



Review of the FY2020 Operating Budget Proposal
An Official Report by the SEPTA Youth Advisory Council

The SEPTA Youth Advisory Council (YAC) is pleased to deliver its comments on SEPTA's Proposed Fiscal Year 2020 Operating Budget. The YAC was pleased with the recommendations, and we present additional comments and suggestions for the board and management in the enclosed pages.

The suggestions in this report reflect the views of the entire council, comprised of young transit users ages 16-23; the combination of City of Philadelphia residents and members residing in each of the four suburban Philadelphia (PA) counties provides diverse and valuable insight on millennials' visions of transit across our region. Furthermore, the YAC took special attention to ensure that our comments were representative of the youth of our region as a whole. As such, we remind readers that we'll inherit their decisions, consequences, and the implications of operational and capital spending for the next several decades. We write in support of the future we wish to see, and we are excited to support the Authority in ensuring the collective success of our region.

In Service,

SEPTA Youth Advisory Council

Prepared and Submitted by:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Will Herzog".

Will Herzog
Executive Chair

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Evan Wise".

Evan Wise
Executive Vice-Chair

YAC-Initiated Recommendations

Student Fare Discount Initiative

The YAC has long advocated for the development of a Student Fare Discount Initiative, wherein discounts are offered to college-age students on the SEPTA system in exchange for institutions of higher education providing universal bulk-access to the system. We look forward to continuing to work with SEPTA to develop such a plan and hope to have such a proposal adopted during the next operating budget cycle. As always, more information about the project can be found on the YAC Website at <http://septayac.com>.

Comments on Proposal

Strengthening SEPTA's Role in Housing and Land-Use Decisions

The YAC believes that there are revenue opportunities left untapped through poor coordination between service locations and opportunities to improve ridership. Many new buildings throughout the City of Philadelphia are constructed with parking directly next to high-frequency service, which is a disservice to our region and undermines local, state, and federal investment in transit. We believe that SEPTA needs to analyze and implement plans for increasing ridership at each station on the SEPTA high-frequency network, proactively respond to land use decisions that are not conducive to high-quality transit, and analyze real estate and surface parking lots for residential redevelopment opportunities. Peer agencies, such as MARTA, have seen success in redeveloping former station parking lots, providing new bases of riders, as well as real estate revenue for the agency.

Energy Action Plan Must Include a Path to Carbon Neutrality

The science cannot be ignored, and members of the YAC will be substantially affected by climate change within our lifetime. Therefore, while we appreciate SEPTA's progress towards sustainability, the progress needs to be expedited along with a schedule and date for phasing out carbon-producing fuels. Additionally, we are concerned that the data for waste management, recycling, and emissions indicates recent lack of improvement and/or rate of improvement; this does not match optimistic goals for the coming years. The YAC requests a more explicit outline of how SEPTA intends to reverse these trends, and what will be different.

Recruiting and Retaining High-Quality Talent

The YAC enthusiastically supports the bolstering of SEPTA's parental leave program and the addition of a student loan repayment program. While these policies will serve the authority well in retaining talent with high levels of educational attainment, SEPTA should not lose sight as its role as a regional public employer, particularly towards employing entry-level employees who've been historically or structurally excluded from the workforce. Special attention should be made towards

developing pipeline programs for certain positions and the consideration of expanded hiring for returning citizens. Moreover, the YAC finds critical links between employee retention and customer service. Efforts should be made to increase performance review for customer-facing employees, such as bus operators or fare booth operators, specifically in how these employees approach customers in need of assistance. Additionally, opportunity exists to combat rising healthcare costs by improving investment in employee wellness. The YAC believes that SEPTA should consider implementing an employee wellness program, improving physical plant related to employee health (such as fitness resources, or expanding the Medical department), and public-private partnerships with proven cost management solutions. The YAC is excited to assist the authority in strategizing ways to attract and retain the highest quality talent.

Ensuring an Inclusive Passenger Experience

The YAC is excited about the move from basic “Customer Service” to “Customer Intelligence and Analytics,” and we have particularly noticed the excellent work of Customer Service and Advocacy and Public and Government Relations in improving communications for non-native speakers of English. However, more work needs to be done in two key areas. The YAC believes that SEPTA is failing to provide sufficient real-time information for users of CCT Connect — among our most vulnerable passengers and a group that would most benefit from this type of improved communication. Philadelphia County is one of only two counties in the State of Pennsylvania that has not participated in the PennDOT’s initiative to upgrade paratransit scheduling software to a cloud-based, automated platform. This leaves state investment on the table to remedy this challenge. Moreover, the YAC wishes to help the authority in improving its experience for LGBT passengers and employees. We look forward to assisting in any capacity that we can.

Developing a Technologically-Integrated Experience

The YAC believes that re-prioritization is in-order to ensure that the website is improved first, rather than the mobile application. There is a strong belief among council members that the authority’s website is not up to caliber with both peer agencies and the technologically-friendly experience of Uber and Lyft’s web platforms. The YAC also finds significant remaining challenges with SEPTA Key. The lack of a chain retailer participation (Wawa, CVS, etc) leads to a difficult-to-navigate, fractured network of suburban locations where users can refill their Key cards; and it’s very concerning to our members that there is an abundance of check cashing participants, pointing users towards potentially predatory locations to make transactions. SEPTA should reach out to chain retailers to understand their technological barriers and remedy them through future investment. The YAC also finds continued difficulty with navigating SEPTA Key kiosks — in language, graphics, and speed. The Operations Budget references a “plan for digitization.” The YAC hopes to review this plan to provide further feedback.

Bus Network Redesign

The YAC is excited about the Bus Network Redesign program and applauds the authority for using in-house labor and expediting the timeline. We are especially excited by the proposal of “a route directness formula...to allow evaluation of requests for route deviations.” There is a sentiment that

many of SEPTA's recent service changes have added deviations with mixed results. We urge the authority to not consider this merely an "optimization;" substantial change is needed to legacy routes in order to achieve the service our region deserves.