

To: Marketing, Planning, & Legislature

Date: July 21, 2026

From: Ryan Jones, Manager of Marketing & Communications

Reviewed by: AMS

SUBJECT: Youth Ride Free Update

Background:

The Youth Ride Free (YRF) program is designed to boost ridership over the summer months while helping young people build familiarity and confidence in riding transit. In June and July 2025, County Connection launched and funded the YRF program, a two-month pilot that allowed riders 18 and under to travel fare-free on all fixed-route buses. Tri Delta Transit and WestCAT also participated in the regional effort, paid for with their own funding. Designed to remove barriers to access, the program required no application, special passes, or ID.

The pilot was a huge success, with 25,000 recorded youth trips across County Connection over the two-month period—a 1,600% increase in participation compared to the previous summer’s youth program, Contra Costa Transportation Authority’s (CCTA) Summer Youth Pass, which they discontinued later that year. Building on this success, County Connection, Tri Delta Transit, and WestCAT brought back Youth Ride Free for summer 2026. Funding for County Connection’s 2026 Youth Ride Free program is being provided by Measure J contributions from TRANSPAC and SWAT, with CCTA providing help with countywide promotional support, including engagement with school districts, city and county offices, and libraries.

Community Engagement:

Building on last year’s online engagement strategy, County Connection promoted YRF through ads on buses and through targeted social media ads based on location, age, and spoken language. The primary audience for social media engagement was youth, ages 13-16, who are beginning to gain independence and are more likely to be receptive to programs like Youth Ride Free that allow them to travel on their own. For this age group, many do not yet have driver’s licenses or are seeking alternatives to relying on others for rides. Our secondary audience are parents and guardians of children ages 6–12, who are key decision-makers and typically manage their children’s activities and schedules.

Messaging around YRF began in May and was focused on awareness of the program and driving youth ages 13-18 to join the Leaderboard at youthridefree.com. The Leaderboard is an engagement tool that allows participants to log their rides and compete for weekly prizes. The following tables show engagement numbers on the various social media platforms, which were a mix of paid advertisements and organic posts (social media postings that are willingly shared).

Table 1: Ad Views on Social Media Platforms Used in Both 2025 and 2026

PLATFORM	YEAR	AD VIEWS (English)	AD VIEWS (Spanish)	NOTES
TikTok	2025	227,612	-	Paid/Organic
	2026	159,376	67,978	
Meta	2025	282,712	160,855	Paid/Organic
	2026	138,194	107,171	
Twitter (X)	2025	21,612	20,706	Paid
	2026	505,443	192,181	
TOTAL	2025	531,936	181,561	
	2026	803,013	367,330	

Table 2: Ad Views on Social Media Platforms Used only in 2026

PLATFORM	YEAR	AD VIEWS (English)	AD VIEWS (Spanish)	NOTES
Instagram	2026	46,695	12,118	Paid/Organic
Snapchat	2026	309,589	15,479	Paid
Reddit	2026	4,021	1,200	Paid
TOTAL	2026	360,305	28,797	

This year, the online YRF campaign about 1,200,000 views of English-language ads and about 400,000 views of Spanish-language ads. The ads built awareness of the YRF program drove traffic to the website, which brought in about 15,000 visitors between May 20 and July 22, 2026.

Web traffic to *youthridefree.com* was a shared marketing effort by County Connection, Tri Delta Transit, WestCAT, and CCTA, which combined social media advertising as well as printed assets such as flyers and posters with QR codes to the site.

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 for the month of June 2026 (the ridership figures for July are not yet available):

- Youth Ridership: 13,422 (up from 15.6% rides in June 2025)
- Youth ridership as a percentage of all weekday rides: 6.8% (11.5% when excluding free routes)
- Youth ridership as a percentage of all weekend rides: 4.5% (11.3% when excluding free routes)
- Most popular routes for youth riders:
 - Weekdays: Routes 6, 10, 15, 20, and 35
 - Weekends: Routes 310, 320, 321, and 335

Survey of Youth and Parents:

CCTA is currently conducting an online survey of youth who have participated in Youth Ride Free and their parents. The survey is open through September 4, 2026 and is being promoted by CCTA, County Connection, Tri Delta Transit, and WestCAT. Once the survey concludes, staff will work with CCTA to share the survey's findings.

Financial Implications:

The marketing costs associated with Youth Ride Free are included in the Promotions Budget, with the youth fares paid for with Measure J Funding.

Recommendation:

None, for information only.

Action Requested:

None, for information only.

Attachments:

None.