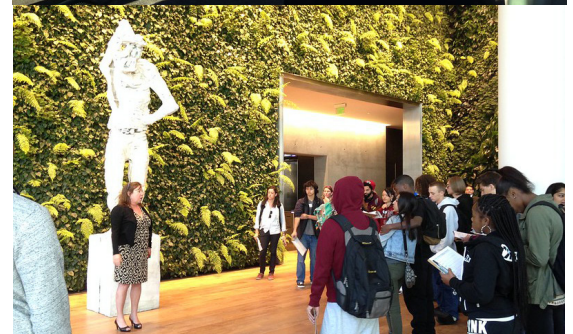
Whether due to necessity or choice, youth are more likely to depend on non-car transportation modes, including transit, walking, and other types of micro-mobility. As such, young people navigate our transportation networks under different constraints and can identify shortcomings that are invisible to more privileged riders. Y-PLAN educator Christina O'Cuddehy at Sacramento's Health Professions High School eloquently stated: **"Who better to ask about public transit than kids who take the bus?"**

The young scholars of the [Y-PLAN](#) (Youth - Plan Learn Act Now) initiative, who are primarily low-income young people of color, are uniquely situated to offer valuable insight regarding the current transportation landscape in urban areas, its failures, and potential solutions. Combining their lived experience within their community with data collected through the Y-PLAN process, the scholars produce policy recommendations in dialogue and collaboration with civic leaders. Some recommendations, such as youth transit discounts and equitable distribution of micro-mobility services, mirror initiatives being supported at the municipal, county, and state levels. Others, like changing the default Clipper Card fund addition down from \$20 increments, are informed by the students' frustrations that might never occur to career planners and policymakers. Y-PLAN's unique process of connecting student scholars with civic leaders (their "clients") has even enabled some student recommendations to be actualized. Assembled from Y-PLAN projects in New York City and the Bay Area focused on transportation, these findings repeatedly emphasized **Community Spaces**, **Safety**, and **Regional and Technological Connectivity** as critical to functional transportation networks.

Looking forward, Y-PLAN's work will be largely focused in California, where 95.5% of young people live in urban areas, but continues to include participants across the globe (U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, Sept. 2018).

## A METHODOLOGY FOR ENGAGING YOUNG PEOPLE IN TRANSPORTATION

Today, children and youth often comprise more than 30% of a city's population. Demographers predict that number will rise to 60% by 2030 ([ARUP](#)). Still, they are rarely incorporated into meaningful planning and policymaking conversations and processes. Projections hold that three quarters of the entire population is expected to live in cities by 2050, so the exclusion of young people will only grow more apparent as our world continues to urbanize. While planners may consider how to plan FOR young people, rarely do they plan WITH young people at the table. Y-PLAN, housed within the UC Berkeley Center for Cities + Schools, uses a five-step participatory action research methodology to prepare entire classes of students to address authentic civic problems posed to them by city leaders, flipping the script of project- and work-based learning. These questions are posed to students with the belief that these city challenges can only be solved in conjunction with young people. Committed to shifting existing power dynamics and bridging divisions between young people and adults, Y-PLAN prioritizes the voices of low-income young people of color in planning for cities now and in the future.



## Transportation Networks are Community Space

Y-PLAN students understand that transportation networks are community space and need to provide:

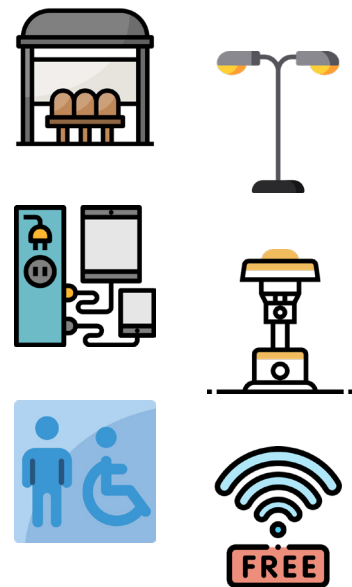
- **Seating**
- **Bathrooms**
- **Wifi & Charging Stations**
- **Public Art**
- **Heat Lamps**
- **Good Lighting**

Public transit in the United States has long been underfunded when compared with the infrastructure systems that support private car ownership and operation. As such, many transit systems collect fare revenue to cover portions of their operating budgets. While fares are inherently exclusionary, Y-PLAN students consistently advocate for **Seating and Accommodations** at transit stations to make the literal spaces more welcoming, if not the system.

High school students at Oakland High and Skyline High in Oakland, CA see opportunities for their client, Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART), to make stations more comfortable, **by providing public art, benches, better lighting, device charging stations, heat lamps, bathrooms and free Wifi service.**

These improvements will suggest to riders that they are welcome at BART.

Looking forward, students advocated for BART to plan affordable housing and recreational spaces into their future developments, making their projects inclusive from the start. A particularly visionary set of students proposed using BART stations as “21st Century Libraries” where students would be able to do their schoolwork in comfort and safety. High school scholars at Oakland High and Skyline High in Oakland, CA heard from surveyed residents that they would like to see more public art at transit stations as a means to create a sense of community ownership in those spaces. Students then interned for BART, designing a mural for the Coliseum station, which is being installed this spring.



Roads shape our urban spaces, even for nondrivers. As an integral part of the urban fabric, Y-PLAN scholars know that it is critical to create roads and streetscapes that are pleasing places to be, not just to pass through. Guided by their mission statement that “**We as students assert that Bushwick is a community worthy of beautiful things!**” students from Brooklyn’s EBC High School for Public Service proposed a massive public art installation along a stretch of Broadway that would resonate with community members. The public art pieces were installed by the community in 2018 and spoke to their resilience and strength, as gentrification and displacement creep closer.

Students at MetWest High School in Oakland worked with AC Transit, a bus transit service providing local and TransBay connections to and from the East Bay, to improve transit riders’ experience of the streetscape that forms the transit network. Students found that riders want their needs to be acknowledged by the system. What does this mean? According to the over 200 respondents surveyed while riding the bus routes, riders want **Benches and Shelters** at their bus stops. Also working on behalf of AC Transit, Berkeley High students proposed a bus stop parklet system, identifying key stops to include in a pilot program, and provided models to the agency of what those spaces might look like. The findings of the student scholars informed AC Transit’s ongoing work and resulted in the first parklet bus stop in the nation located in Albany, CA ([East Bay Times](#)).

Y-PLAN students recommend safety improvements that benefit all community members, such as:

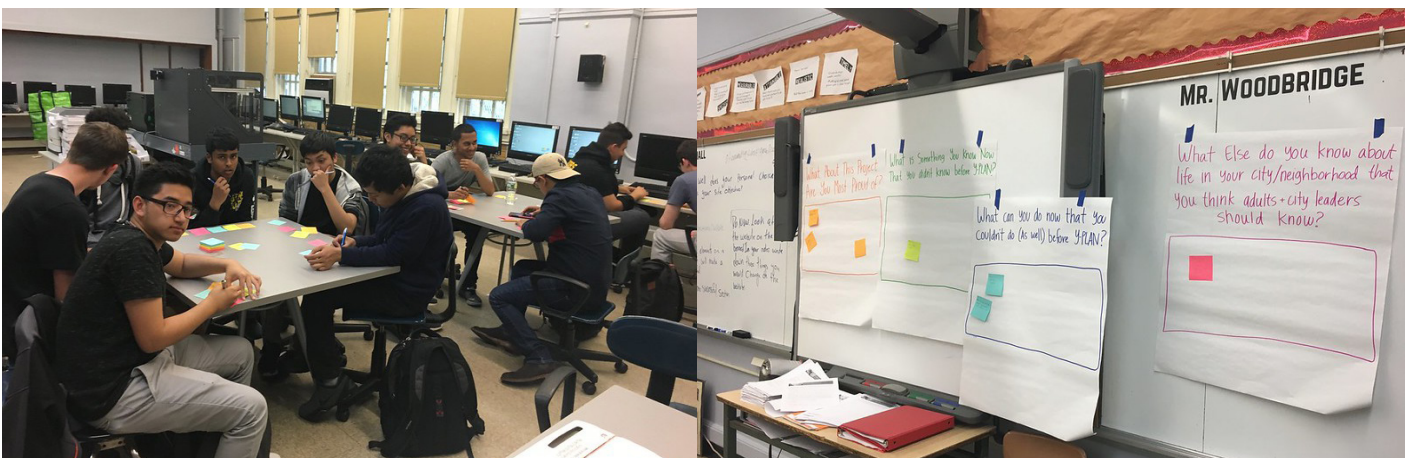
- **Traffic Calming Measures**
- **Community Protectors/Civilian Safety Officers**
- **Public Art**
- **Good Lighting**

Safety in transportation is a complicated concept and can refer to a sense of safety while crossing a busy street, walking a long stretch of road alone as a pedestrian, or having a sense of safety from theft or violence while utilizing a transit system. Often, some segments of the public (and transit agencies) think the panacea for safety concerns is increased police presence - both in person and via technology - but this has disproportionate impacts on the real safety of black and brown people ([The Appeal](#)). Y-PLAN student scholars **see opportunities to increase safety without putting members of our community at risk.**

As conversations about the implications of [policing transit](#) are occurring globally, Y-PLAN student scholars from the African American Male Achievement Initiative (AAMA) in Oakland, CA proposed the introduction of **Community Protectors** to BART stations - unarmed community members, trained in de-escalation, to increase perceptions of safety for all visitors. These individuals would be the “eyes and ears of the street,” leveraging their knowledge as members of the community to anticipate and dissipate conflict.

Students often agreed with the mission statement of the Vision Zero initiative that “**all of us - whether driving, walking, bicycling, using a wheelchair, or riding transit - have a right to safe mobility,**” ([Vision Zero](#)). Many student recommendations revolve around reclaiming the streets that dominate as much as 80% of public space in cities for pedestrians ([NACTO](#)). Y-PLAN student scholars in New York worked with the NYC Department of Transportation’s Vision Zero efforts over several years, offering their insight on a number of technological questions. Students from City Polytechnic High School of Engineering, Architecture + Technology were challenged to make their streets safer for pedestrians, focusing on local intersections with high rates of traffic fatalities, including one across the street from their school that claimed the life of a classmate. After surveying pedestrians and mapping travel patterns, the scholars proposed a number of traffic calming measures to calm traffic and empower pedestrians to navigate the space with confidence. These measures include **safety improvements**, like traffic calming measures and better lighting, as well as aspects to **beautify the spaces**, like parklets and public art.

Students from Grover Cleveland High School approached the same issue through digital space, creating apps that would raise awareness around the Vision Zero initiative and crowdsource community input for recommendations to improve transportation safety.



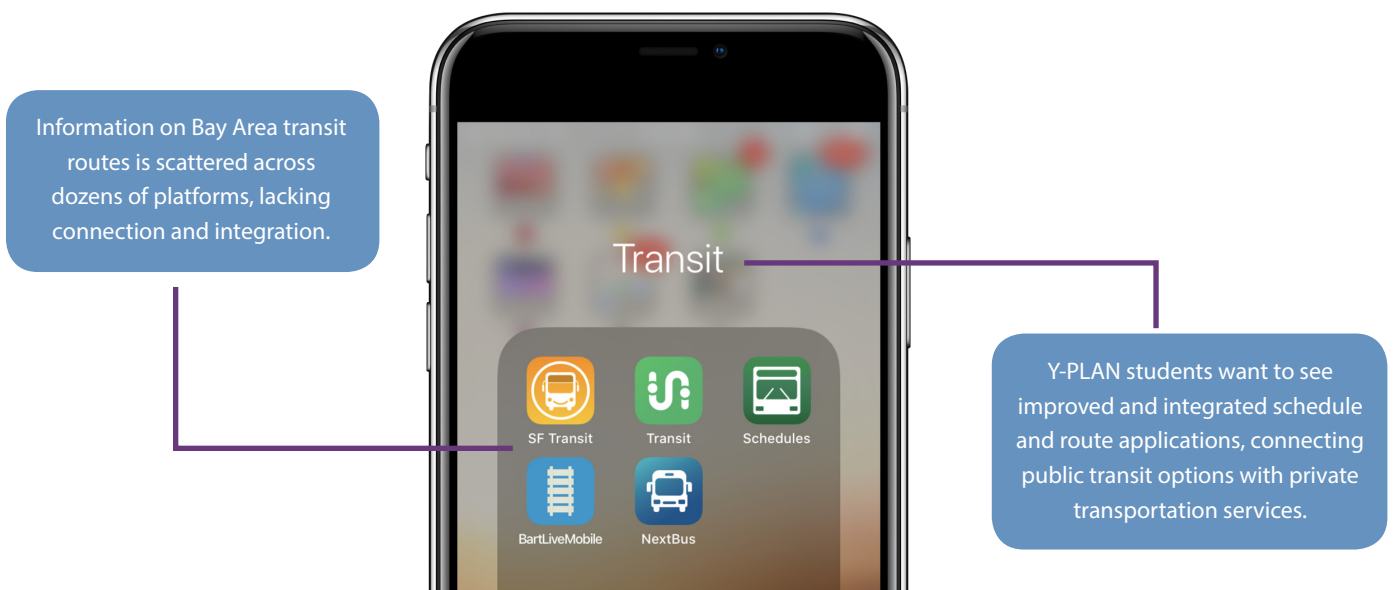
## Regional and Technological Connectivity

Frustrated by the lack of coordination in regional transportation planning, Y-PLAN scholars suggest:

- **Improved Transit Mobile Applications**
  - **To track reliability**
  - **To integrate with other services**
- **Interagency Timetable Coordination**
- **Private/Public Partnerships to solve first/last mile gaps**

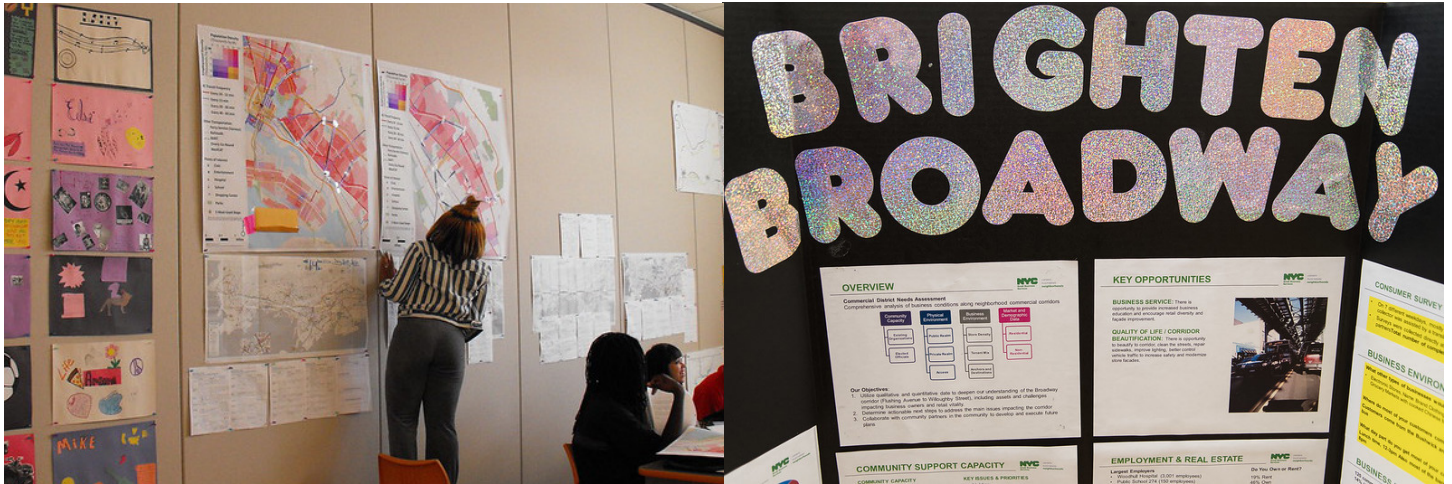
Student scholars, more restricted in their transportation choices due to age and income, acutely feel the pains caused by gaps in regional transportation connectivity and the lack of regional planning in related sectors, like housing. Scholars from East Palo Alto Phoenix Academy (EPAPA) in the Peninsula were asked by their client, the Metropolitan Transportation Commission and the Association of Bay Area Governments (MTC/ABAG) - a regional governance agency - to consider how to improve their commute to school in 2050. Students surveyed their classmates and received over 100 responses. Respondents touched on issues like transportation costs, mode choices (i.e. whether or not scooters, bikeshare, or carshare were available in their neighborhoods), and lack of transit system coordination to enable timely travel. Students feel the changes in their communities - because of rising housing costs, for example, some peers are moving further away from school. **Students see an opportunity to leverage transportation to keep those students connected to their communities** through coordinated interagency planning.

Students also noted that a lack of technological connection limited their ability to use public transit as much as they would like. They see the dominance of private transportation companies in the digital space; if transit wants to compete, they need to produce apps that are attractive, informative and easy to use. To that end, students proposed, supported by data gathered by a survey they administered to their classmates, that a public alternative to ride-share be created, to encourage transit use that students could rely on to be timely, as they do with current rideshare options. Scholars from Richmond and Kennedy High Schools in Richmond, CA grappled with the question of how to best connect their shoreline to the rest of the city. Students reported back that an accurate mobile app for the bus schedules would give riders a sense of the reliability of the bus service, which heretofore had been spotty at best. Students in Oakland suggested a similar concept, a BART mobile app that would integrate real-time information on BART and enable users to order a rideshare to meet them at their destination station to close the gap between transit and where they want to go. The AAMA students declared **“Our generation is a Tech Generation - connection is about safety and access.”**



## CONCLUSION

The findings from these Y-PLAN case studies reveal that students are able to understand the issues and the tools being used in the transportation planning field today. Further, when students are armed with planning expertise through Y-PLAN, they are able to reflect on their lived experience as young people and community members and identify challenges and opportunities that might be invisible to others. Y-PLAN connects students with industry & civic leaders as well as elected officials. In the transportation sector, they see an urgent need to consider Community Spaces, Safety, and Regional and Technological Connectivity not only between transportation networks, but also in the provision of other public needs, like housing and education. Y-PLAN teaches students the professional expertise they need to undertake planning work while valuing the knowledge inherent in their lived experience.



***Transportation provides opportunity, and Y-PLAN students are calling for improvements that provide greater and more equitable connection, safety, comfort, dignity and opportunities for all on roads and on transit. We should keep listening.***

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