2026 OPPORTUNITY PASS YOUTH TRANSIT SURVEY

INSIGHTS INTO NEW ORLEANS YOUTHS' TRAVEL BEHAVIOR, TRANSIT USAGE, AND LIVED EXPERIENCES





RIDE

OCTOBER 2026



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ABOUT RIDE NEW ORLEANS

Ride New Orleans is an independent nonprofit 501(c)3 organization. *We envision a region in which taking transit enables full access to jobs, education, health care, and other needs that ensure the equitable, thriving community that all residents deserve. Our mission is to win world-class and equitable public transportation that works for all residents across the New Orleans region.* Visit www.rideneworleans.org to learn more.

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Background & Survey Methodology

The Opportunity Pass was a pilot program developed by Ride New Orleans (RIDE) in partnership with the City of New Orleans, the New Orleans Regional Transit Authority (RTA), the New Orleans Children and Youth Planning Board, and the New Orleans Public Library. The program offered unlimited free access to RTA buses, streetcars, and ferries for enrolled Orleans Parish youth aged 16-24 ("Opportunity Youth") from its creation in September of 2024 through November of 2026. The program was funded by a one-time allocation of American Rescue Plan Act monies from the City of New Orleans, and the program served over 11,500 young people. Enrollments in the program closed in August of 2026, due to declining program funds.

In the same month, RIDE released a comprehensive report, *A Ticket to Opportunity*, analyzing the pilot program's successes and challenges and mapping the way forward for a permanent program. In September 2026, the New Orleans City Council unanimously adopted Resolution R-26-356, introduced by the Transportation Committee Chair Councilman Eugene Green, which publicly recognized the program's success, outlined the City's support for the pursuit of public, private, and/or philanthropic funding to sustain a permanent program, and stated the City's intent to develop and administer a permanent program if funding is secured. At the time of writing, funding is still being sought.

This report is intended as a supplement to *A Ticket to Opportunity* and is based on the analysis of an extensive survey of Opportunity Pass users carried out between April and August of 2026. The survey was designed by RIDE's Youth Transit Ambassadors in collaboration with core RIDE staff, and was presented to participants at a RIDE Youth Focus Group for feedback before distribution in order to ensure questions were accessible to young people and addressed relevant aspects of their transit experience. Survey questions covered Opportunity Youths' general usage of the transit system, the destinations they travel to via transit and those they would like to, their experiences on and perceptions of the region's transit system, and how the Opportunity Pass program itself has impacted them and their transit use, in addition to demographic information.

Invitations to complete the survey were sent via email to all enrolled program participants who provided a contact email upon enrollment, with rolling notifications sent to newly enrolled Opportunity Youth throughout the survey period. Additionally, both digital and paper copies of the survey were available to RIDE's Youth Focus Group participants, for those without access to a phone or computer.[1] As an incentive to

[1] For more information on RIDE's Youth Focus Groups, see *A Ticket to Opportunity* (RIDE, 2026).

complete the survey, participants who provided contact information were automatically entered in a random drawing to receive a $75 Visa gift card. A total of 345 survey responses were received. From these, 7 were identified as duplicates, leaving a final sample size of 338. All quotes contained in this report are taken from survey responses. Some quotes have been minimally edited for length and/or grammatical clarity.

"Free transit with the Opportunity Pass has helped me stay consistent with work and appointments without stressing about transportation costs. It makes it easier to get where I need to go on time, whether that's work, school, or important errands. Not having to worry about paying for rides every day has also allowed me to save money and focus more on my goals. Overall, it's made getting around more reliable and less of a burden."



Opportunity Youth and Youth Transit Ambassadors at a RIDE Youth Focus Group

How Youth Use the Transit System

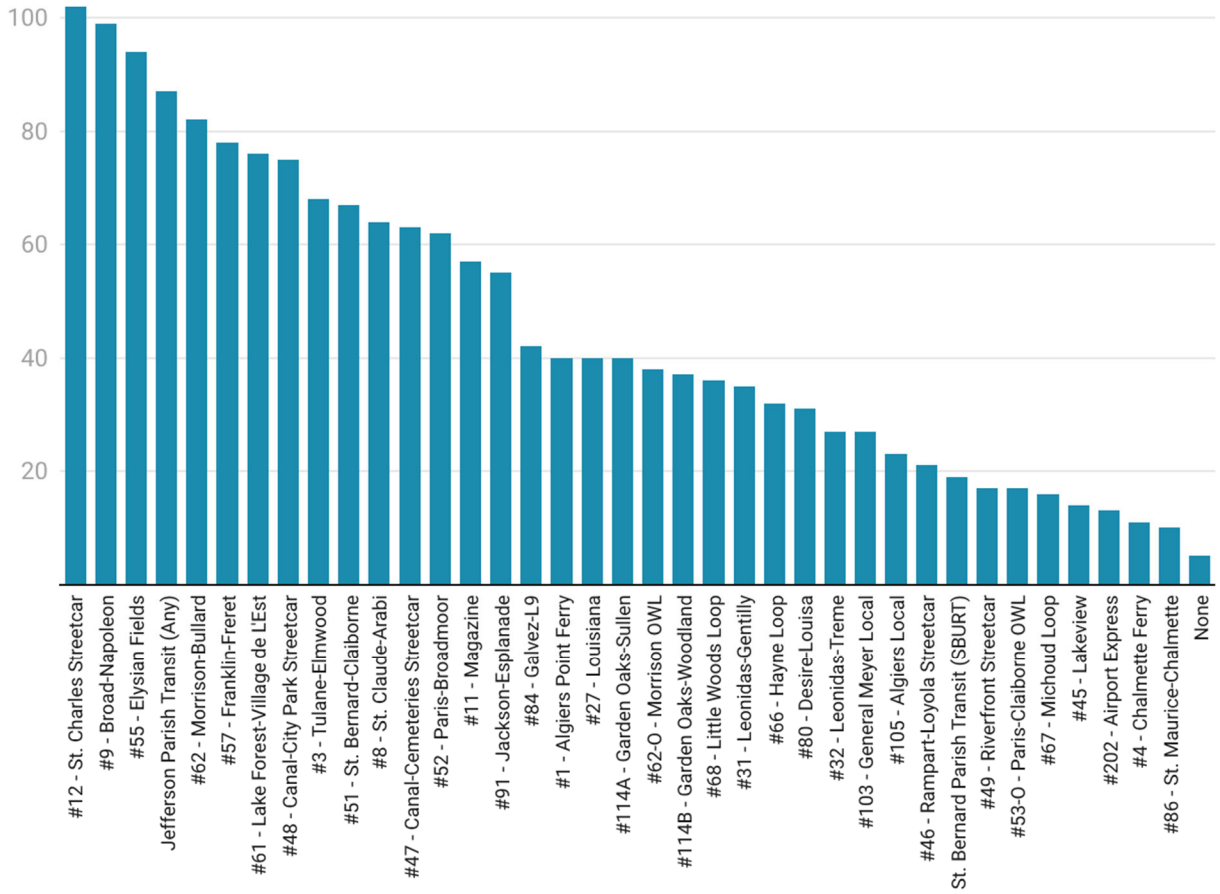
One of the primary objectives of the survey, and a significant object of the pilot program as a whole, was to better understand youth mobility and transportation needs in the Greater New Orleans region. In order to advocate for, design, and implement a transit system that serves the needs of young people in our city and region, we need to understand what those needs are. Prior to the present survey, no comprehensive analysis of youth mobility has been undertaken in the New Orleans metropolitan area.

Transit Ridership

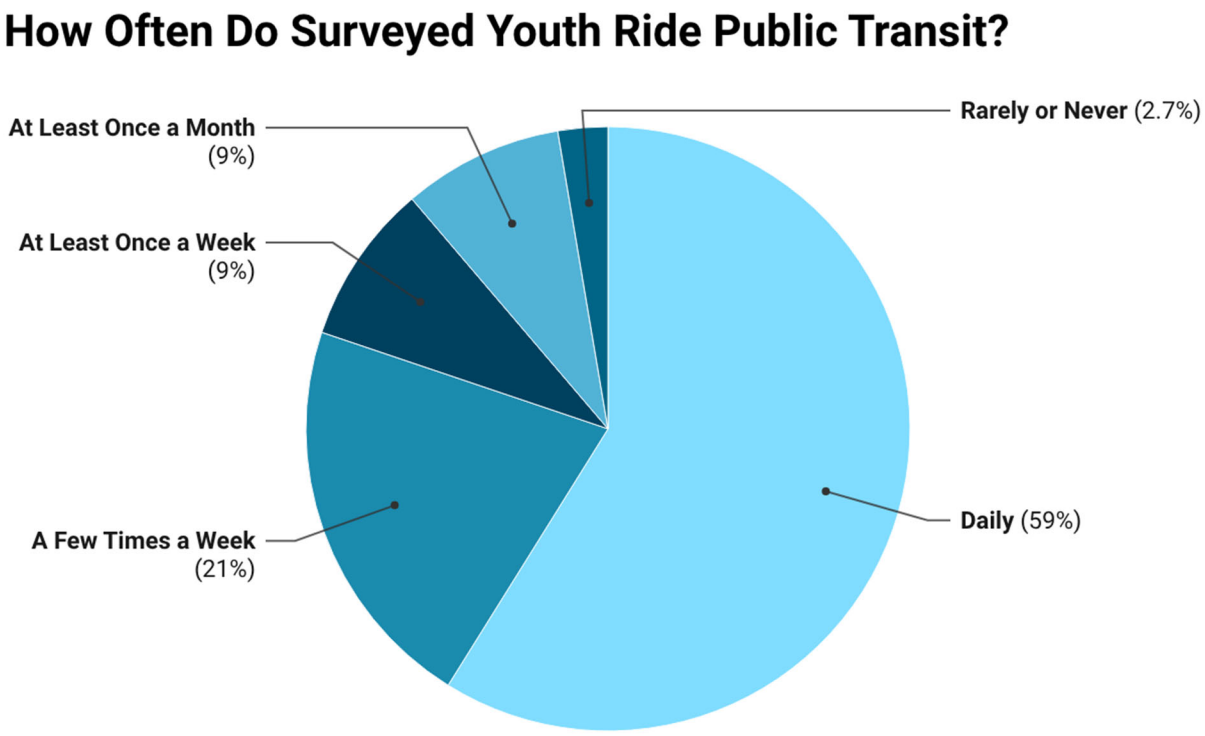
The transit lines most heavily used by surveyed youth largely align with the region's highest ridership[2] lines systemwide, with a few notable differences. Several routes which serve New Orleans' many college and university campuses ranked higher in the survey results proportionate to their overall ridership. Among these are the #55 Elysian Fields bus, which serves LSU New Orleans (formerly University of New Orleans), Southern University at New Orleans (SUNO), Dillard University, the city's downtown job core, and several high schools. In terms of systemwide RTA ridership, the #55 generally ranks between 10th and 15th in terms of overall monthly ridership, whereas among surveyed youth it was the third most heavily used line, surpassed only by the St. Charles streetcar and the #9 Broad-Napoleon bus. The #57 Franklin-Freret bus, which connects Tulane, Loyola, SUNO, and several high schools to the downtown job core similarly ranked far higher among surveyed youth than would be proportionate to its overall ridership, which is similar to that of the #55. Conversely, the #3 Tulane-Elmwood bus, which consistently ranks as the third highest ridership line in the RTA system, ranked much lower among survey respondents. While the line connects several major job centers and residential neighborhoods, it notably does not serve any universities, colleges, or New Orleans public charter high schools.

[2] For current systemwide ridership on RTA buses and streetcars, see RIDE's *Transit Data Portal*, available at https://rideneworleans.org.

What Transit Lines Do Surveyed Youth Regularly Take?



At a glance, this data provides us with a key insight into youth travel patterns. While Opportunity Youth rely on the transit system to address a myriad of needs, ranging from school and work to job training, healthcare, childcare, groceries, and recreation as we will explore later in this report, many of these needs are likely dispersed geographically in ways not dissimilar to the needs and transit destinations of the regions' overall ridership. Schools, while far from the only destinations youth need to access, do nevertheless represent highly *concentrated* destinations for young people, indicating a need to ensure these locations are well connected to youth's places of residence and other critical needs.



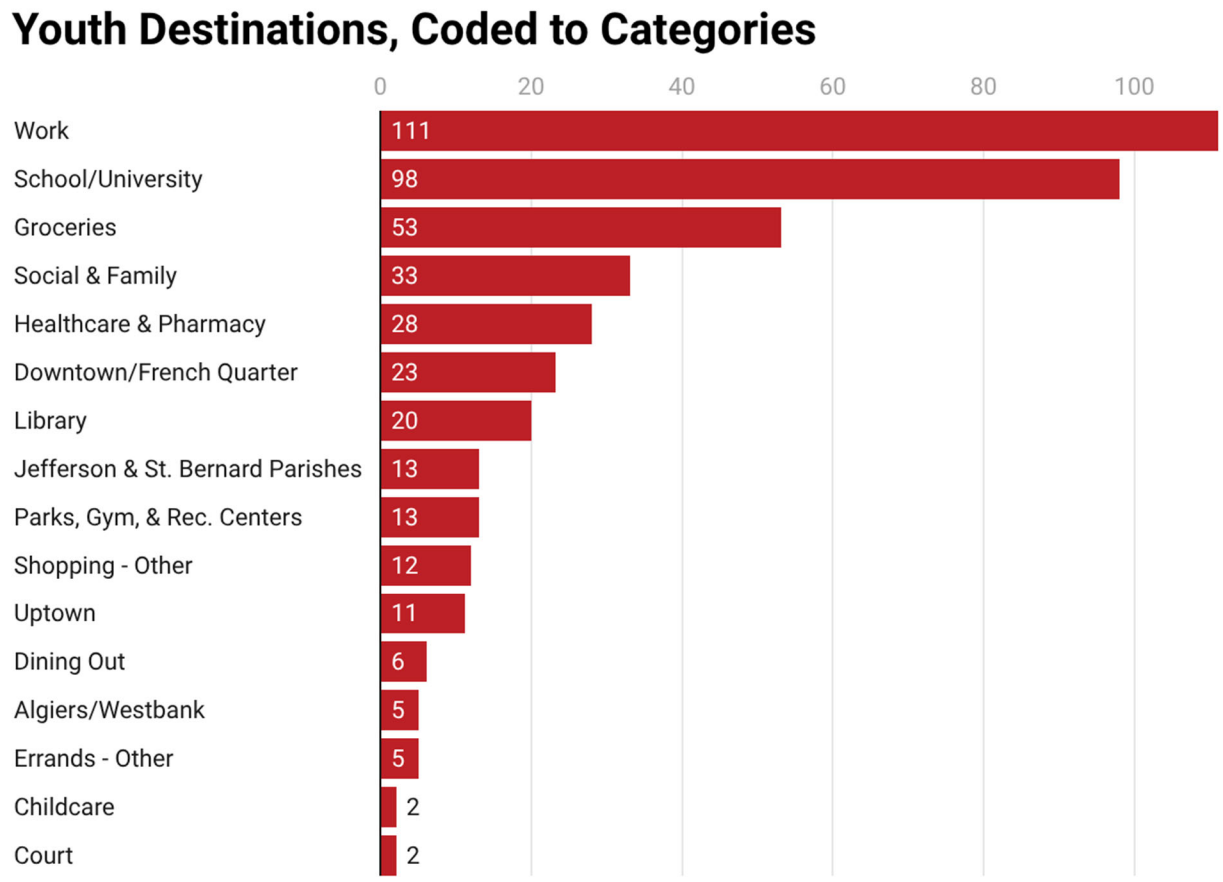
When surveyed on the frequency with which they ride transit, 59% of respondents indicated daily use, 80% reported using the system at least a few times a week, and almost 90% indicated riding at least once a week. These numbers are higher than the self-identified frequency of transit use for all Opportunity Pass users upon enrollment (55% daily, 75% at least weekly).[3] This increase may be caused by increased usage after enrolling in the program (as many youth have indicated that having the Opportunity Pass has increased their transit usage), or may be due to slight survey bias, where frequent riders may have been more likely to respond to the survey.

Youth Destinations

The survey asked respondents to "tell us more about the places you currently take public transportation to and your experience getting there," an open-ended question designed to induce a broad range of responses, beyond what might have been collected had we opted to offer specific destinations or categories. To better assess the responses, the destinations youth provided were then coded into 16 categories, representing both destination types (e.g., work, groceries) and geographic destinations (e.g., French Quarter, Algiers). When both types of information were provided, a

[3] See *A Ticket to Opportunity*.

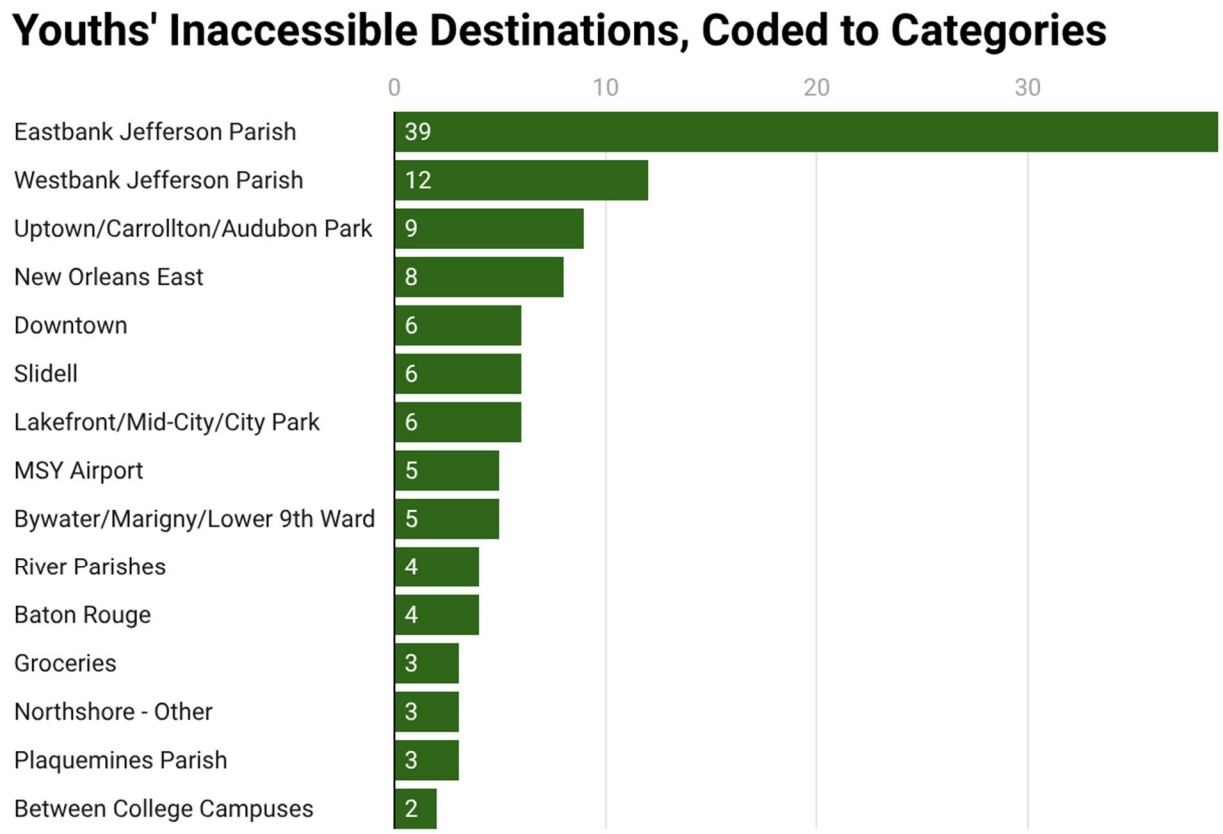
destination was coded twice (e.g., a youth indicating they take transit to work in the French Quarter was coded as both “Downtown/French Quarter” and as “Work”).



The top mentioned destination was work (111 times), followed by school (98). It is important to note that a significant number of responders indicated use of transit for *both* work and school. Among specific schools mentioned, the most common were LSU New Orleans/University of New Orleans (10), Delgado (5), and Tulane (4). Most respondents did not indicate a specific school or place of work. Other key destination types included grocery shopping (53), social and family destinations (33), healthcare and pharmacy destinations (28), libraries (20), and parks and physical recreation (13).

The use of geographic destination indicators shows that youth commute across the greater New Orleans region, including to destinations outside of Orleans parish, where they often indicated extreme difficulties with minimal service offered on Jefferson Parish (JP) Transit. Less commonly indicated destinations like court and childcare services are important to note as well, as youth with children of their own and those in the criminal justice system are likely to be among the most vulnerable in our community.

"I typically catch the transit to any and everything. I ride to work, to go thrifting, to court, to buy groceries, to doctors' appointments, to buy lunch. I will ride transit for all desires imaginable."



Additionally, youth were asked to "tell us if there are places you would like to be able to go on public transportation but do not, and why." As with the previous question, the format was open ended and responses were coded to categories. In this instance, responses were coded to geography first, and only left as a category when no geographic destination was offered (e.g. *"Grocery stores. There's no direct route from my house to a cheap grocery store and if I make a transfer it takes so long that my frozen groceries would go bad"*). Geographies were consolidated to limit the data to a reasonable number of categories.

Nearly half of the responses indicated desired destinations in neighboring Jefferson Parish, both on the Eastbank (44 responses, when counting MSY airport) and Westbank (12). Among these, Lakeside Mall in neighboring Metairie was the single

most frequently cited desired destination. While the RTA runs some routes that serve parts of Jefferson Parish, including the airport, the parish (larger and more populous than Orleans) is primarily served by JP Transit. Reasons cited for inaccessibility of these destinations included limited frequency of JP Transit service, poor connectivity between JP Transit and RTA, the lack of night and weekend service on JP Transit, time burden, the cost burden associated with JP Transit not being a part of the Opportunity Pass program, and a general lack of transit lines connecting to desired destinations.

"I can technically reach my parents' house in Westwego, but it takes over an hour and is a three-bus trip, so it's not very feasible. I would like to be able to reach other places like the Lakeside Mall, but there aren't any RTA buses out in Metairie."

"I had this high paying job that was so amazing, but I had to quit because it was in Metairie and the bus ride was over an hour long."

Some youth expressed desires to travel even further in the region, citing desired destinations in Slidell and the Northshore of Lake Pontchartrain (9), the River Parishes and Baton Rouge (8) and Plaquemines Parish downriver (3). Even within Orleans Parish and the RTA system, youth reported finding certain areas of the city inaccessible to them, due to the need for multiple transfers, excessive wait and travel times, and poorly coordinated routes and schedules. These factors often prevent youth from reaching family or social events, forcing them to change jobs to ones that are more accessible, or forgoing necessities like groceries.

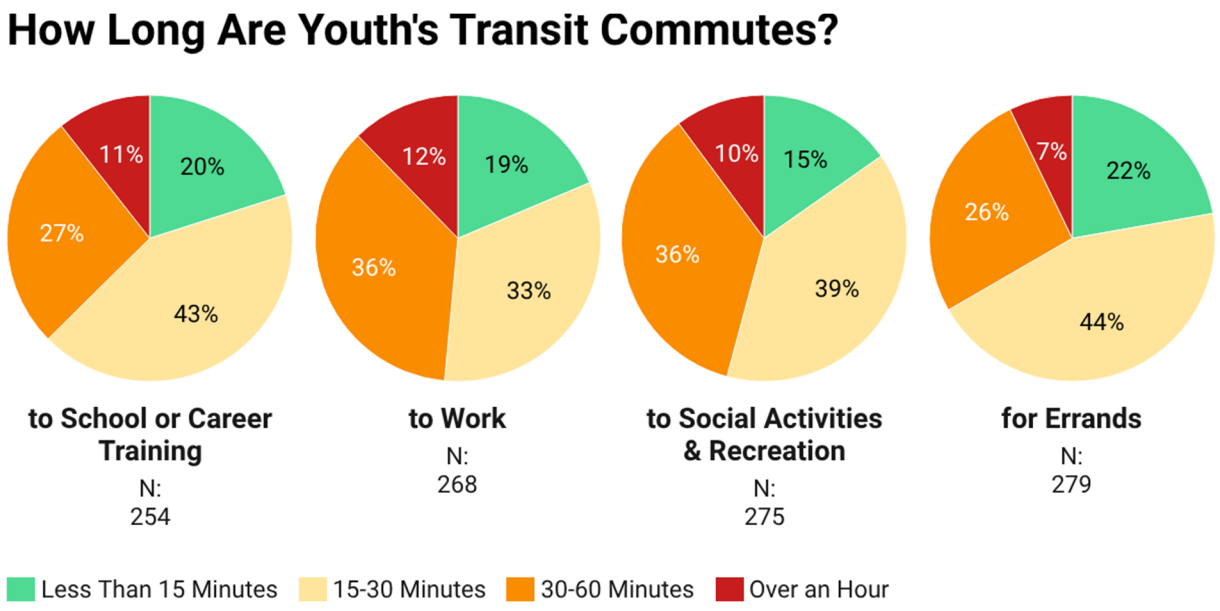
"I have noticed a lack of bus lines that go from Uptown to the Marigny and back, so there are times when I want to go to one of those places but can't, because there's just no transit options. I also wish there were more options for getting to the lake or the East. It would be easier to go to UNO, the Lakefront, and everything else in that area if there were more easily accessible routes. The main reason I do not go to these places is that getting there requires sometimes multiple transfers and really long travel times, and that becomes especially difficult in the summer when the heat becomes dangerous."

Commute Burden

Youth were also asked to indicate how long it takes them to get to various destination types on public transit. Those who indicated they did not use transit to reach a given destination or skipped the question were not included in the analysis shown. Generally,

youth have the highest commute burdens to work and the lowest commute burdens for errands. This is unsurprising, given that employees (youth or otherwise) tend to have limited flexibility in work and living locations, due to employment center locations, residential rent patterns, specific career pathways, and myriad other factors. 12 percent of youth indicated work commutes on transit of over an hour, more than for any other destination category, and nearly half reported commutes over 30 minutes.

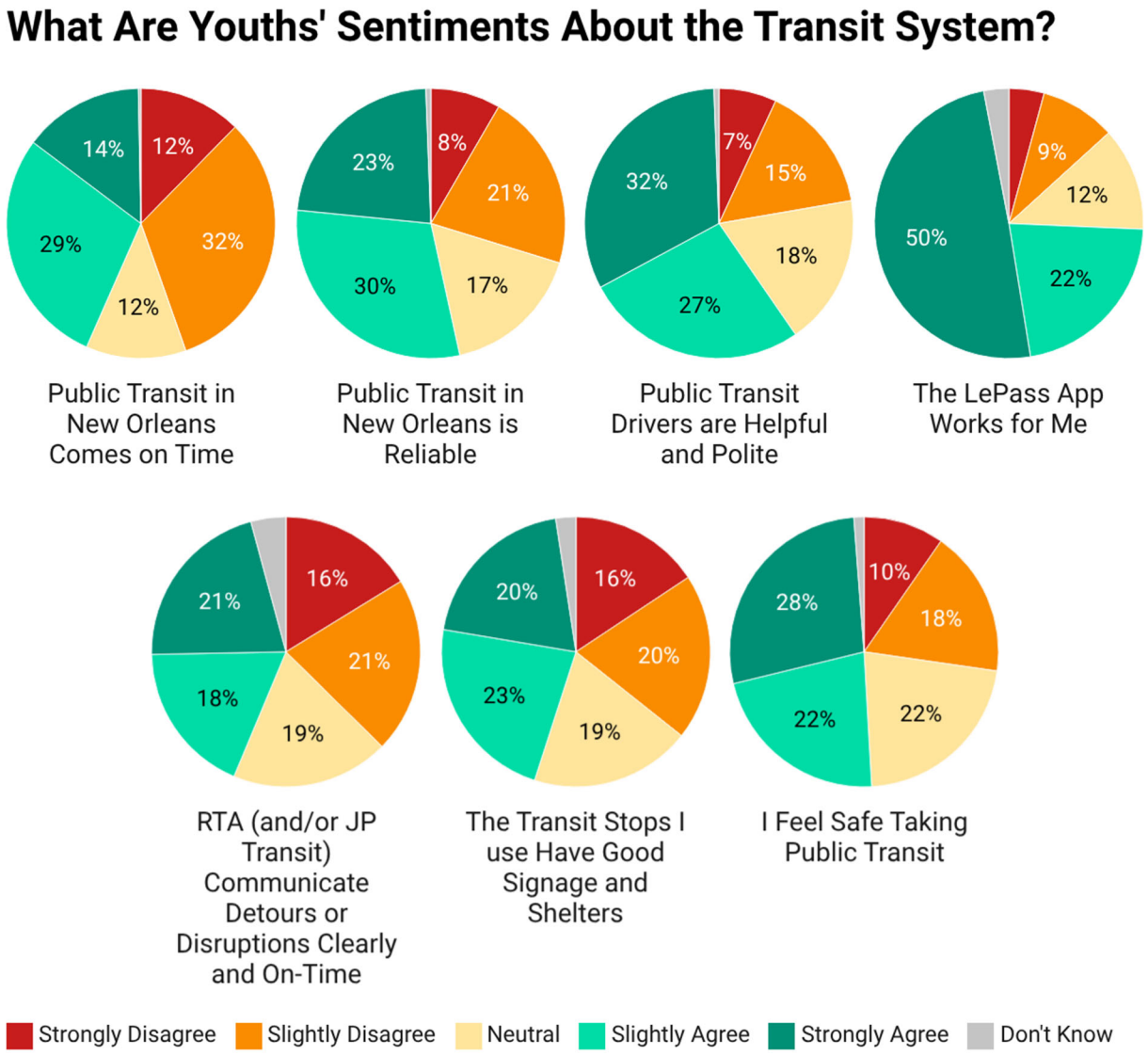
Conversely, many errands (with notable exceptions, such as the need to see a specific healthcare provider) can be more flexible in terms of specific geographic destination based on residential location and transit availability. Two thirds of respondents indicated that their trips for errands were generally under 30 minutes.



Interestingly, commutes to school and career training, while demonstrating a high percentage of extreme burden (11% of respondents' trips taking over an hour), had a relatively low level of moderate burden (27% taking 30-60 minutes). This may indicate a higher proportion of students choosing to reside on or in close proximity to campuses. Commutes to recreational and social activities displayed a relatively high level of both moderate and severe commute burden, with nearly half of trips taking over 30 minutes. This indicates the crucial value of these activities, often deemed “non-essential” to youth, and the importance of ensuring the transit system meets youth needs not only for work and school, but also for recreation and joy.

Youth Perceptions of the Transit System

In addition to understanding youth's travel patterns and needs, another critical aspect of the survey was to better understand their lived experiences using the region's transit system. In order to advocate for meaningful improvements to the system, it is critical to understand how youth riders perceive the system as it stands. Youth perceptions of the transit system were collected through three questions. Two were open-ended: the sentiments expressed in response to the second half of the destination question examined above ("please tell us more about the places you currently take public transportation to *and your experience getting there*") and the final survey question "is there anything else you would like to tell us about your experience taking public transit?"



The sentiments youth expressed in response to these questions were primarily either positive or neutral. For those who did mention specific issues encountered on their commutes, the most frequent were unpredictable or unreliable service, crowded or dirty vehicles, delays, late or missing vehicles, vehicles passing up stops, issues with communications and the LePass app, rude drivers, and long wait times. While most of the youth who had positive experiences on their commutes left generic feedback (e.g., *"my experiences on the bus and streetcars have been good"*), among those who left specific positive feedback, the most common were gratitude for the Opportunity Pass program itself and an appreciation for helpful and polite drivers.

"It is 50/50 if it will be a smooth trip. The app is unreliable and the communication is practically non-existent."

The second assessment of youth's sentiments about the transit system was in the form of a 5-point Likert scale, where youth ranked responses to seven questions about the transit system from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree." Youth sentiments about the LePass app's functionality and about transit vehicle operators were largely positive. Sentiments about system reliability and safety were mixed. Sentiments relating to the timeliness of transit, signage, shelters, and communications all leaned negative. These sentiments align with many of the persistent issues RIDE has raised and addressed to agency leadership for years, and mirror issues communicated to us by other groups, including hospitality workers, senior riders, and the general transit riding public as a whole.

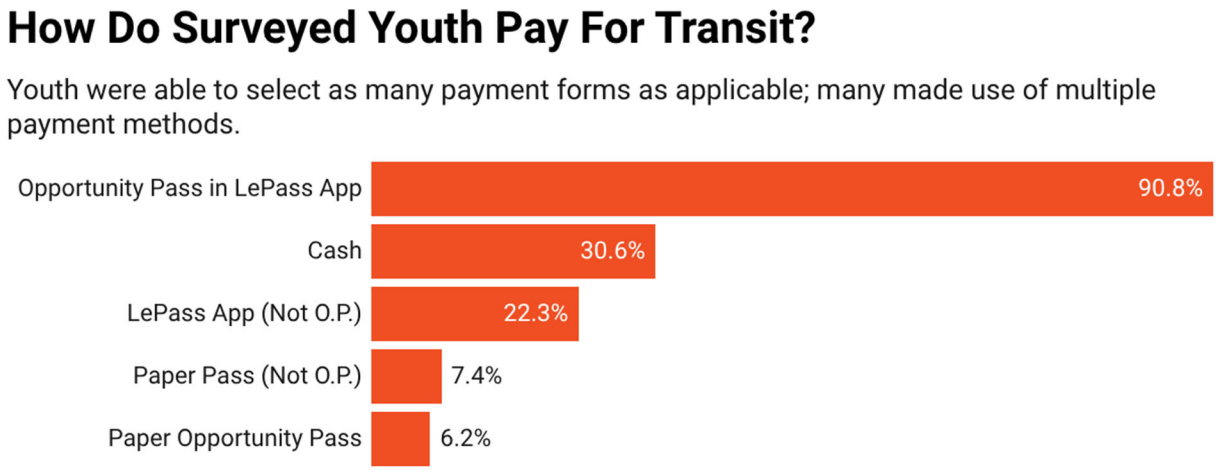
"Public transportation is a human right. It is a service that requires more funding, it doesn't have to generate lots of income. It is humiliating to wait in the elements for an unreliable line. It is dehumanizing to pack together like sardines in a dirty vehicle because the city doesn't want to fund more transportation. We the citizens are of more importance than tourists. We live and love the city, love us back."

The Opportunity Pass: Usage & Impacts

Aside from building our understanding of youth's usage and experience of the transit system, another key goal of the survey was to build an understanding of youth's experiences with the Opportunity Pass pilot program itself. With a goal of evaluating the pilot in order to create recommendations for the development and implementation of a permanent program, it was crucial to understand the pilot's impacts on youth travel and identify opportunities for improvement.

Pass Usage & Fare Payment

Youth were asked how they pay for transit, and were allowed to select as many payment methods as were applicable. For those who used multiple methods (e.g., Opportunity Pass and cash), they were asked to indicate why. The majority of youth surveyed (90.8%) used the digital version of the Opportunity Pass through the LePass app, while 6.2% used the paper Opportunity Pass option, which was rolled out as an option in June of 2026, midway through the survey period. Those who selected cash as their only form of payment were respondents who did not have access to a working smartphone and completed the survey before the paper pass option was made available.



Many of the respondents used multiple payment methods; nearly a third of respondents (30.6%) reported using cash at least occasionally. The primary reason youth who were enrolled in the digital (LePass app) Opportunity Pass program utilized cash was in instances where they had issues with their phones or the app. Lack of reliable access to data service or Wi-Fi to download and activate passes, dead phone batteries at the end of the day, technical issues within the LePass app, and lost or broken phones all forced

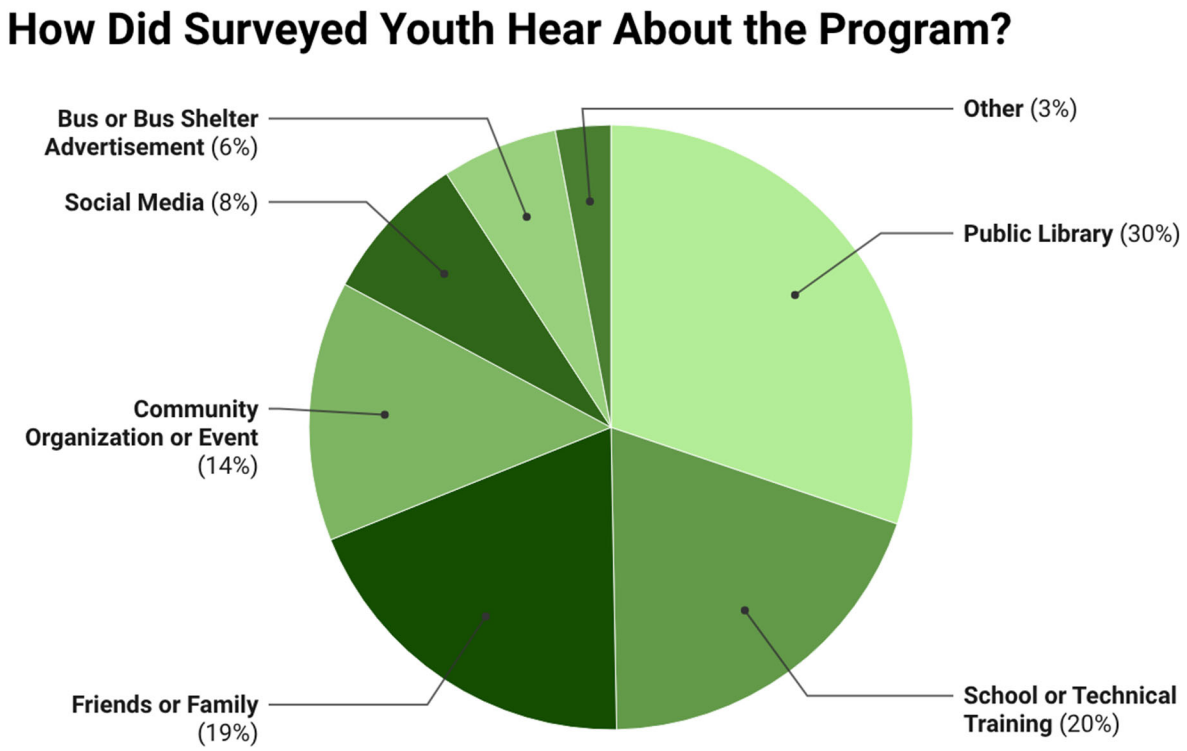
youth to pay for transit with cash despite being enrolled in the program. These responses indicate the critical need for a physical pass option not tied to a smartphone.

"I don't always have Wi-Fi, data, or battery charge on my phone, OR even a phone, so in any of those cases I would not be able to use the Opportunity Pass... just cash."

The other reason youth used cash, or non-Opportunity Pass payment methods, was to ride JP Transit, which was not a part of the Opportunity Pass program. Throughout the program and RIDE's outreach, youths' critical need for accessible regional mobility options continue to be demonstrated.

Discovering the Program

The survey also asked youth how they first heard about the Opportunity Pass program. The most common responses were at the public library (30%), at school or technical training (20%), from friends or family (19%) and from community organizations or events (14%), followed by social media, advertisements, and others.



Throughout the program's run, youth continued to enroll steadily.[4] Notably, when the program partners announced in early August of 2026 that enrollments would end mid-month, there was a major surge in enrollments as media coverage around the program increased. This indicates the critical nature of developing a robust public communications plan, including mainstream media coverage, around the rollout of any future permanent program. It is especially critical to ensure information about the program is conveyed effectively to the city's most vulnerable youth, who may be disconnected from mainstream media, internet, or other forms of communication and outreach.



Impacts

The final question asked youth, "if you have the Opportunity Pass, how has free transit helped you?" Most of the responses pointed to increased mobility, cost savings, and reduced stress associated with transportation and transit costs. Many others indicated

[4] For enrollments over time, see *A Ticket to Opportunity*.

the program led to them using transit more often and becoming more comfortable and proficient traveling via public transit. Others described the pass leading to them exploring and engaging with the city and community in ways they had not done before. Many pointed to truly life-changing impacts: the ability or choice to stay in school or find a job, to access medical appointments, and to visit family members. Many indicated that while bus fares may seem low, they add up to amounts that are truly impactful in the decision-making processes and opportunities available to young people.

"Free transit is literally a life saver. It feels so good to save a little money every day. I have 4 kids, so every bit of change I can save is a blessing."

"It's helped a lot! From saving money to understanding how transportation in New Orleans works, it's honestly been a life saver."

"Finances were and still are a huge burden. Most jobs in New Orleans don't pay well so it almost felt like you were burning up a significant amount of your check just to get around, especially if you're a university student like myself."

"There would be days where I didn't have anything, let alone $1.25. I would be rushing to work or rushing to classes and the stress of figuring out how to get there, whether I had to run or pray someone would give me a ride... the Opportunity Pass helped rid me of the fear of being late or constantly questioning how I was going to get somewhere."

"It has saved me a lot of money, since the money I would otherwise use in transit passes can go to other things. I also use public transit way more frequently because it's free, so I don't limit myself on use as much as I would before."

"I have a lot more time and mental energy to spend doing the things I enjoy. I also now have more freedom with how I get around, and feel a lot less trapped in the little neighborhood I live in."

"Without [Opportunity Pass] I don't think I'd be working, going to school, or going to visit relatives."

Conclusions & Next Steps

The data collected through this survey has helped us to better understand youth's travel needs, the impacts of the transit system on their mobility, and how the system needs to adapt in order to better serve youth needs. Furthermore, it has shed light onto the Opportunity Pass program itself, providing critical insights into how a future permanent program should be designed and implemented in order to better serve young people's travel needs.

Some of the key recommendations and takeaways from the survey are:

- Youth rely heavily on public transit, and free access to transit has major positive impacts on youths' lives.

- Youth ridership across the system differs from general ridership. Certain lines, such as the #55 Elysian Fields and #57 Franklin-Freret buses, serve youth at rates disproportionately higher than their overall ridership.

- Youth use transit to access a wide array of destinations, including work, school, groceries, healthcare, their families, recreation, and much more. Many youth use transit to access both jobs and education.

- Youth travel needs do not end at the city limits, and the current transit system often fails to meet youths' regional access needs, especially to neighboring Jefferson Parish.

- Many youth are heavily commute burdened, with the largest commute burdens experienced for travel to work, social activities, and recreation.

- The region's transit agencies need to make improvements to the system, particularly in terms of signage, shelters, detour and disruption communications, timeliness, and overall reliability.

- Youth need fare options that are not reliant on smartphones with data access. Any permanent iteration of the Opportunity Pass program should be based on a physical pass or card, or have a physical pass type option.

- An extensive, coordinated media campaign is needed to effectively spread awareness of any future iteration of the program, ensuring eligible youth have the information they need to enroll.

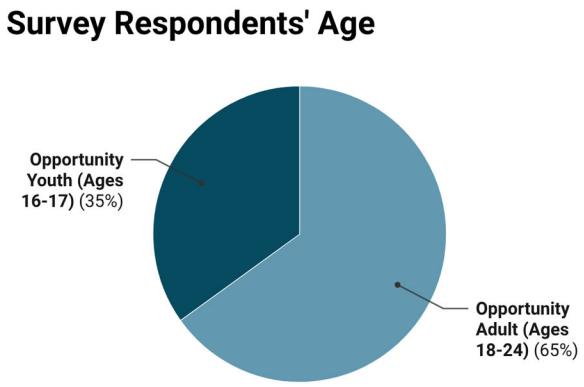
- The Opportunity Pass is life changing. The young people of New Orleans need, and deserve, meaningful access to opportunities and to joy.

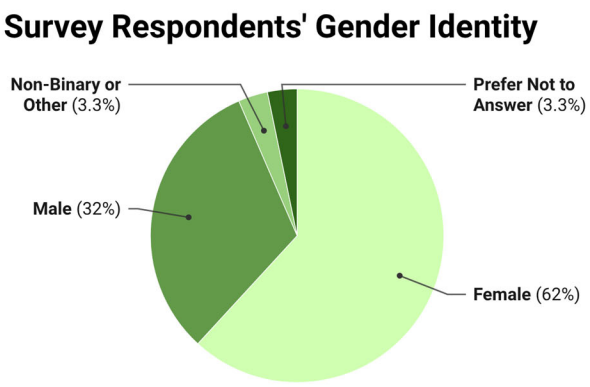
Going forward, RIDE will continue the work begun in the pilot program across several initiatives. First, with the support of the City and our program partners, we continue to seek donors and funding opportunities to develop a permanent program. If and when that funding is secured, while RIDE will no longer serve as the program administrators, we will work closely with the City as advisors to ensure the program is built out efficiently, effectively, and in a way that will best serve our city's young people.

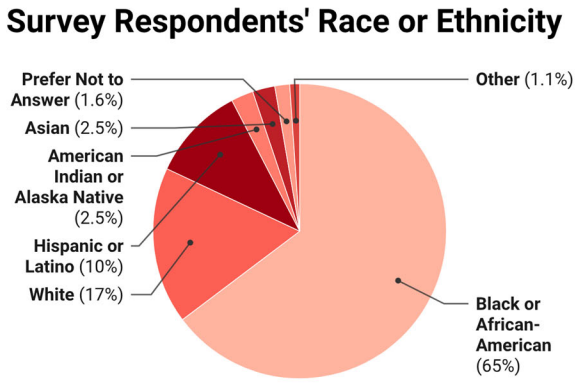
Additionally, RIDE continues to work with youth to better understand and advocate for their mobility needs. We continue to host Youth Transit Focus Groups, and are developing a multi-year youth mobility mapping project that seeks to visualize and quantify youth travel patterns in the region with the aid of Geographic Information Systems (GIS). The project aims to develop both an accessible database of youth destinations, created for youth and by youth, as well as to develop targeted policy recommendations for how the region's transit agencies and municipalities can better serve youth's mobility needs. RIDE also continues to host Youth Transit Literacy trainings and cohorts, designed to give young people the soft skills needed to travel confidently throughout their communities on public transit.

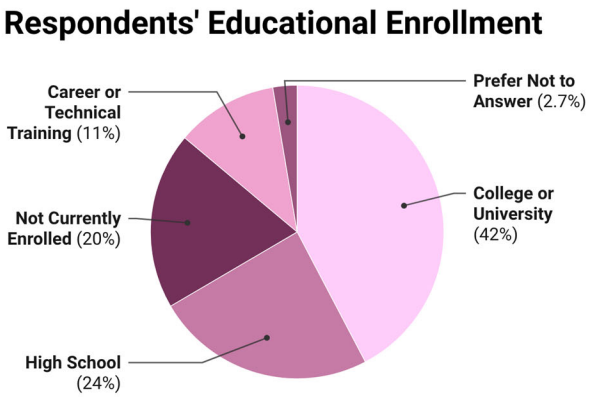
While the Opportunity Pass pilot program has come to an end, the needs of youth to access work, school, food, healthcare, community, and joy have not. RIDE remains dedicated to working with young people and with our partners around the city to advocate for the funding and systemic changes needed to ensure all young New Orleanians have meaningful access to opportunity.

Appendix: Survey Respondent Demographics





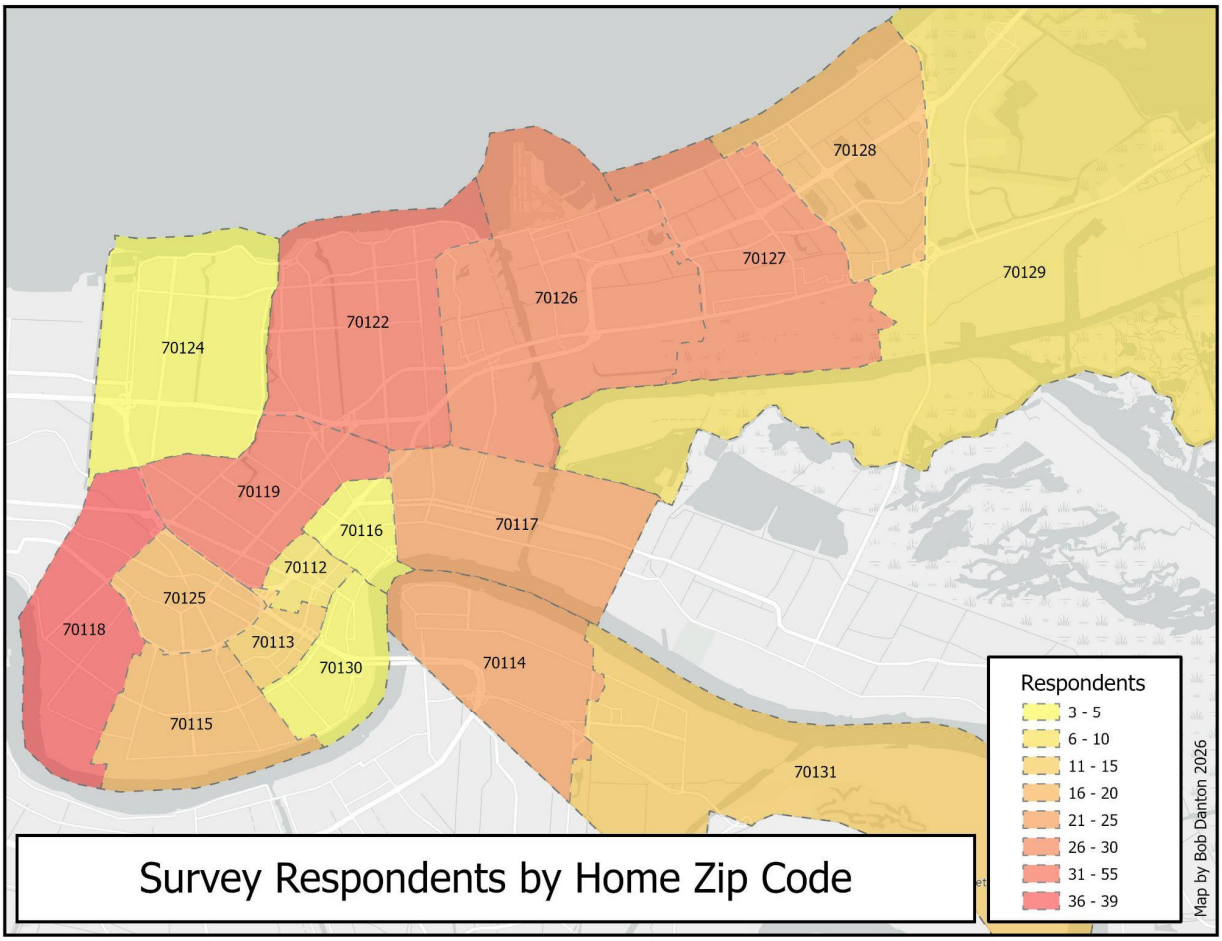




Survey respondents' demographics align extremely closely with the overall demographics of Opportunity Pass enrollees, indicating a highly representative sample.[5] In terms of race and ethnicity, survey respondents were 65% Black or African-American, 17% white, and 10% Hispanic or Latino, compared to 62%, 17% and 8% respectively for all program enrollees. The largest difference between survey respondents and overall enrollees in terms of self-identified race or ethnicity was a lower response rate of "prefer not to answer" among survey respondents- 1.6% compared with 3.7% among all enrolled youth. Educational enrollment in high school, college and among those not enrolled also corresponded closely, while the percentage of survey respondents enrolled in career or technical training programs was higher (11%) than among all enrollees (6%). 65% of respondents were in the Opportunity Adult (ages 18-24) age range, compared to about 60% of all enrollees, indicating a slight but not significant overrepresentation of this group in the survey compared to Opportunity Pass users overall. 62% of respondents identified as female and 32% as male, with the remainder

[5] For demographic analysis of all Opportunity Pass enrollees, see *A Ticket to Opportunity*.

identifying as non-binary, other, or preferring not to answer. Gender was not included on enrollment forms, so we are unable to compare these numbers to enrollees overall.



Geographically, survey respondents' home zip codes also correlated closely to the overall distribution of Opportunity Pass users across the city. Proportionately, the 70112 and 70117 zip codes were slightly, but not significantly, underrepresented in the survey.[6]

[6] For mapping of all enrolled users, as well as mapping of average pass activations per user across zip codes, see *A Ticket to Opportunity*.

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