May 8, 2020

MTS Board of Directors
1255 Imperial Avenue
San Diego, CA 92101

RE: Youth Opportunity Passes as part of the MTS Covid Response

Dear MTS Board Members,

The San Diego Green New Deal Alliance is an affiliation of community, environmental, labor, and social justice organizations committed to ensuring the San Diego region achieves a zero carbon economy by 2035. Recently, the San Diego Green New Deal Alliance publicly released a letter to governmental leaders at all levels outlining our recommendations for federal, state, and local COVID-19 relief programs that will address the health, safety, and economic needs of everyday people while moving us toward a Zero Carbon future. Crucial to that vision are no-cost transit passes for youth, also known as Youth Opportunity Passes (YOP).

The shockwaves of COVID-19 have caused problems for both MTS as well as for MTS’s number one customer—working class families—who are suffering disproportionately from the health and economic impacts of the crisis. YOP will help our region achieve clean air and a livable future by reducing greenhouse gas emissions and meeting climate goals, as well as help the MTS create a new public image as a public service provider, essential to building a more sustainable region.

**The Community Wants YOP**

Since 2011, many organizations and community members have advocated for no-cost transit passes for youth 24 and under. In 2013, a successful pilot program was conducted in the City of
San Diego for 850 students in four transit-dependent high schools. Passes like these are not new to transit systems; many cities and regions across the state and country have established them. During the public engagement effort held for Elevate SD 2020, YOP came out as one of the most desired projects. In the MTS Elevate SD 2020 Vision Builder survey, communities and cities south of the Interstate 8 (National City, Lemon Grove, Imperial Beach, San Diego Districts 4,8,9, and County District 4) all had YOP consistently ranked in the top five projects in their survey answers. These are the same communities that are transit-dependent and experiencing the greatest economic impacts from COVID-19.

**Benefits of YOP**
Youth Opportunity Passes will not only increase access to educational and work-related opportunities for all youth; it will also increase ridership in our transit system. More young people riding transit means fewer people in cars, less traffic, cleaner air and reduced greenhouse gas emissions. Recently, MTS estimated a 65 and 70 percent drop in ridership since the beginning of March. In the months ahead, as the "Stay at Home" orders are relaxed or eliminated, how will MTS recover this loss? Experience has shown us that making transit free is one of the most effective ways to bring back previous users as well as add new users to the system. Youth Opportunity Passes are an immediate solution to both support ridership increase and help alleviate the financial impact that working families are suffering in the crisis caused by COVID-19.

**CARES Act Enables YOP**
The 2020 Coronavirus Aid Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act, Section 5307 provides nearly 220 Million dollars to MTS in FY 2020 for operating costs. These funds provide significant relief from the revenue loss that MTS is currently experiencing as well as much of what is anticipated for the year ahead. MTS should invest in the future of our transit system by increasing ridership. The CARES fund provides such an opportunity—a cost neutral program. In addition, the use of these Federal funds should be used to provide relief to people most affected by the financial stress the pandemic has caused. Seeking revenue from young people simply should not be a preferred policy especially when such funding has been provided to MTS.

While the COVID-19 crisis creates great challenges, it also offers a unique opportunity to pivot toward a more equitable, prosperous, healthy and sustainable San Diego. We urge you to implement Youth Opportunity Passes immediately in your response to the impacts of COVID-19. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Signed,

James Miller  
Vice President  
American Federation of Teachers 1931

Judi Tentor  
Executive Director  
Bike San Diego
Randolph Torres-Van Vleck
Senior Program Manager, Transportation & Planning
City Heights Community Development Corporation

Jack Shu
President
Cleveland National Forest Foundation

Maleeka Marsden
Co-Director of Policy
Climate Action Campaign

Tara Hammond
Climate Hub Manager
Climate Hub

Susan Orlofsky
Steering Committee Member
Green New Deal at UCSD

Tara Hammond
Founder & Chief Environmental Officer
Hammond Climate Solutions

Diana Ross
Executive Director
Mid-City CAN

Ramla Sahid
Executive Director
Partnership for the Advancement of New Americans

Jeff Olson
Founder
Public Bank SD

Chelsi Sparti
Associate Director
Samuel Lawrence Foundation

Joyce Lane
Co-Chair, Public Policy Team
SanDiego350

San Diego Coastkeeper
Matt O’Malley
Executive Director

Richard Miller
Chapter Director
Sierra Club San Diego

Connor Franklin Rey
Partnerships Team Lead
Sunrise Movement San Diego

JP Bruner
Climate Change Committee Co-Lead
Surfrider Foundation San Diego

Román Partida-López
Environmental Equity Legal Counsel
The Greenlining Institute

Reem Zubaidi
Refugee Health Unit Manager
UCSD School of Medicine

Brigette Browning
President
UNITE HERE Local 30

Sarah Martin
President
UPTE-CWA 9119 Local 9 UCSD

Sean Elo-Rivera, J.D.
Executive Director
Youth Will