Resolution urging the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency to collaborate with the San Francisco Unified School District to maintain and expand San Francisco’s Slow Streets program near schools, provide additional safe options for students to commute to and from school when in-person learning resumes, and collect additional data on student commutes.

WHEREAS, In response to the Covid-19 pandemic, the City and County of San Francisco (the “City”) created the Slow Streets program through the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency (“SFMTA”); and

WHEREAS, According to the SFMTA, the purpose of the Slow Streets program “is to manage traffic speeds and create a safe network for essential walk and bike travel while transit service levels are reduced,” by limiting designated streets to through traffic; and

WHEREAS, On April 6, 2021, the SFUSD Board of Education voted unanimously to give all SFUSD students the option to return to in-person learning starting in the fall of 2021; and

WHEREAS, As of April 12, 2021, some students at the San Francisco Unified School District (“SFUSD”) have returned to in-person learning after over a year of distance learning, due to the pandemic; and

WHEREAS, According to 2013 data from the UC Berkeley Center for Cities and Schools, 25% of SFUSD students rely on public transportation to get to and from school, and 21% walk or ride a bike; and

WHEREAS, Student transit commuters tend to be from lower-income backgrounds, and students of color; and
WHEREAS, However, the SFMTA has neither clarified nor committed to a plan for returning transit to 100% of pre-pandemic service levels, in part due to fiscal and logistical challenges, and has failed to assure students that the SFMTA will be able to provide this desperately needed service; and

WHEREAS, In the absence of fully restored transit service, which would render social distancing difficult or impossible for students commuting to and from school on public transit, the SFMTA has indicated that students may rely on the City’s network of 30 Slow Streets to safely walk or bike to school if possible; and

WHEREAS, Slow streets have helped provide outdoor space for community members, including and especially youth, to recreate and enjoy themselves during the pandemic while not fully eliminating local vehicle access; and

WHEREAS, Placing Slow Streets near schools, as was intentionally done in the Sunset, could help alleviate traffic dangers for students who walk, bike, or take public transit to and from school caused by drop-off and pick-up lanes when schools return to in-person learning; and

WHEREAS, Cities like Davis, CA have also prioritized dedicated bike lanes near and leading to schools, in order to facilitate safe, low-cost, and sustainable commutes for students; and

WHEREAS, Unfortunately, on April 8, 2021, principals at several Sunset district SFUSD schools requested that Sunset district Slow Streets be removed in anticipation of students’ return to in-person learning, which resulted in a temporary reopening of several Slow Streets to through traffic prior to them being restored after process issues were raised; and
WHEREAS, School administrators have claimed that they need “as much road real estate as possible during intake and dismissal times,” completely disregarding the safety of those students who do not commute to school via car; and

WHEREAS, Maintaining a robust network of Slow Streets across the City and near schools is key to ensuring all students have options for safely commuting to school when in-person learning resumes; and

WHEREAS, Furthermore, it appears that youth and students were not consulted before the temporary closure of Slow Streets in the Sunset; and

WHEREAS, While presenting Slow Streets as a primary option for the majority of SFUSD students that do not commute to school by car to do so safely is itself problematic, especially for students who live far away from their school, removing this option would simply be a further burden on students’ and their families as they navigate the difficult and frequently fraught process of returning to in-person learning; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That the Youth Commission supports the Slow Streets program, and encourages the SFMTA to expand the Slow Streets network and install better infrastructure to support their continued existence past the pandemic as community spaces and avenues for safe pedestrian traffic; and, be it

FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Youth Commission urges the SFMTA, SFUSD, and individual school site administrators to consult with students and youth about the future of Slow Streets, especially those near schools, and to collaborate with each other to collect more consistent data on student commutes; and, be it

FURTHER RESOLVED, That the Youth Commission urges the SFMTA to develop a plan to return transit to 100% of pre-pandemic service levels to alleviate crowding during school commute hours and enable students who rely on transit for their commutes to safely get to school when they return to in-person learning.
Nora Hylton, Chair
Adopted on May 17, 2021
2020-2021 San Francisco Youth Commission