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Transportation and School Access: A Case Study of the Geffen Academy

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Issue

In 2016, Metro introduced the Universal College Student Transit Pass (U-Pass), its reduced transit fare pass program for college and university students, with the expressed goal of increasing student transit ridership. An increase in college student transit ridership has great potential in Los Angeles County, where public transit ridership is declining, traffic congestion is worsening, and more than 1 million students are enrolled in postsecondary education at public institutions.

Researchers have found that reduced transit fare pass programs for university students are successful in increasing student transit use and reducing trips by private automobile to campus, generally with modest operational costs imposed on transit agencies. Is this true for U-Pass? A relatively young program, U-Pass raises questions for Metro staff about added costs and service demand on Metro buses and trains in exchange for increased ridership and student savings. Using ridership and survey data from the first two years of U-Pass, this research explores the relationships between U-Pass and student transit ridership, service demand and operating costs, and fare revenue/productivity of curb space.

Research Findings

- Due to the Geffen Academy's unique relationship with UCLA, the school keeps track of which students are the children of UCLA staff and faculty. Students of UCLA staff members represent 50 percent of the Hispanic/Latino population and 30 percent of the low-income population of enrolled students.
- There is no significant difference in the spatial distribution of enrolled students and students who applied but did not enroll. However, not enrolled students tend to live slightly farther away from the Geffen Academy than enrolled students.
- The travel survey showed that 80 percent of students who live less than two miles away from the school get to school by car, but as the distance from the school increases, the share of students who carpool increases.
- Google Maps travel time estimates show that travel time from the selected low-enrollment neighborhoods to school is up to 2.4 times longer by transit than by car.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Carpooling is the preferred travel mode for families who live further away from the Geffen Academy.
- Public transit can take almost twice as long as the same trip by car, which makes public transit difficult for students who live far away.
- There should be greater emphasis on recruiting more students from families who may live far away but have family members who work in Westwood.
- Students who declined to enroll at the Geffen Academy tend to live farther away from the school than enrolled students.

Study

The Geffen Academy provided data on the demographics and spatial locations of enrolled students and students who applied to the school but did not enroll. The researcher geocoded student addresses by zip code to see if there was a noticeable difference in the spatial patterns of enrolled students and students who did not enroll. The researcher then worked with the Geffen Academy to conduct a travel survey of enrolled students to understand how students travel to and from school, and what factors influence mode choice. Lastly, the researcher selected three neighborhoods with low densities of enrolled students and used Google Maps to estimate the travel time to and from school by auto and transit to compare the travel time of these two modes.

- Although costly to implement, the Geffen Academy should consider investing in a school bus that would provide direct point-to-point transportation for families, and would be a great benefit to families that cannot carpool.

Conclusions

- The Geffen Academy should focus on promoting carpooling to reduce travel costs for low-income families who live far away from the school.
- Public transit lines located within one half-mile of the Geffen Academy mostly serve the Westside of Los Angeles, which already has high densities of enrolled students. Furthermore, transit trips to and from school can take up to 2.4 times longer than the same trip by car. Therefore, transit may not be an effective means of transportation for families who live far away from the Geffen Academy.
- The Geffen Academy should focus more on recruiting students who may live far away but have family members who work in Westwood, including UCLA staff.

For More Information

Doyle, E. (2019). *Transportation and school access: A case study of the Geffen Academy (Masters capstone, UCLA)*. Retrieved from <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/23j909c5>

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