



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Youth Ride Free Returns for Summer 2026**

**Contra Costa County, CA** — Following a highly successful youth program last summer, County Connection, Tri Delta Transit, and WestCAT will continue the Youth Ride Free program, offering fare-free rides on all fixed-bus routes for youth up to 18 years of age from June 1 through July 31, 2026. County Connection will also extend the Youth Ride Free program to its LINK paratransit service.

With strong participation and widespread grassroots community support, Youth Ride Free has quickly become a cornerstone program for expanding access and mobility for young riders across the three connecting service areas in Contra Costa County. By removing barriers—no fares, applications, IDs, or special passes required—young riders can simply get on board, making transit more accessible than ever.

“The Youth Ride Free program provides a vital mobility option for our youth in eastern Contra Costa,” said CEO Rashidi Barnes. “This valuable initiative allows our young people to participate freely in summer sports and school programs, connect with friends and family, all without relying on a car. Furthermore, as a teenager growing up in the Bay Area, public transportation enabled me to secure a summer job, which helped me support the local economy and develop important life skills.”

Last year alone, Tri Delta Transit transported 40,000 youth during June and July and expects to reach similar ridership levels this year. Recognizing the significant impact of the program, Tri Delta Transit thanks District 3 County Supervisor Diane Burgis and District 5 County Supervisor Shanelle Scales-Preston for their financial commitment, which has ensured the continuation of the 2026 Youth Ride Free program in eastern Contra Costa County.

Says Rob Thompson, General Manager of WestCAT, “Our goal this summer is simple—remove barriers and make it easier for young people to get where they need to go. By offering free rides, we’re supporting opportunity, independence, and stronger connections across our community.”

During last year’s Youth Ride Free pilot, WestCAT saw a 1,170% increase in youth ridership compared to the previous year. In 2025, WestCAT was the only participating agency that required students to show IDs to board—a requirement that did not significantly impact ridership. In 2026, WestCAT will eliminate this requirement, further aligning with the program’s barrier-free approach.



County Connection’s program also demonstrated a transformative impact on youth mobility, with more than 25,000 free rides recorded over two months—an increase of more than 1,600% compared to previous summer programs. This growth was driven in large part by strong community support, including school districts, parents, and local organizations that helped raise awareness and encourage participation.

“I’m very proud of our staff for creating a program that allows our students to ride our buses,” said Robert Storer, Board Chair of County Connection. “When a program takes what was near stagnant youth ridership in the summer months and boosts it to 25,000 rides, as it did with Youth Ride Free, that’s a powerful measure of success. It shows what’s possible when we remove barriers and work closely with our community.

Beyond increased ridership across all participating agencies, the program also shifted how young people travel, attracting many first-time riders. While Youth Ride Free removes fares for riders, all three agency-led programs are supported through alternative, short-term funding sources.

As Contra Costa and other Bay Area transit agencies navigate an uncertain long-term funding landscape, initiatives like Youth Ride Free represent a strategic investment in cultivating the next generation of transit riders. Building on this momentum, County Connection, Tri Delta Transit, and WestCAT will continue working closely with regional partners to strengthen transit connections and expand opportunities for youth throughout Contra Costa County.

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