

To: Advisory Committee

Date: 08/29/2025

From: Ryan Jones, Manager of Marketing;
Pranjal Dixit, Manager of Planning

Reviewed by: *Ref*

SUBJECT: Youth Ride Free Update

Background:

The Youth Ride Free (YRF) pilot program, administered by County Connection, was a self-funded two-month pilot with the goal of getting area youth to ride public transportation. Prior to the summer launch, the program grew countywide to include Tri Delta Transit and WestCAT, both of which built their marketing materials using County Connection's design language to ensure a unified brand image. WestCAT required youth to show an ID to board, but otherwise, the pilot was the same across the three agency service areas.

The YRF pilot came into effect following a reallocation of funding by the Contra Costa Transportation Authority (CCTA) that resulted in the discontinuance of the Summer Youth Pass (SYP) program. With the YRF pilot now complete, County Connection staff have reviewed the extensive data that was collected to determine the program's efficacy.

Data Tracking:

County Connection's bus operators used their Mobile Data Terminals (MDTs) to track youth boardings for the YRF pilot, consistent with past student pass programs. Additional systems, including Automatic Passenger Counters (APCs) and Automatic Vehicle Location (AVL), provided detailed ridership and trip data such as Passenger Miles Traveled (PMT) and average trip length. Over the course of the two-month pilot, youth riders collectively traveled over 95,500 miles, averaging 3.86 miles per trip.

Ridership Overview:

As expected, the combination of free fares and the removal of barriers to entry (i.e. no need to sign up for a program to obtain a special pass) resulted in a significant increase in youth ridership, not only for County Connection, but for our YRF partners Tri Delta Transit and WestCAT. The following is a summary of YRF ridership over the course of the two-month pilot.

County Connection youth ridership for June and July 2025 (systemwide):

- Youth ridership as a percentage of all weekday rides: 6.5% (11.4% when excluding free routes)
- Youth ridership as a percentage of all weekend rides: 4.9% (12.0% when excluding free routes)
- Most popular routes for youth riders:
 - Weekdays: 6, 10, 15, 20 and 35
 - Weekends: 310, 320, 321 and 335

Summer Youth Pass vs. Youth Ride Free Ridership

The following tables (Tables 1-3) show the increase in ridership between Summer Youth Pass (SYP) ridership and Youth Ride Free (YRF) ridership in June and July 2025 for each of the three participating Contra Costa County operators.

COUNTY CONNECTION	SYP	YRF	% Change
June	630	11,615	1,744% ↑
July	830	13,796	1,562% ↑
Total	1,460	25,411	1,640% ↑

Table 1: County Connection YRF Ridership

TRI DELTA TRANSIT	SYP	YRF	% Change
June	373	8,914	2,290% ↑
July	454	10,643	2,244% ↑
Total	827	19,557	2,265% ↑

Table 2: Tri Delta Transit YRF Ridership

WESTCAT	SYP	YRF*	% Change
June	329	2,019	514% ↑
July	190	4,572	2,306% ↑
Total	519	6,591	1,170% ↑

Table 3: WestCAT YRF Ridership

*WestCAT required students to show IDs to board. The other agencies did not require IDs.

As shown above, the YRF program was a remarkable success, facilitating a total of 25,411 rides on County Connection. Additionally, the YRF program transported 1,640% more youth riders on County Connection than the SYP program over the same two months last year (1,460 rides) (see Table 1).

Survey Results, Youth and Parents:

Staff conducted an opt-in YRF survey for parents and students from July 21 to August 15. The survey was intentionally designed as opt-in to mirror the Youth Ride Free program by removing barriers—such as requiring verifiable email addresses or identification—and by avoiding incentives like prizes. To reach participants, staff promoted the survey online through paid ads targeting Youth Ride Free riders as well as students and parents in central Contra Costa. In addition, 511 Contra Costa and several jurisdictions, including Pleasant Hill and Walnut Creek, helped share the survey on their social media channels.

A total of 191 respondents completed the survey—139 in English and 52 in Spanish. Since no questions were required, 108 respondents either did not answer beyond the initial language question or were

filtered out as “poor quality.” This left 95 usable responses for analysis in the following report. Of these, 48 respondents identified as “Youth (18 and under)” and 46 as “Adults/Parents/Guardians.” (A copy of the survey results is attached as Attachment 1: Youth Ride Free Survey Results).

Youth Survey Results:

Survey results from youth as highlighted below show the strong impact of the program. Youth transportation habits shifted significantly during the program, with many moving away from relying on family and friends for rides and toward using public transit. The number of youths taking at least five trips a week with family or friends dropped sharply from 44% to 18%. In contrast, the percentage of youth taking transit five or more times per week rose from 42% to 59% (Fig 1).

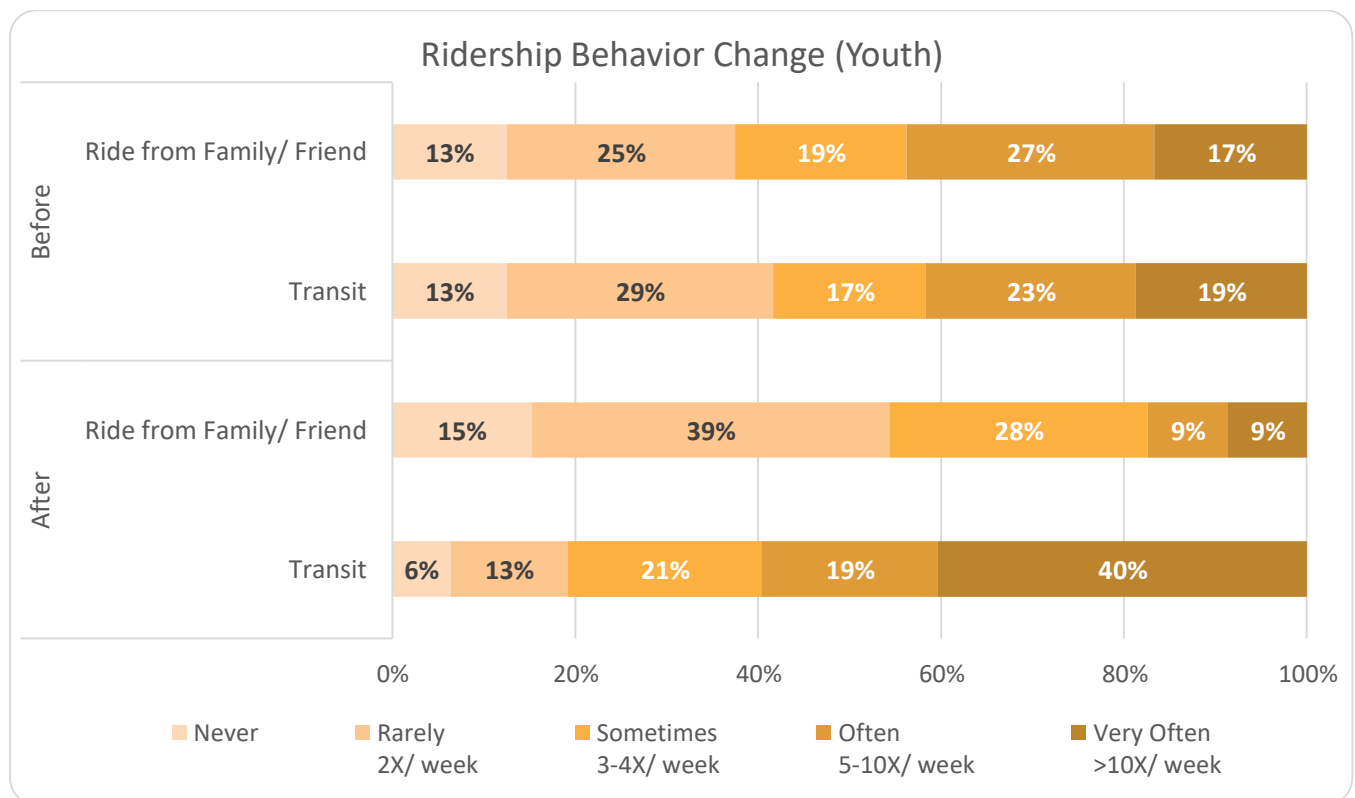


Fig 1: Ridership Behavior Change (Youth)

The program proved highly effective at attracting new youth riders, with over a third of participants reporting that it was their first time joining a youth mobility initiative (Fig 2). Not requiring payment, ID, pass, or application process were among key factors in making the program accessible and appealing, as well as helping gain new independence (Fig 3).

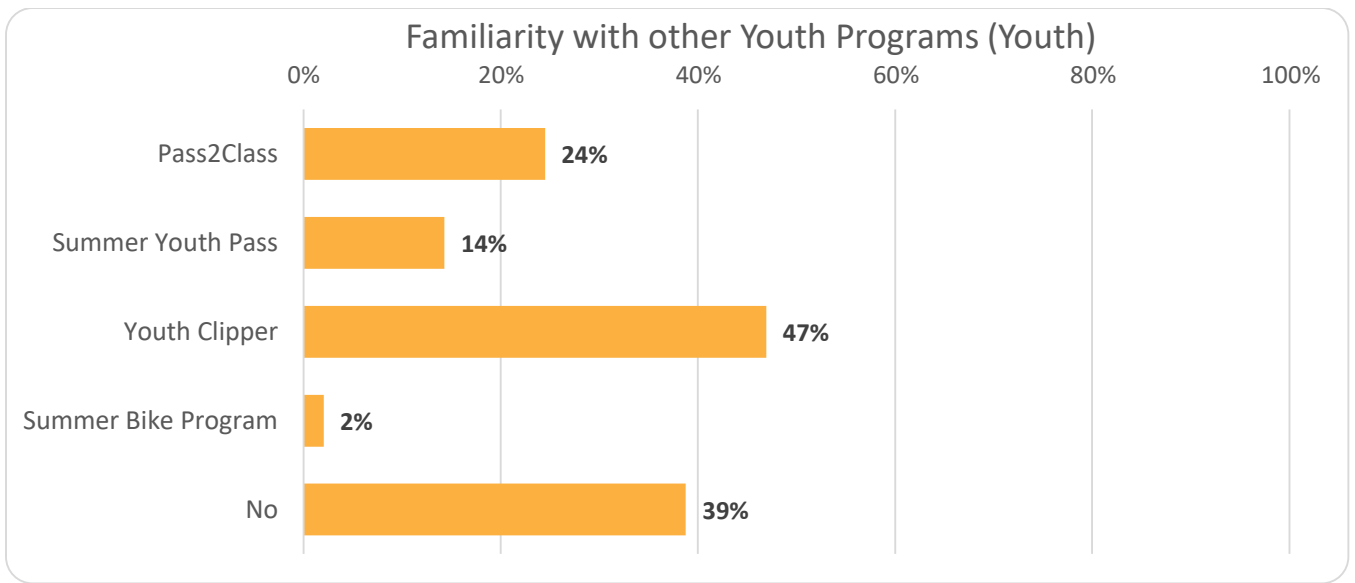


Fig 2: Familiarity with other Youth Programs (Youth)

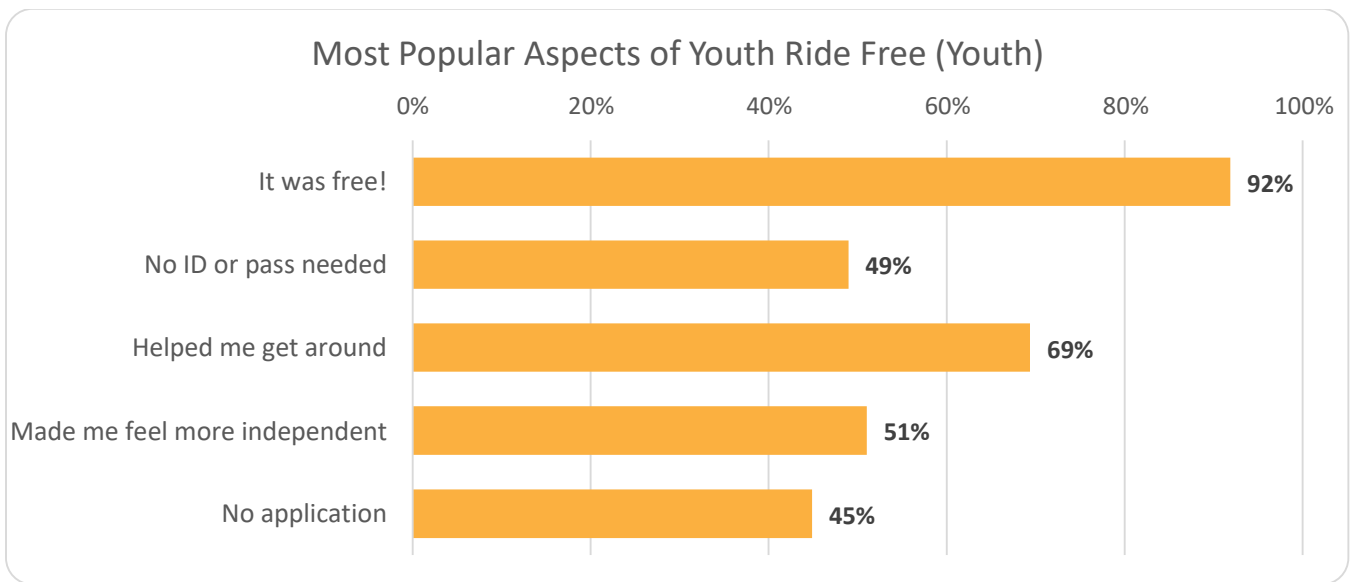


Fig 3: Most popular aspects of Youth Ride Free (Youth)

Despite this, youth still face significant barriers to participating in similar programs (Fig 4), with the biggest being cost (59%), followed by a difficult application process (43%), and programs that are hard to understand (35%).

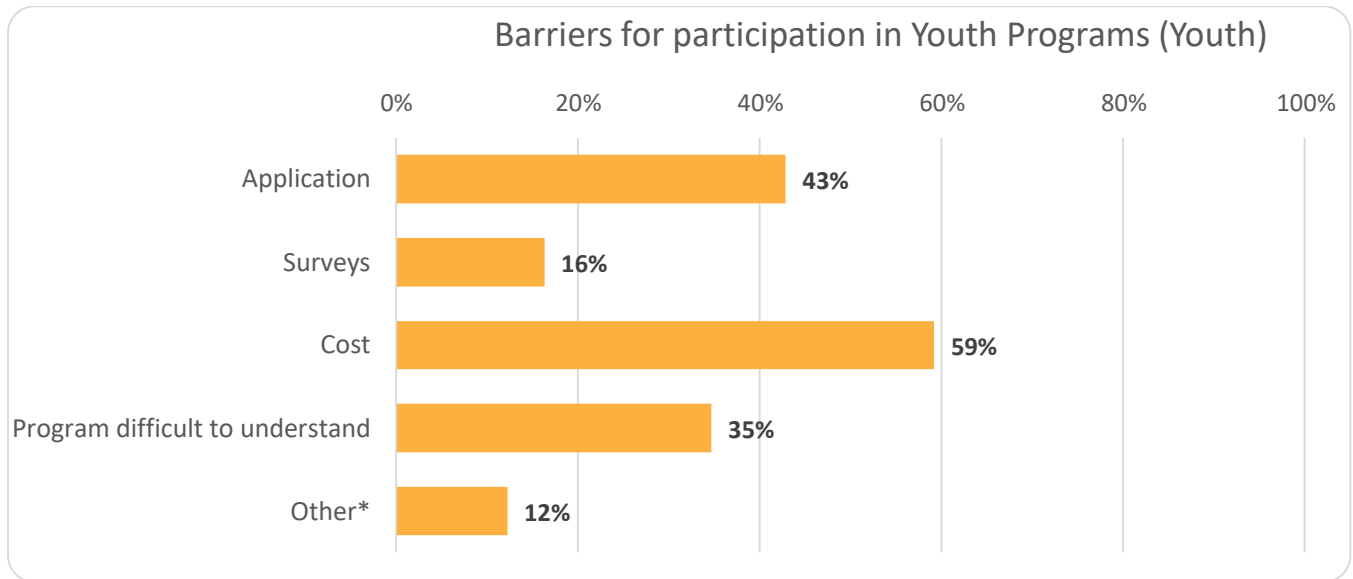


Fig 4: Barriers for participation in Youth Programs (Youth)

Parent Survey Results:

Parents also saw clear benefits, with nearly 32% reporting their children now ride County Connection at least five times a week (Fig 5), saving families both time and mileage—often more than five car trips and 11 miles each week (Fig 6 & Fig 7).

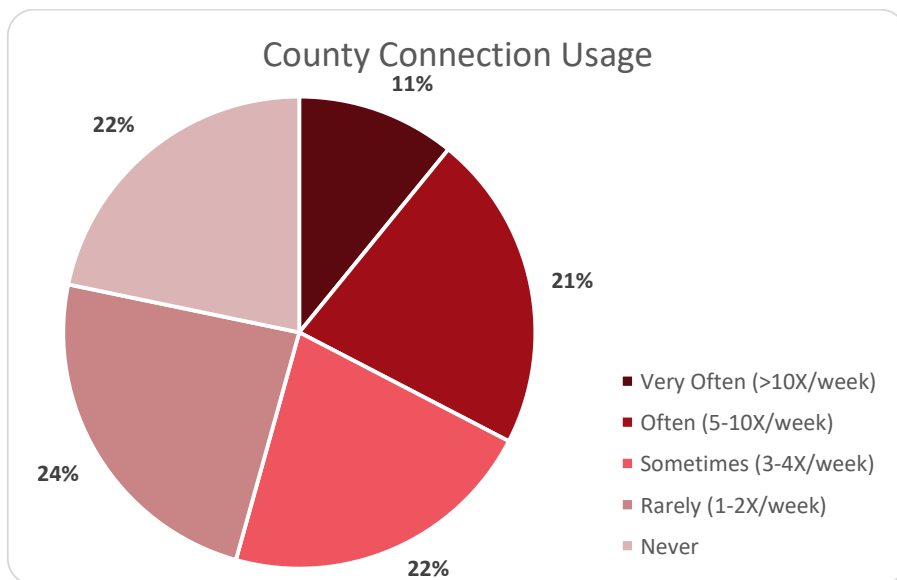


Fig 5: County Connection bus usage since June 1st (Parents)

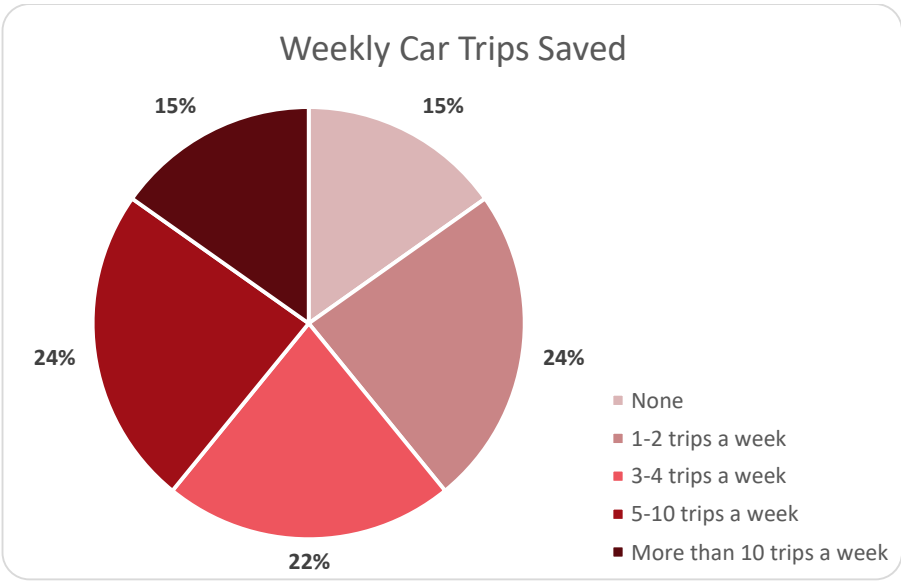


Fig 6: Weekly car trips saved (Parents)

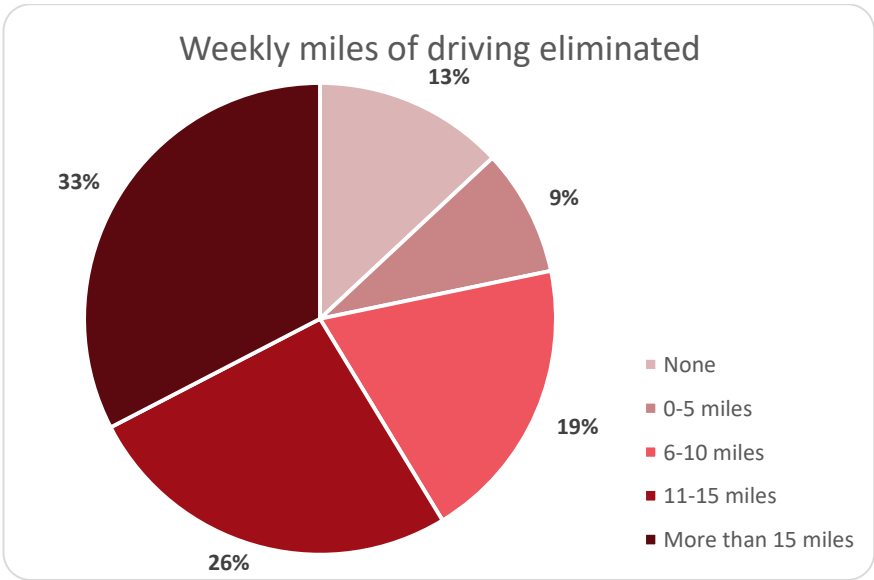


Fig 7: Weekly miles of driving eliminated (Parents)

Parents valued the independence the program gave their children and the reduced need to drive, though they identified safety and reliability as their top concerns (Fig 8 & Fig 9). Overall, 85% of parents supported continuing the Youth Ride Free program, underscoring its positive role in improving mobility and access for families.

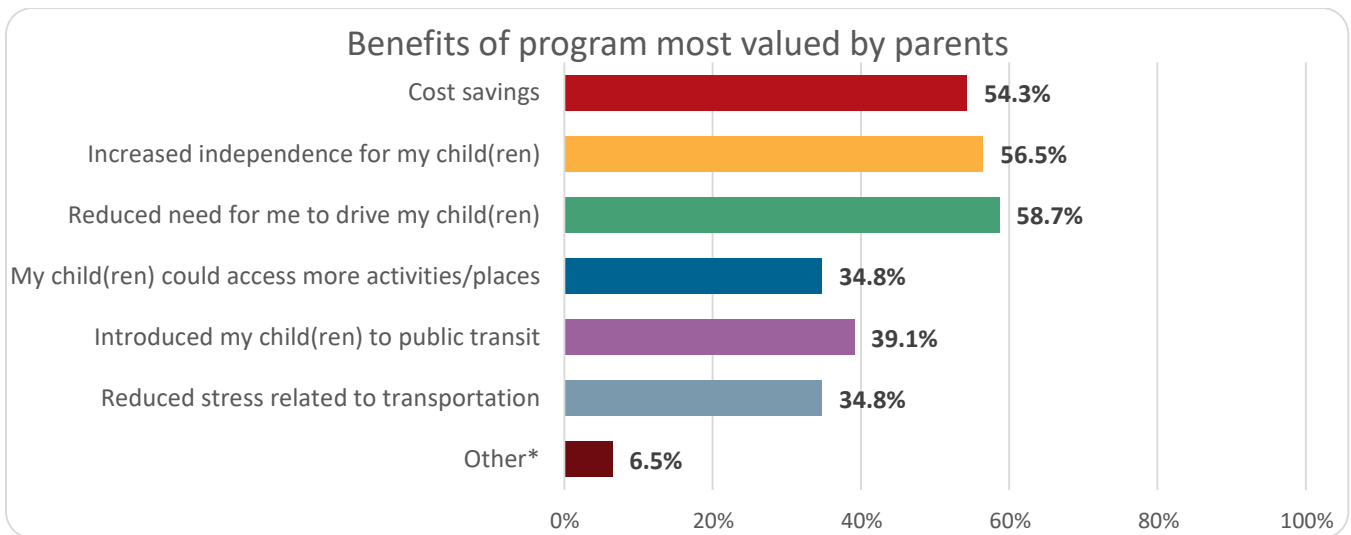


Fig 8: Benefits of the program most valued by parents

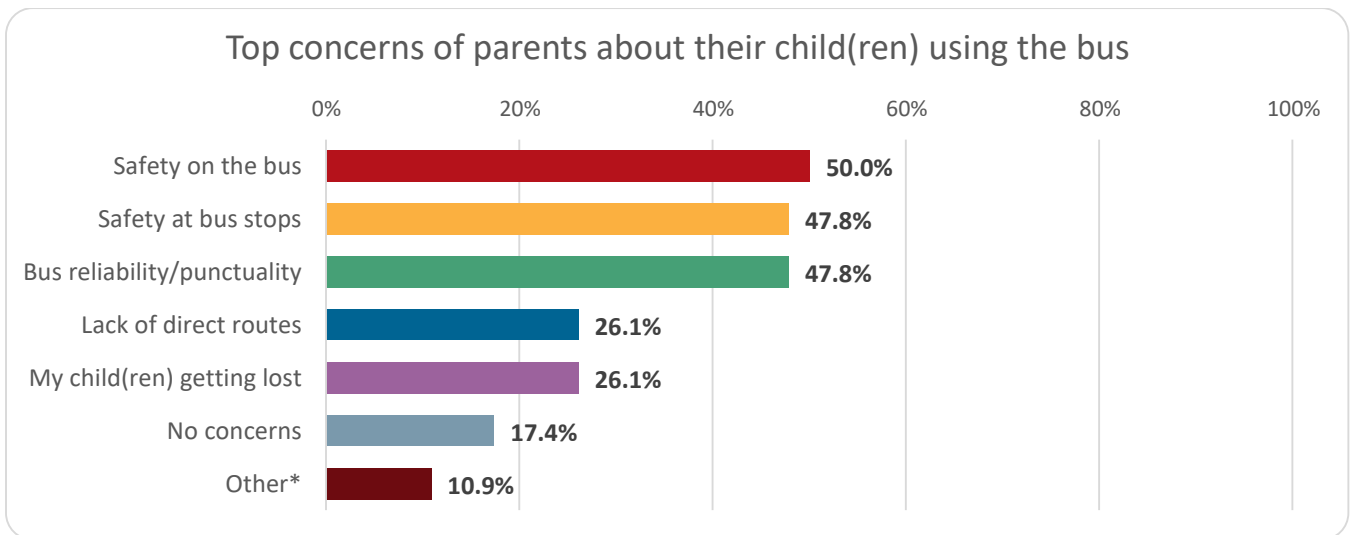


Fig 9: Top concerns of parents about their child(ren) using the bus

Financial Implications:

All direct costs of the program will be covered under the existing marketing promotions budget.

Recommendation:

None, for information only.

Action Requested:

None, for information only.

Attachments:

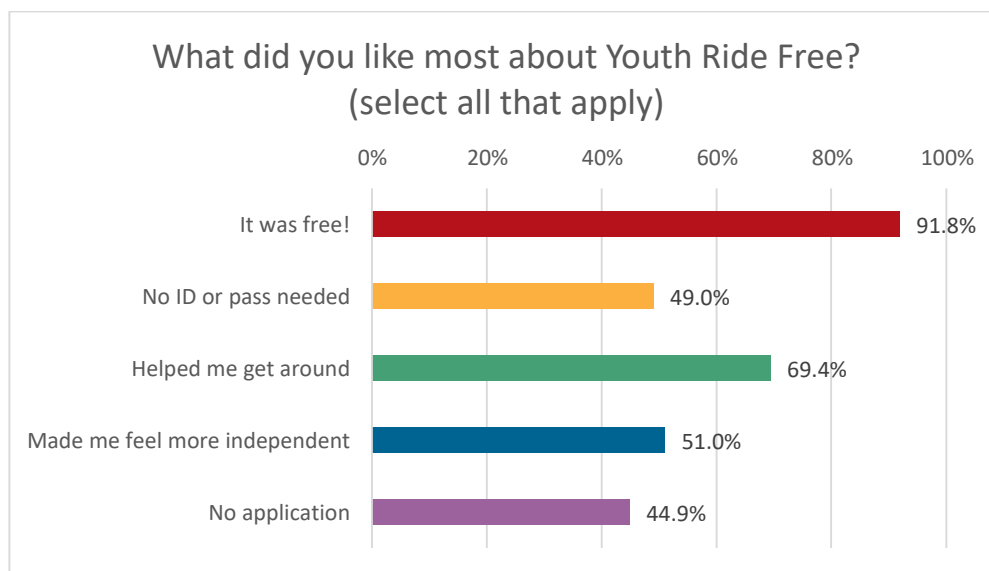
Attachment 1: Youth Ride Free Survey Results

Youth Ride Free: End-of-Program Survey Insights

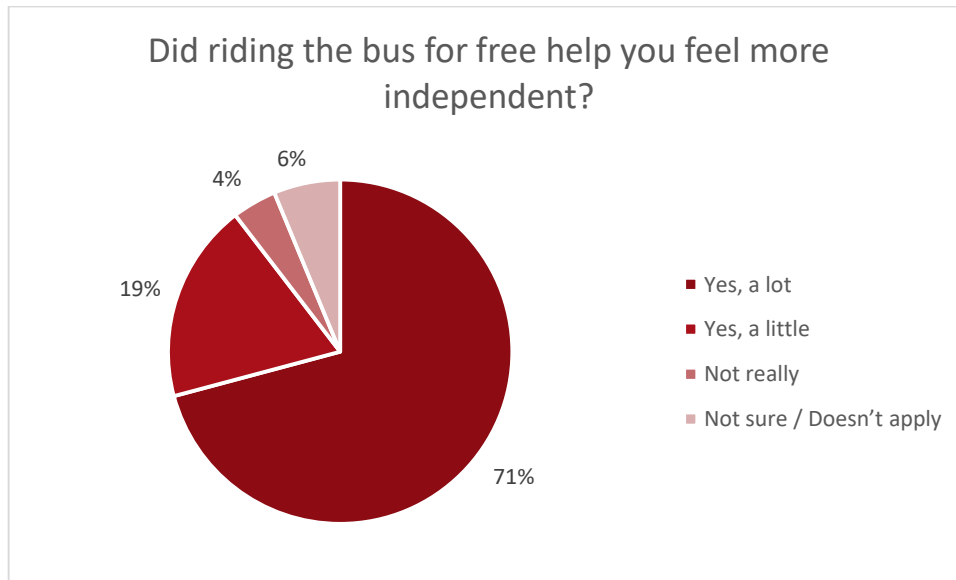
Following the completion of the summer Youth Ride Free (“YRF”) program, which ran from June 1 to July 31, County Connection collected user feedback using an online survey instrument. Responses were collected from July 21st to August 15th, with 202 total responses collected. 139 respondents completed the survey in English, and 52 completed it in Spanish. No questions were “required” to complete the survey. 108 respondents did not answer any other questions after the initial language question or were filtered out due to being “poor quality.” 95 responses contained usable survey data, which is analyzed in the following report. Of these responses, 48 respondents identified themselves as “Youth (18 and under),” while 46 identified themselves as “Adults/Parents/Guardians.” A copy of the survey instrument is attached.

Youth

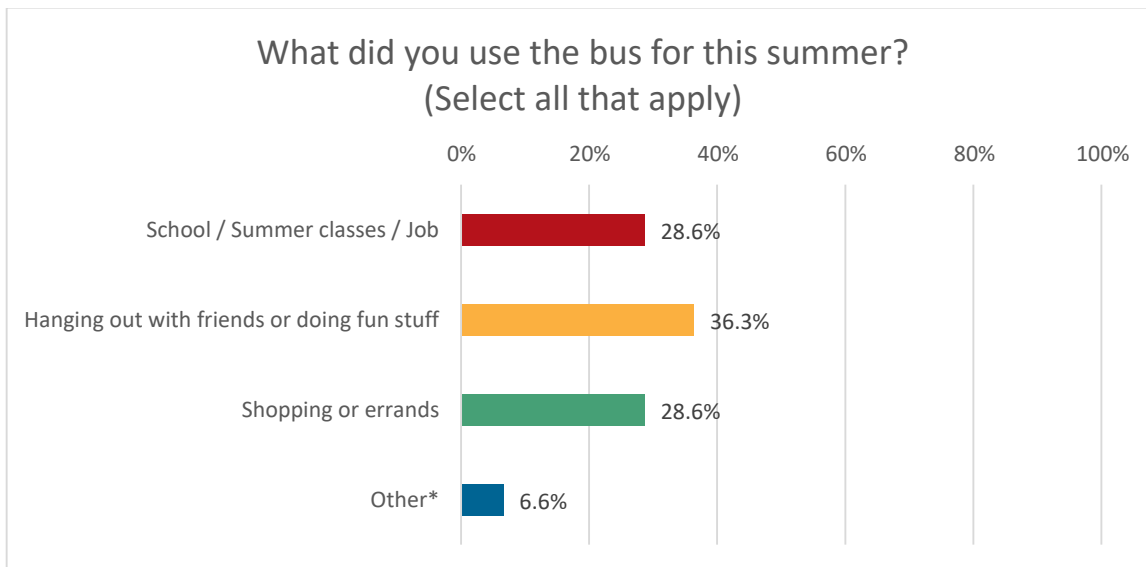
Question 3 (n=48, 150 selections)



Question 4 (n=48)



Question 5 (n=48, 91 selections)

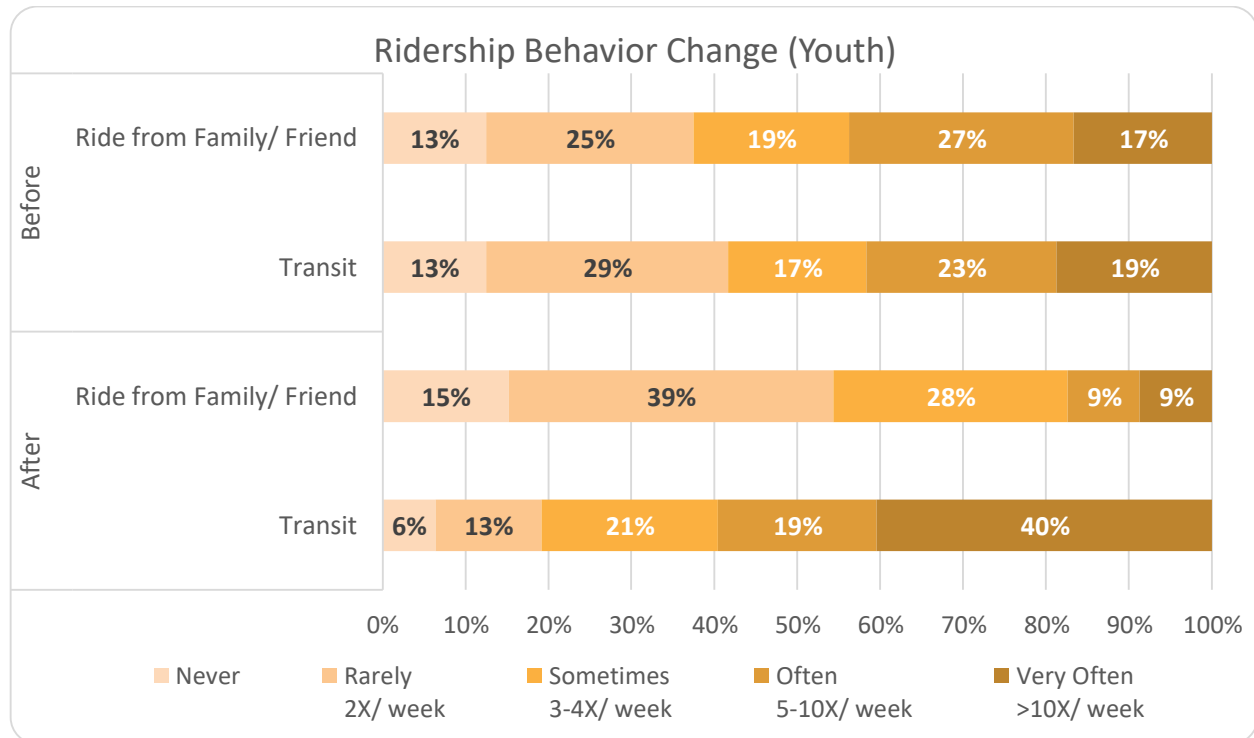


*Respondents who selected "Other" were asked to specify using a free response text box. Those responses included:

- *Going to the gym*
- *Gym*
- *Work*
- *See [sic]*
- *Sports*
- *Railfanning*

Question 6/7 (n=48)

Questions 6 and 7 asked respondents to indicate how frequently they used certain modes of transportation before (in question 6) and during (in question 7) the YRF pilot. Data is presented in charts showing before/after for Rides provided by Family/Friend and Transit.



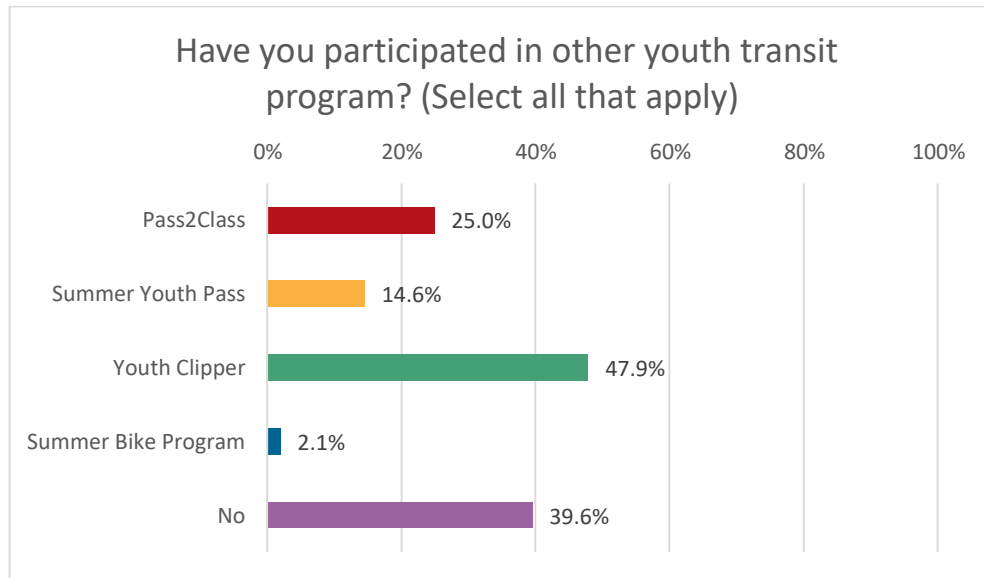
Respondents had the option to select “Other” for both questions 6 and 7 for modes that were not included. For question 6 (before YRF), 4 respondents filled in the text box for the “Other” option:

- *Drive alone*
- *0-1 times a week [sic]*
- *Very rarely, whenever I couldn't get ride to the gym*
- *Skateboard too*

For question 7 (during YRF), 1 respondent filled in the text box for the “Other” option:

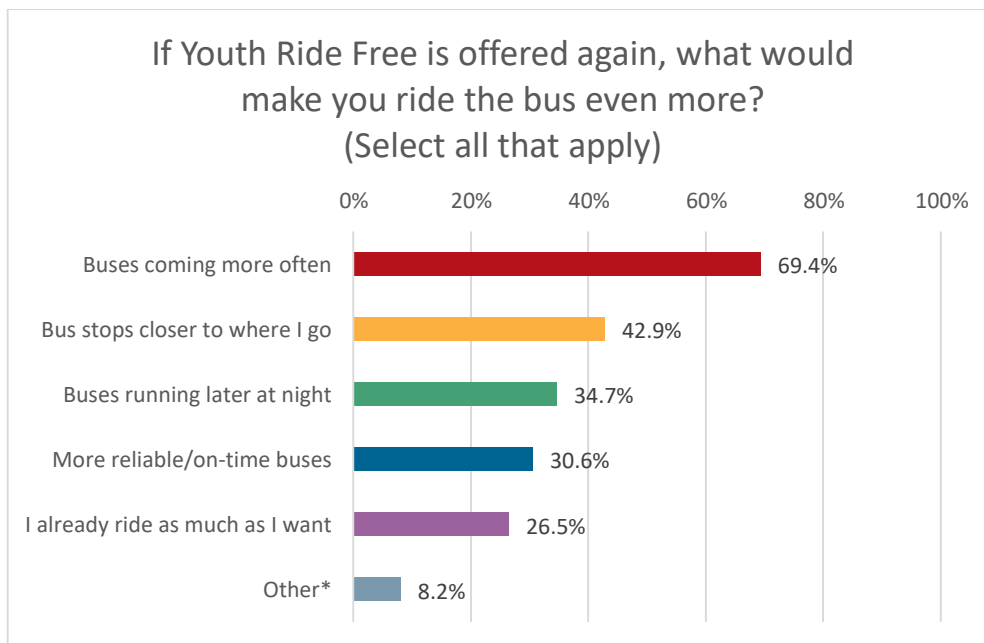
- *Drive alone*

Question 8 (n=48, 62 selections)



For this question, “SchoolPool” was included as an option but excluded from this chart as it was not selected by any respondents.

Question 9 (n=48, 104 selections)

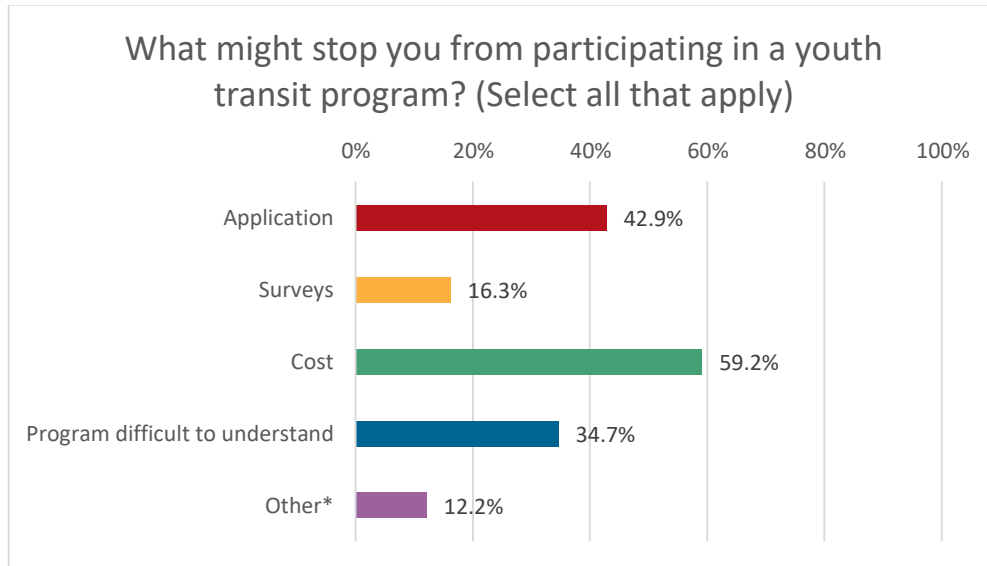


Respondents who selected “Other” were asked to specify using a free response text box. Those responses included:

- *Weekend buses*
- *Bus from schaefer ranch to main dublin! [sic]*

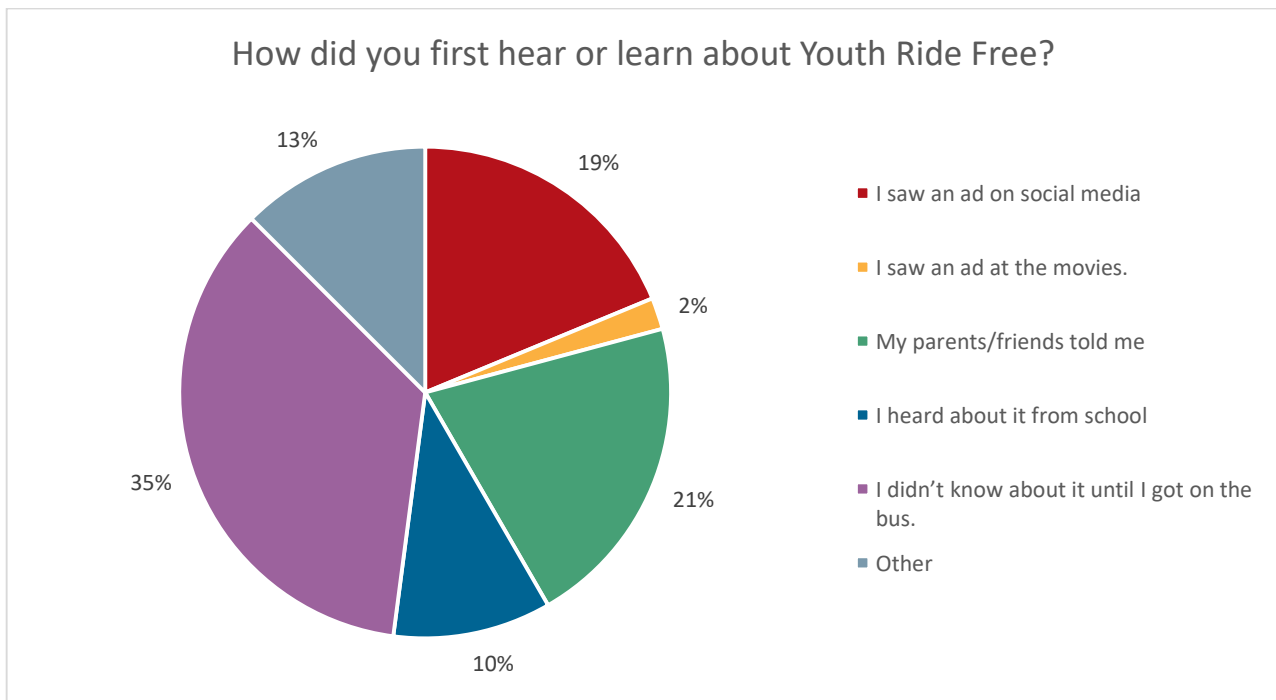
- More service to Clayton
- Year long YRF program

Question 10 (n=48, 81 selections)

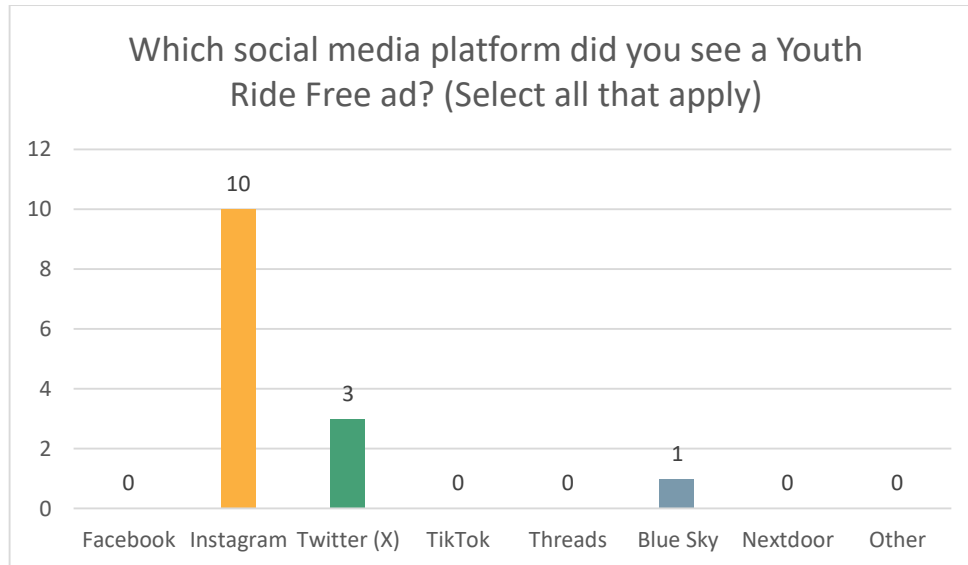


*For this question, respondents who selected “Other” were not given a free response text box to specify.

Question 11 (n=48)



*For this question, respondents who selected “Other” were not given a free response text box to specify. Respondents who answered “I saw an ad on social media” or “Other” were asked to specify on which platform they saw an ad. Those results (n=10, 14 selections) are summarized in the chart below.



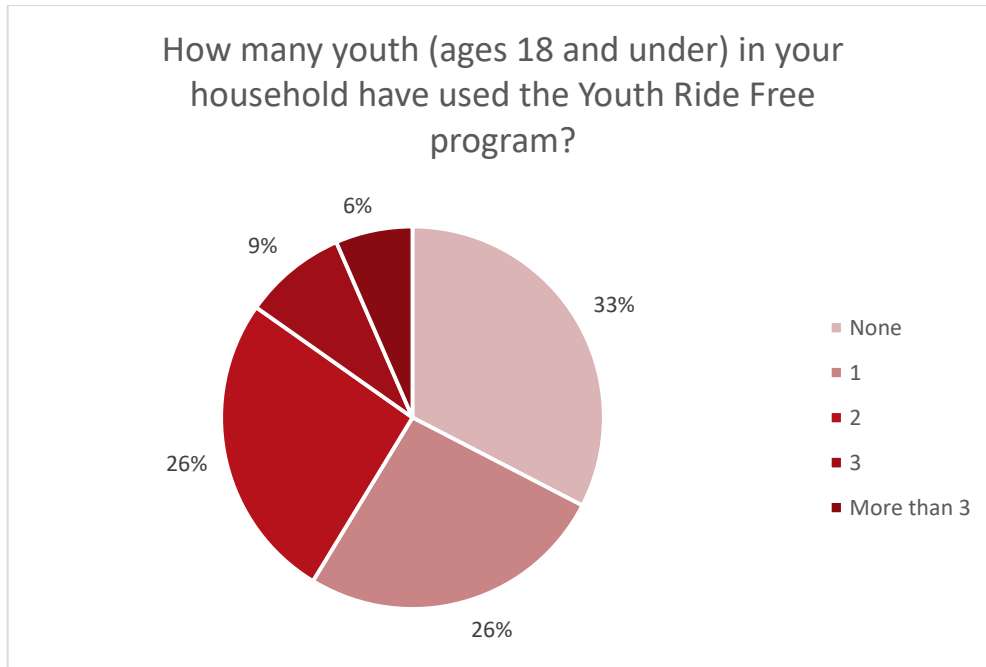
Open comments (4 responses)

All respondents were asked to “leave a comment and let us know about your experience with Youth Ride Free.” 4 Youth respondents included a comment as listed below:

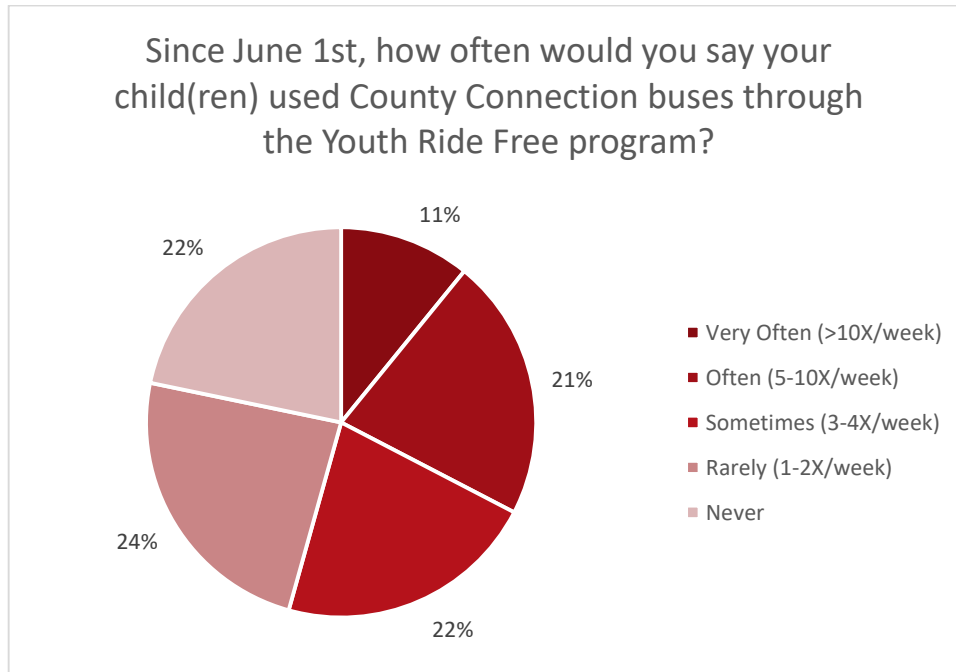
- *Amazing, 10/10*
- *Great! However, there is no way to get from schaefer ranch down to main dublin without a car unless you walk or bike, which i cannot do for that long due to disabilities. we deserve the same access*
- *I really appreciated the Youth Ride Free program this summer! It saved me a lot of money since I worked five days a week this summer and don't drive. I also loved competing on the leaderboard*
- *It was very helpful and freeing! I hope to see it in a more permanent form in the future!*

Adults/Parents/Guardians

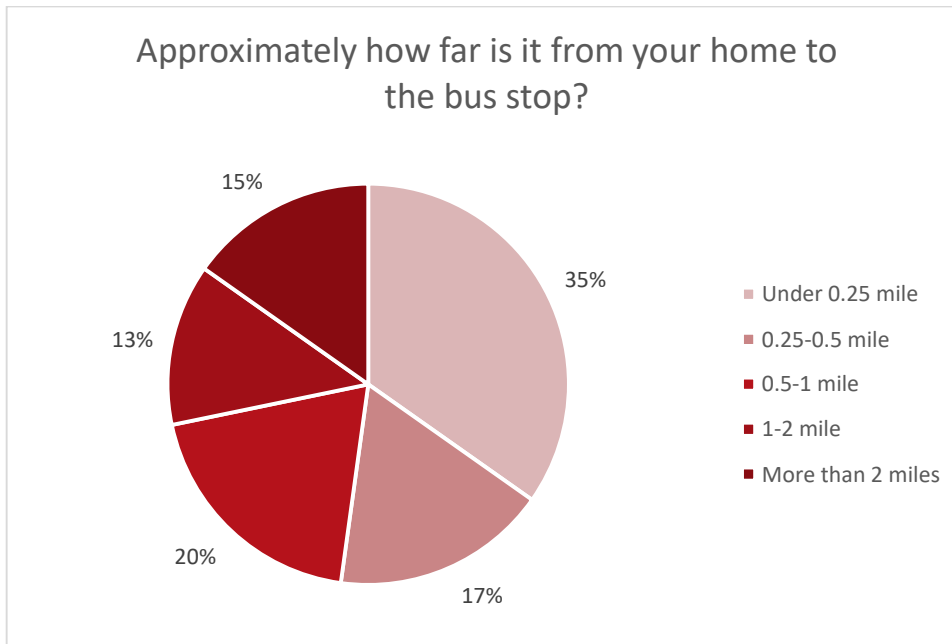
Question 12 (n=46)



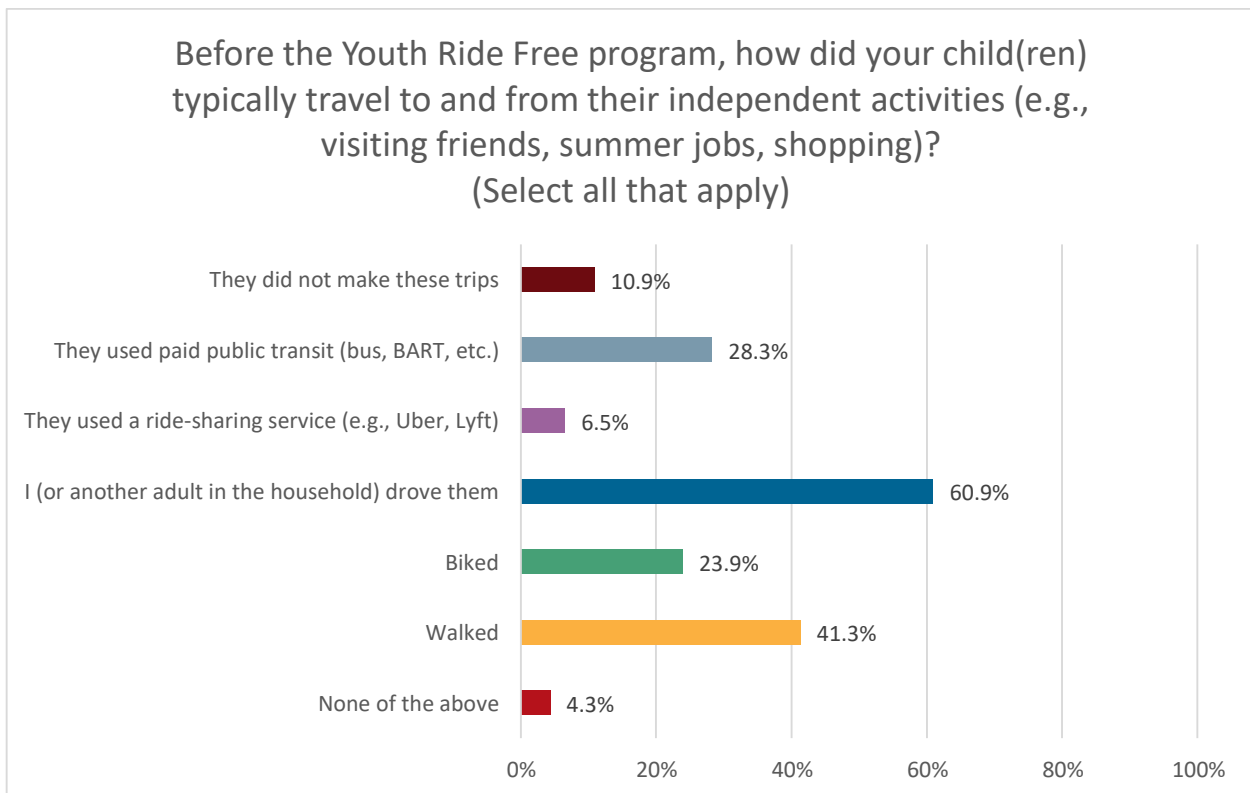
Question 13 (n=46)



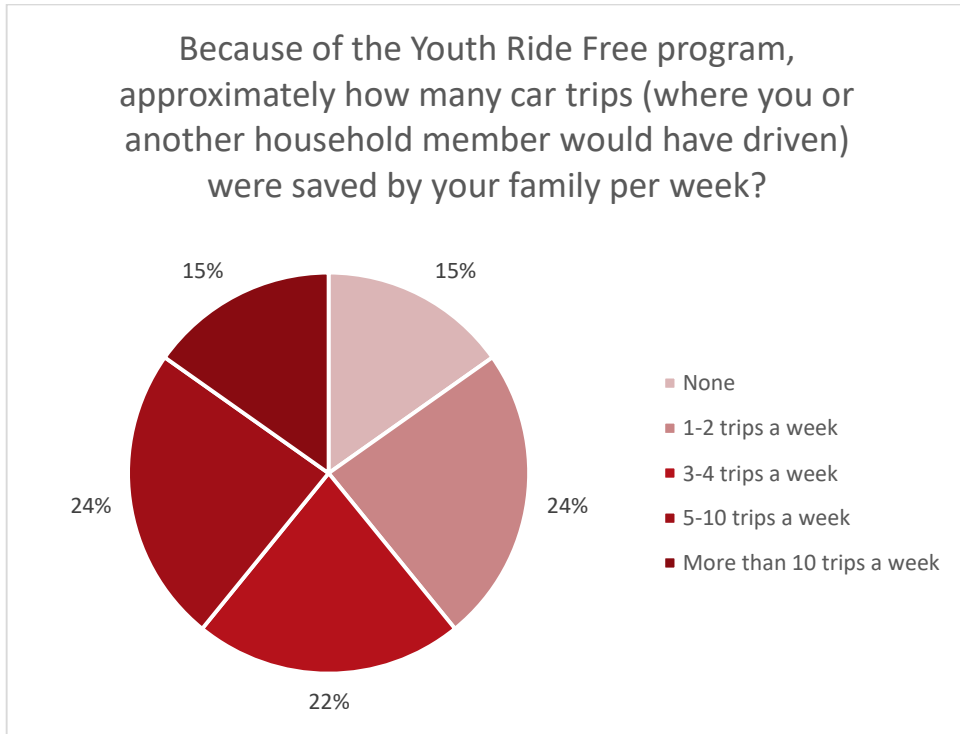
Question 14 (n=46)



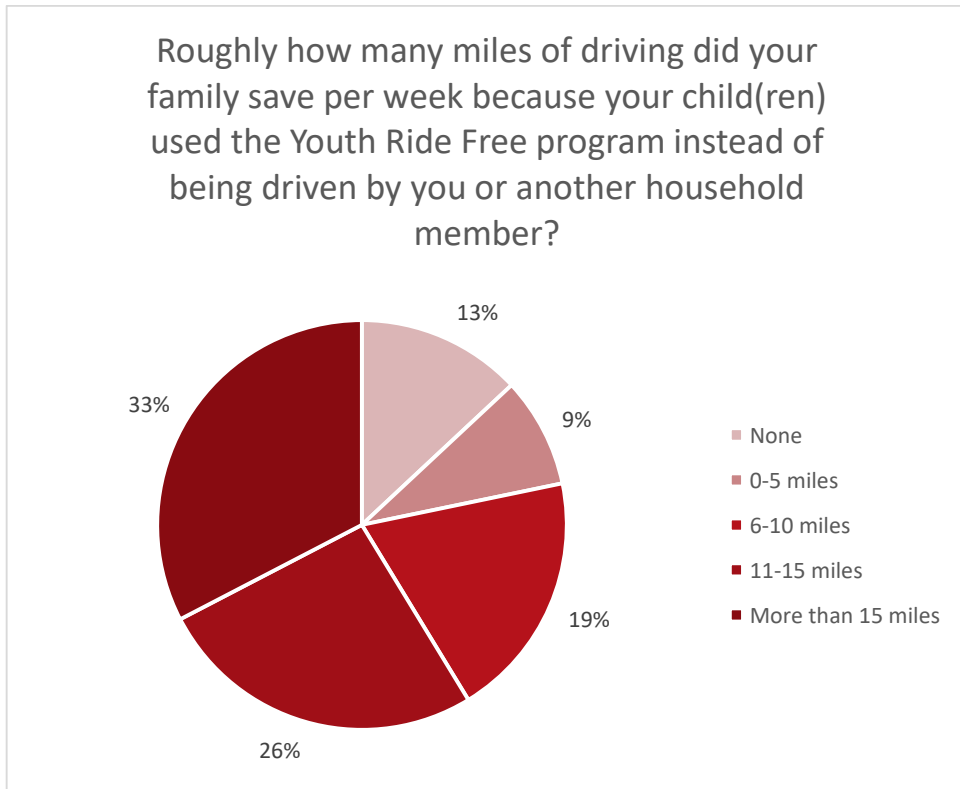
Question 15 (n=46, 81 selections)



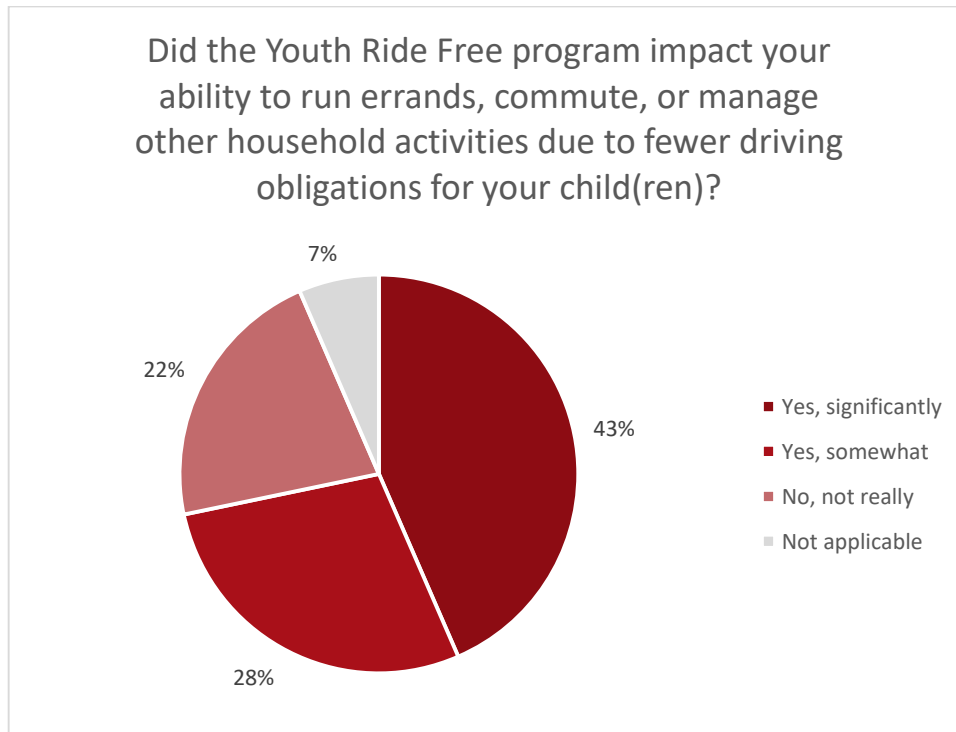
Question 16 (n=46)



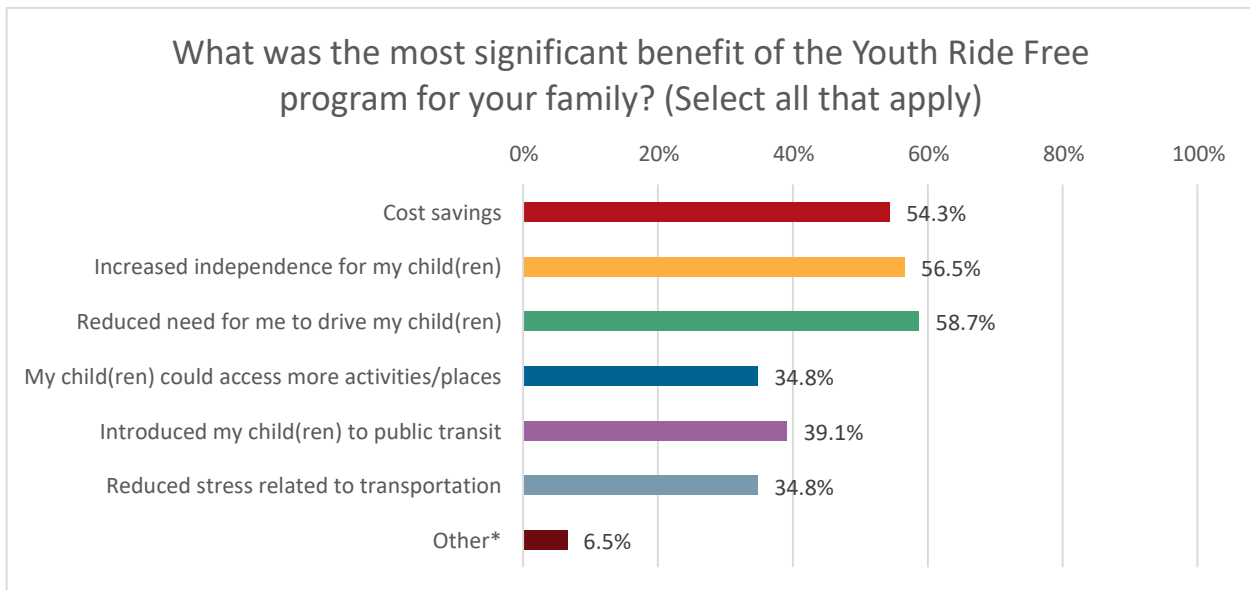
Question 17 (n=46)



Question 18 (n=46)



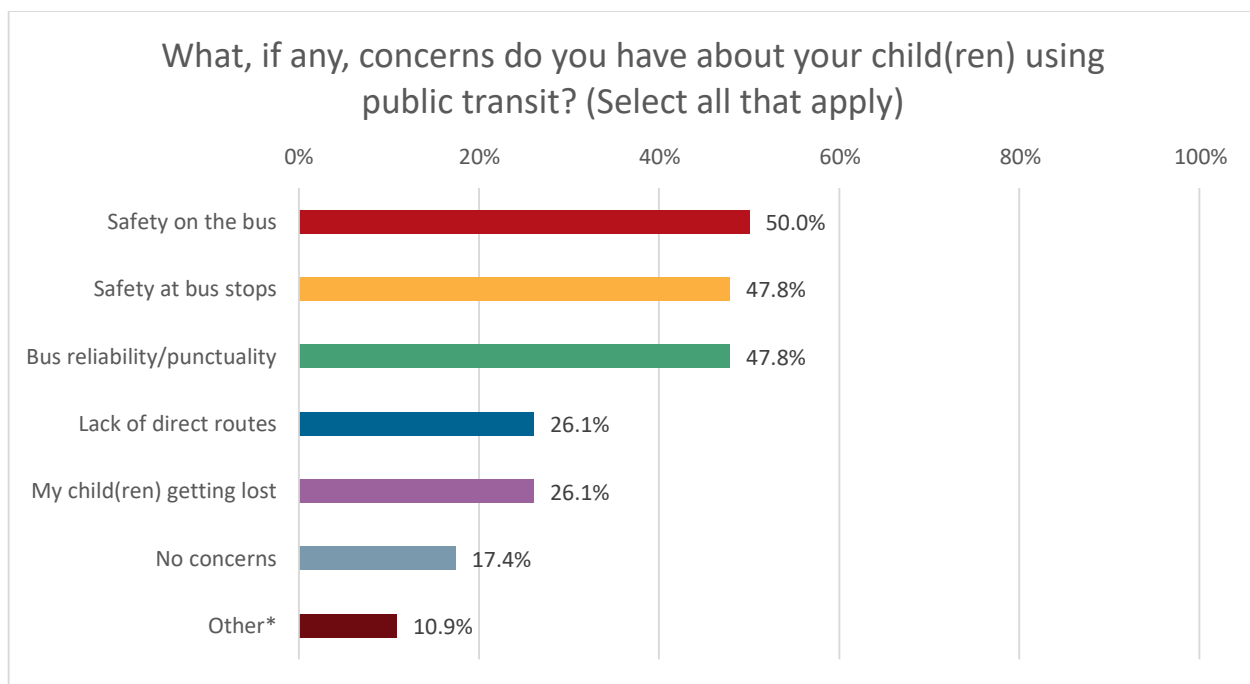
Question 19 (n=46, 131 selections)



Respondents who selected “Other” were asked to specify using a free response text box. Those responses included:

- N/A
- No kids

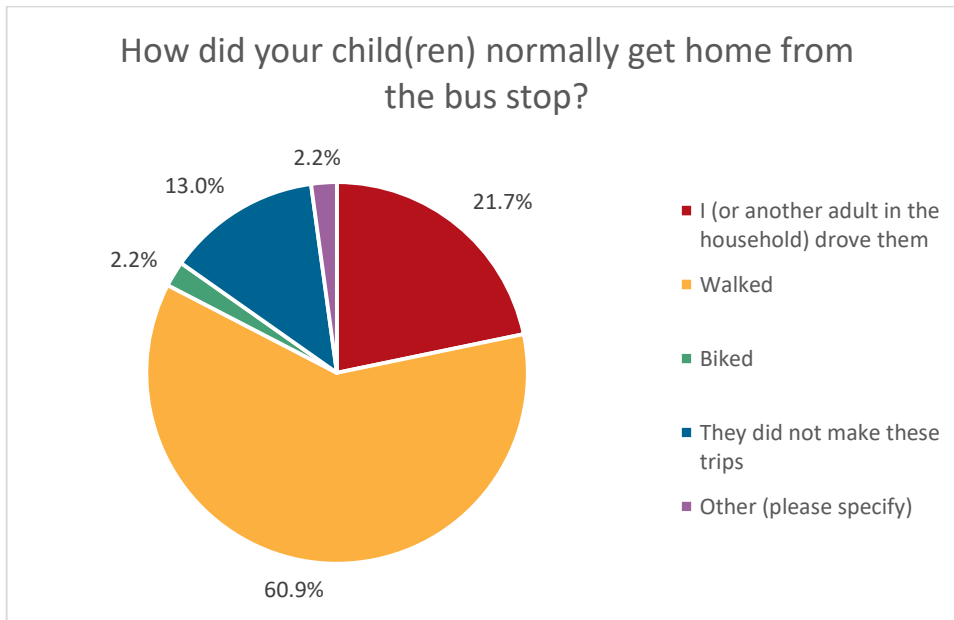
Question 20 (n=46, 104 selections)



Respondents who selected “Other” were asked to specify using a free response text box. Those responses included:

- *Span of service (buses often stop running too early in the day)*
- *No kids*
- *Waiting at bus stops in extremely hot or freezing cold weather with no benches, cover, or shade. They get sick from the heat especially which limits how often they ride the buss [sic]*
- *Inconvenient routes/stops. North Concord needs better routes/connections/stops*
- *Barrier: Lack of bus stop near our house*
- *They don't use it [translated from Spanish]*

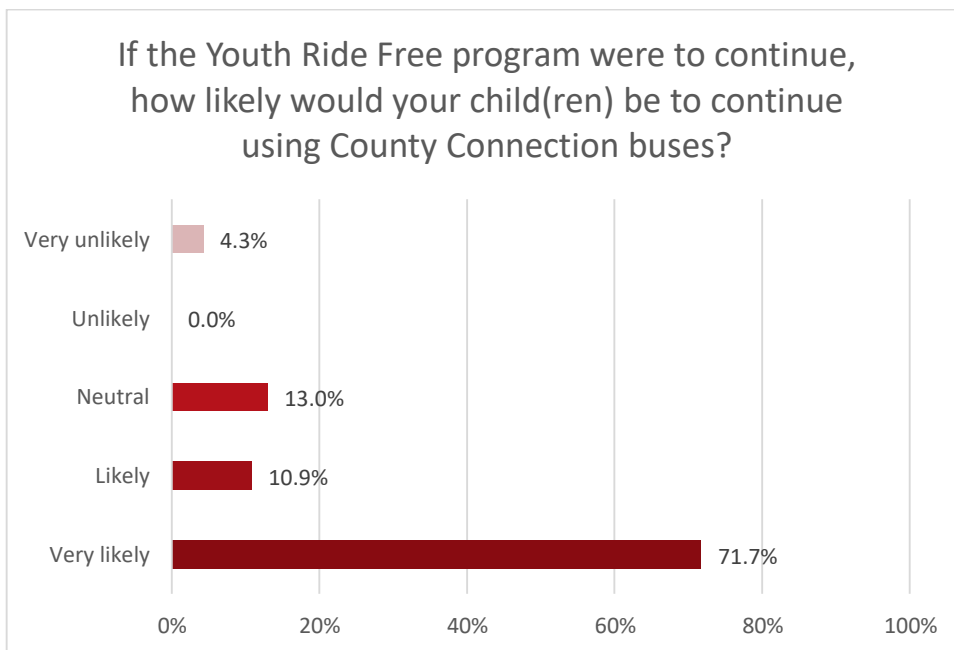
Question 21 (n=46)



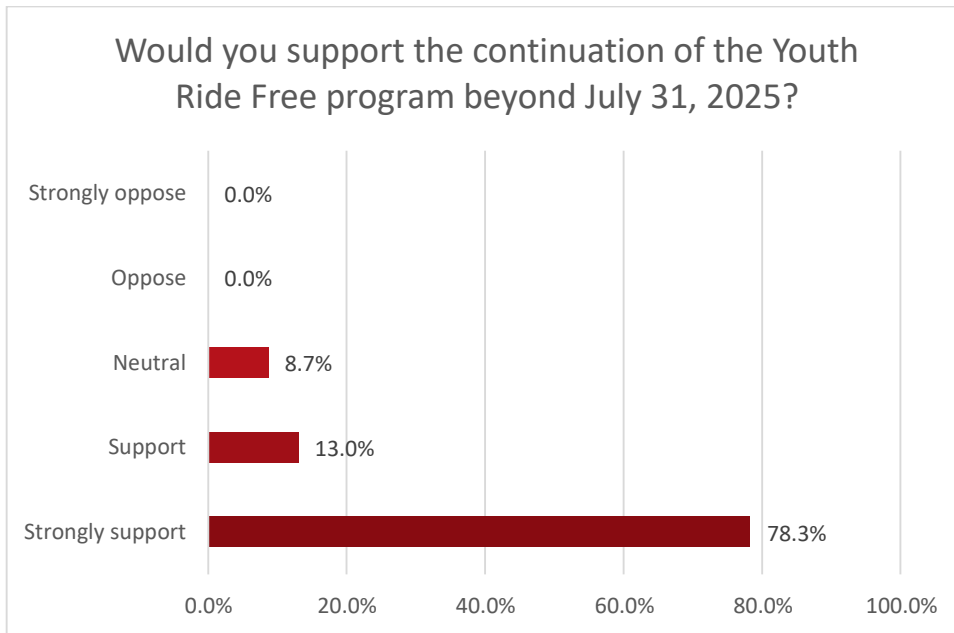
Respondents who selected “Other” were asked to specify using a free response text box. Those responses included:

- *No kids*

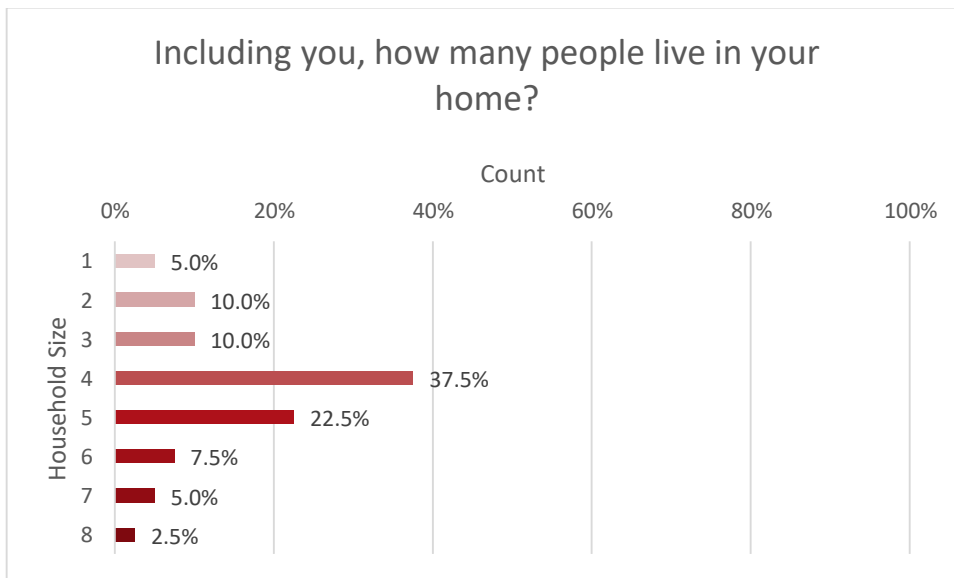
Question 22 (n=46)



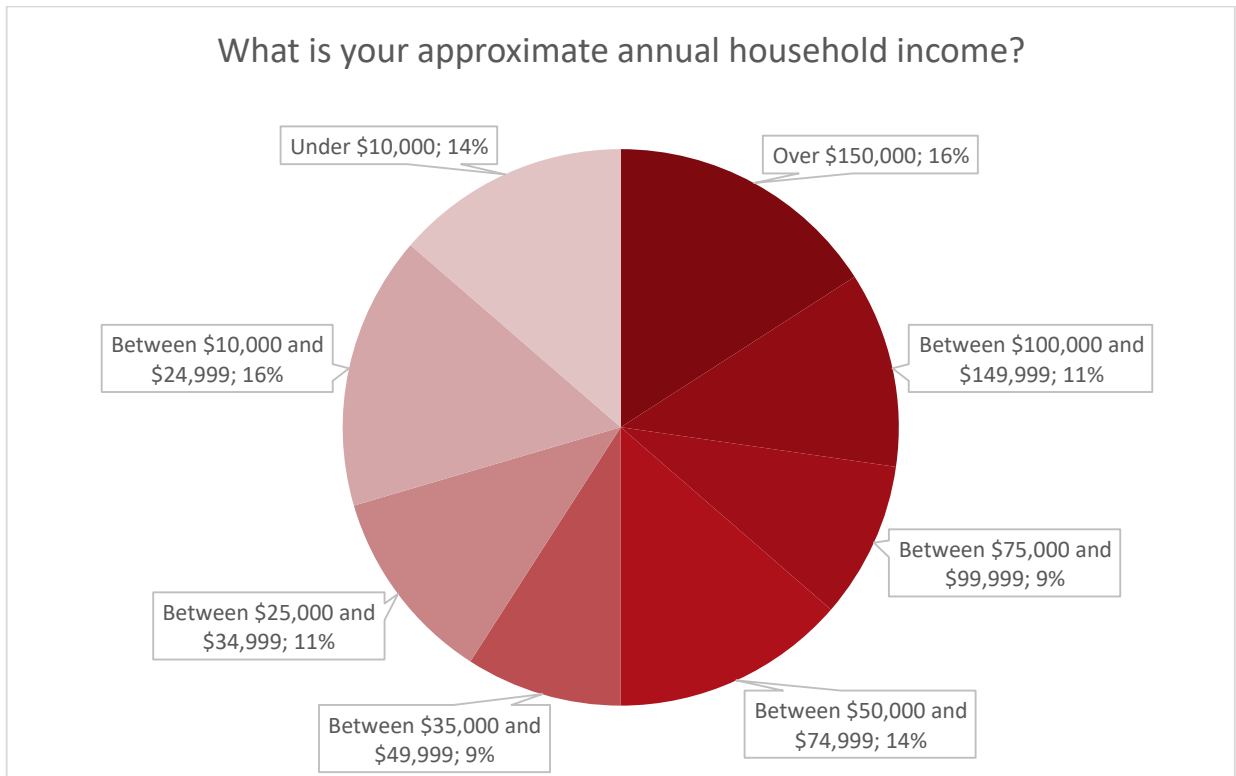
Question 23 (n=46)



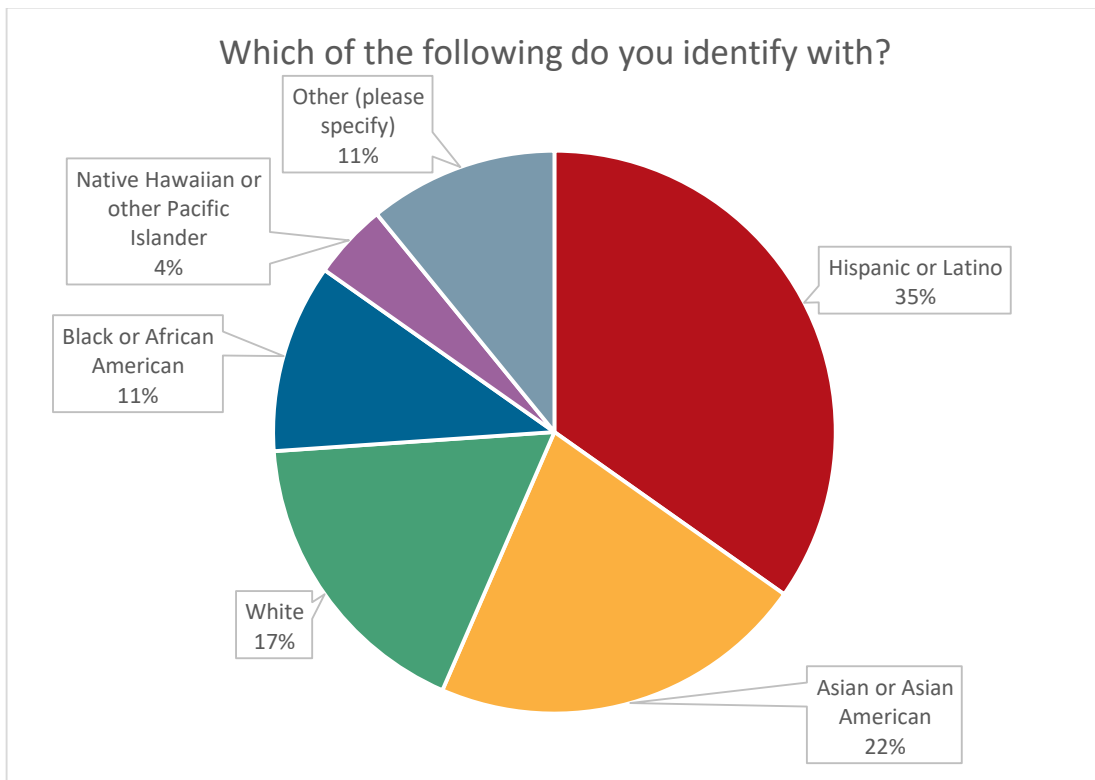
Question 24 (n=40)



Question 25 (n=44)



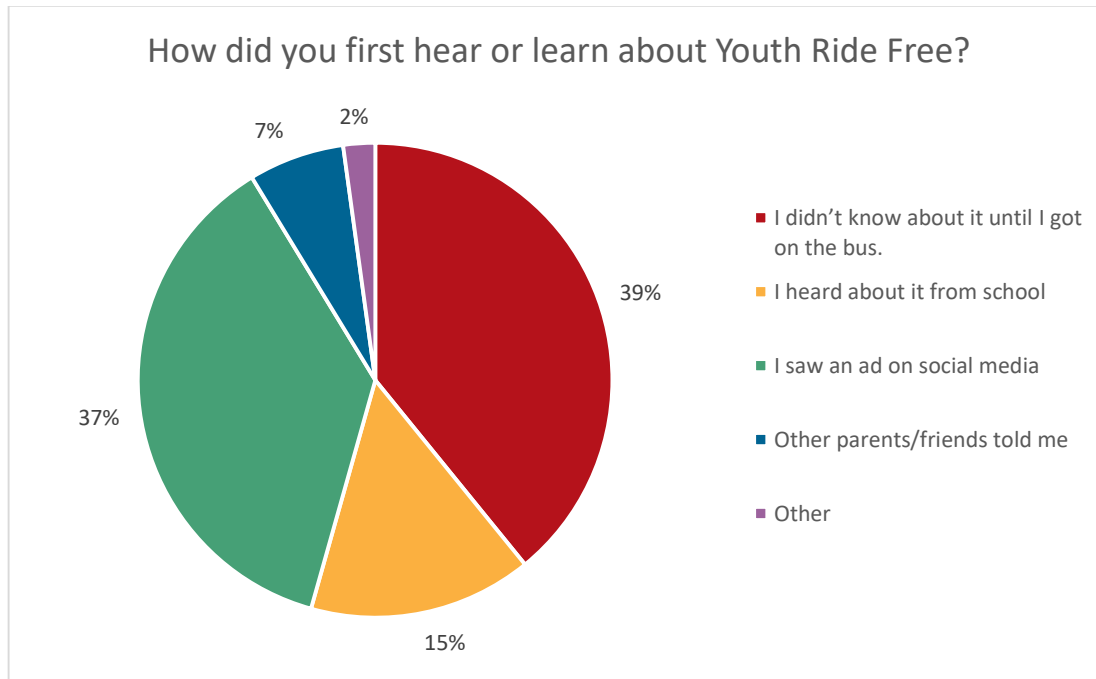
Question 26 (n=46)



For this question, “American Indian/Alaska Native” was included as an option but excluded from this chart as it was not selected by any respondents. Respondents who selected “Other” were asked to specify using a free response text box. Those responses included:

- *Mixed/Multiple [x4]*
- *Of Scottish descent*

Question 27 (n=46)



Respondents who selected “Other” were asked to specify using a free response text box. That response included:

- *Email, library*

Open comments (3 responses)

All respondents were asked to “leave a comment and let us know about your experience with Youth Ride Free.” 3 Adult/Parent/Guardian respondents included a comment as listed below:

- *Save money big help to my child*
- *We need free rides for seniors too please*
- *A great program*