

**For Immediate Release**

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**METRO's Youth Cruz Free Program Wins Transit Industry's Top Marketing Award**

*With a 400% increase in youth ridership, METRO will extend free youth rides through December*

Santa Cruz, CA (Feb. 27, 2024): At the American Public Transit Association's (APTA) annual marketing conference that took place mid-February, the Santa Cruz Metropolitan Transit District (METRO) took home top honors for its hugely successful promotion of Youth Cruz Free, the agency's program that provides free rides to K-12 students in Santa Cruz County. Originally conceived as a one-year pilot, METRO is now extending Youth Cruz Free through December, 31 2024 after the agency saw a 400% increase in youth ridership since the program began in March 2023.

"The goal of Youth Cruz Free is to encourage young people to form a lifelong habit of riding transit," said John Urgo, METRO Planning & Development Director. "This program increases access to opportunities and resources for all Santa Cruz County youth, especially those in historically under-served communities. We are so pleased to be able to extend it through the end of this year."

The digital marketing campaign to promote Youth Cruz Free won APTA's award for Best Social Media Campaign to Increase Ridership, beating out dozens of similarly sized transit agencies across the country. To introduce Youth Cruz Free to Santa Cruz County, METRO developed a creative campaign targeted to both parents and teens, using social media to spread the word far and wide that riding the bus is safe, accessible, and free.

"Since Youth Cruz Free launched, METRO has seen a 400% increase in youth ridership," said Danielle Glagola, METRO Marketing and Communications Director. "This fact alone speaks to the incredible need for this program and the effectiveness of our campaign in delivering the right message to the right people."

Youth Cruz Free allows any young person in grades K-12 to ride METRO services within Santa Cruz County free of charge. (Highway 17 Express service is excluded). Riders in 8<sup>th</sup> grade and under may be asked by the driver to identify their grade level or the school they attend. Students may be asked to show a student ID if one is available.

Riders in grades 9-12 will be asked to show student ID to the driver. High School students without a student ID can validate their grade level by getting a special pass from their school or signing up for a free METRO Youth Cruz Free ID.

To get a free Youth Cruz Free ID (for those without a student ID), visit one of METRO's Customer Service booths in Santa Cruz or Watsonville, Monday through Friday from 8 am to 5 pm (closed for breaks and lunch.) Bring a form of ID or proof of grade level and fill out the Youth Cruz Free On-Demand Form. Please allow at least 5-10 minutes for processing. The first ID is free.

For more information visit [scmetro.org/youthcruzfree](https://scmetro.org/youthcruzfree), or for questions call Customer Service at (831) 425-8600 or email [youthcruzfree@scmtd.com](mailto:youthcruzfree@scmtd.com).

## **About Us**

### **Santa Cruz Metropolitan Transit District (METRO)**

Established in 1968, METRO'S mission is to provide environmentally sustainable transportation to Santa Cruz County. METRO directly operates county-wide, fixed-route and Highway 17 commuter service, with connections to Santa Clara County and Monterey Salinas Transit at our Watsonville Transit Center. The agency also operates ParaCruz paratransit service. Today METRO operates a fleet of 94 buses on at least 24 fixed routes and 32 paratransit vehicles.

Every ride on a METRO bus takes cars off the road, significantly reduces greenhouse gas emissions, and supports economic opportunity and quality of life in our community. Moving into the future, METRO strives to meet the following goals:

- Increase transit ridership to 7 million trips annually within the next five years
- Transition to a zero-emissions fleet with a mix of hydrogen and electric vehicles
- Increase affordable housing at METRO-owned transit centers to 175 units in the next 10 years.

For more information, visit [scmetro.org](https://scmetro.org).