



The Transit Reader

The official newsletter of the Transit Riders Union

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The Statewide Transit Funding Crisis

By Beau Morton

As transit riders, it can be hard to look beyond the particular stops and routes that we use most often to the larger transit issues in our state. Time and again riders have shown the willingness and ability to rally around service restructures and save those most-used routes and stops. But throughout Washington over the past decade, transit agencies have been forced to deal with constantly declining revenue, anti-transit legislatures, and transportation budgets built entirely around funding the building of roads.

While most states allocate on average about 17% of their transportation budgets for transit, in Washington it's only 2%. The passage of Initiative 695 in 1999 reduced the state's motor vehicle excise tax, which up to then had provided about one-third of King County Metro's total revenue. Since then, Metro has tried to make up the difference



"You say not as as good, I say front-wheel drive."

with fare increases – including an 80% increase over the past five years – cutting and restructuring routes, and cutting drivers' recovery time between runs. The burden for funding what should be treated as a public good has been shifted more and more onto those who ride, and, through the sales tax, onto those who buy: sales tax, which now ac-

counts the majority of Metro's funding, both hits the poorest the hardest and leaves Metro vulnerable to increasingly volatile economic conditions.

This year in the state legislature there have been several transportation funding bills – the best of which is HB 1959 – which include local fund-

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Is Public Transit Doomed?

By Scott Myers

Well, the situation for public transit in the Puget Sound does not look good. Pierce Transit has already been forced to cut about half of its transit service in the space of a few years. Community Transit in Snohomish County no longer offers Sunday service. And unless the state legislature offers some kind of funding option, next year King County Metro will be forced to go ahead with the 17% service cuts it had planned in 2011. Like education and healthcare, indeed like all public services, public transit is on the chopping block.

Solutions have been of- *Continued as DOOM?, page 2*

The Transit Riders Union Wants You!

By Sam Smith

Welcome to the Transit Riders Union's inaugural newsletter! Here you can read all about public transit issues, the projects and campaigns we're working on now, and our long-term goals.

Do you see anything you're excited about? Do you see anything missing? Then join us! If you use public transportation, we want you to become a TRU member.

What do you wish was different about King County Metro Transit and other local public transportation agencies? What is needed to make sure that all working and poor people in our region have access to safe, affordable, and reliable public transit? Lower fares? More frequent service? Better service to your neighborhood? Better lighting at bus stops? More accessible services? Cleaner buses? Better maps? Faster service? More bus shelters?

This is your opportunity to change public transit in our region for the better. We need your ideas, your voice, and your passion to help us fight for the better transportation system that we deserve, a system to which every person has safe and easy access, regardless of income and physical ability.

In the summer of 2011, we just barely avoided devastating cuts to transit service in King County that would have eliminated 17% of all bus service hours, completely canceling many routes. Did you know that the temporary funding used to prevent these

catastrophic cuts is set to expire next year? This means that if we don't speak up and act now, Metro service will be slashed in 2014.

Not only is transit service on the chopping block, riding the bus is getting less and less affordable. Since 2008, when the wealthy corporate power-holders dragged us into a recession, as poor people have grown poorer, we have seen our bus fare double. King County, finding itself strapped for cash, saw no other choice but to make up the difference by squeezing the poorest. We say NO MORE!

This is why we are campaigning for a Low Income Fare, and why we oppose further fare increases. We need to be making public transit more affordable, not less – and to stop global warming we need to make it easy for people to get out of their cars. Public transit is a public and social good that benefits everyone, and we need to find stable progressive public funding for it.

We are as strong as our membership. As a member, you have an equal voice in our decisions and our actions. Please join us!

We have member meetings at the Seattle Labor Temple (2800 1st Ave, Hall #6) on the first Monday of each month, from 6:30-8:30pm. To learn more come to a meeting, email contact@transitriders.org, call 206-651-4282, or visit <http://transitriders.org/membership>.

In solidarity and in transit,
Transit Riders Union

Who Needs a Low Income Fare?

By Katie Wilson

Are you "middle class"? If you're like most Americans, you probably answered "yes". We don't want to think of ourselves as "poor" or "low income" – it's like admitting we've failed. We're supposed to be living the American Dream, right? If we work hard, we should be successful and on our way to the top, or at least the secure and comfortable middle.

But the reality is, nearly half the population of the United States is now low income or poor. Are you a single-person household earning less than \$22,980 a year? Or a family of four earning less than \$47,100? Welcome to the club. "Low income" isn't "them", more and more it's "us": we're young and old, college graduates and high school drop-outs, parents and single adults, unemployed

and working three jobs, from all backgrounds and walks of life. What we all have in common is that this economy isn't working for us.

Meanwhile, our living costs, everything from food to rent to transportation, continue to climb. Metro bus fares have gone up four times since the Great Recession began in 2008, for a total increase of 80% – and fares will likely rise again next year. For many of us, public transit is becoming unaffordable.

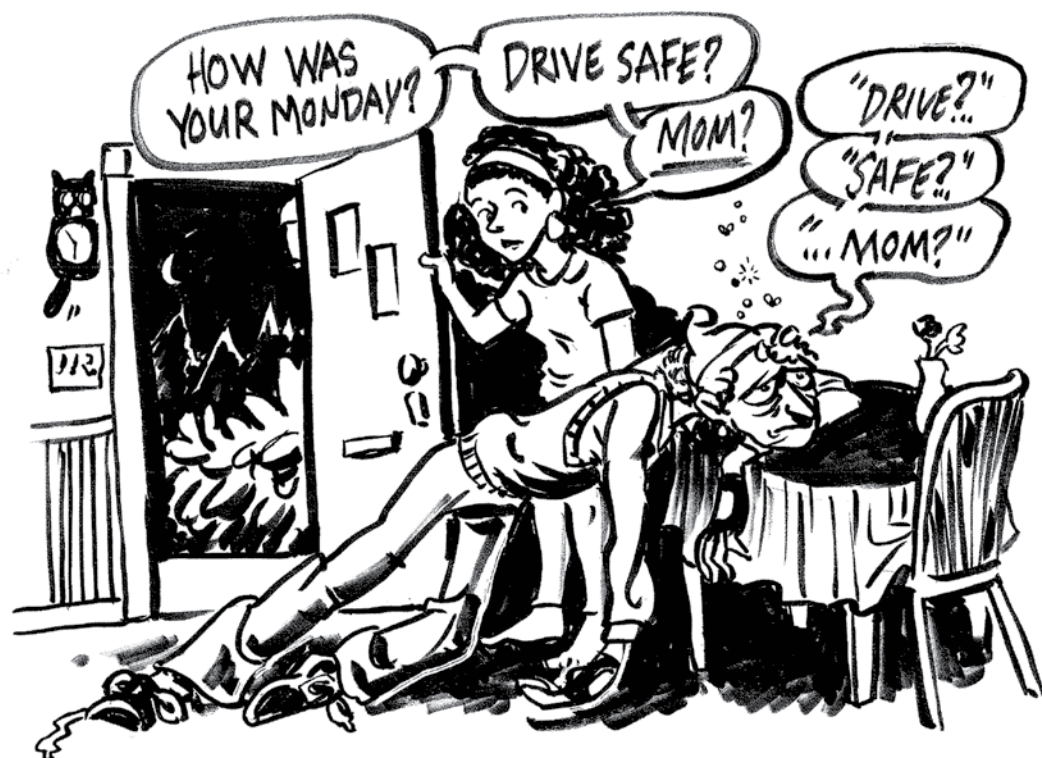
But we still need to get around: to work or to apply for jobs, to access services we depend on, and to care for friends and relatives who depend on us. Affordable transit is vital to our quality of life, and it's a public good that benefits everyone – when we have to plan our days to save on bus fares, everyone suffers the consequences.

The Transit Riders Union

believes that mobility should be a right, something we as a society can guarantee to everyone. We live in one of the wealthiest counties and one of the wealthiest states in the world. We should be able to achieve this basic level of civilization.

That's why we're campaigning for a low income reduced fare. King County is now studying and considering the options – if we succeed, Metro could be the first major transit agency in the country with a comprehensive low income fare program. But it's not going to happen without strong public pressure and organization by transit riders. We need your help! To learn more, sign our petition, volunteer, or join the Transit Riders Union, visit <http://transitriders.org> or get in touch: contact@transitriders.org, 206-651-4282.

From the Driver's Seat



By Susanna Smith

I'm a Metro Transit Operator and member of both the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) and the Transit Riders Union (TRU). Not only do I drive the bus, I am a daily rider as well. It seems to me that each union can be supportive of the other as we have common goals. We both want more and improved service. We want satisfied riders and drivers. To reach these goals, we need a stable funding source for transit because fares only cover 25-30% of transit service costs.

The major costs of operating a transit system are the people: drivers, management, maintenance, and support personnel. Metro drivers want to maintain their wage and benefit structure, but just as important are working conditions.

Since the recession, and subsequent cuts to transit funding, schedules have been tightened to the point where most drivers are not getting enough recovery time at each terminal to rest for a couple of minutes, use the restroom, or grab a bite to eat. After being in the driver's seat for anywhere from one to over two hours, dealing with heavy traffic, many rude car drivers, some discourteous passengers, overloads, using the lift/ramp, crying babies, and so much more, we need a short period of down time at the end of each trip. If we don't get it, we can become cranky and discourteous ourselves! If we don't have time, but have to go to the restroom or eat something anyway, we may leave late on our next trip, leading to upset riders, who may be then late to work, appointments, or their transfer. That's

why working conditions for drivers affect riders too.

We need to get funding not only to maintain and increase service, but to make service better, for both riders and drivers. This won't be easy. The state legislature is very disinclined to raise taxes, and the regressive tax structure we have now, depending heavily on sales taxes and property taxes, is not working. Unfortunately Washington voters, a couple of years ago, voted against an income tax for those making over \$250,000/year. There are many important services to fund, including education, social services, health care, low income housing, and we are all competing for the same small slice of pie. We need a more progressive tax structure! The TRU and ATU must work together for better transit funding and service.

When There is No Public Transportation

By James S. McIntosh

There are some who would say, "Public transportation is a tired old idea," or "It costs too much." But they need to ask the question, "Who uses it and why is it important?"

People use public transportation for countless reasons, including commuting to and from work at offices, industrial sites, grocery stores, and restaurants, for school, for medical reasons and to provide care. People ride transit to get to sports events, festivals, shows and other activities, and to connect with other transportation systems.

Severe transit service cuts in Pierce and Snohomish Counties and service reductions in many neighborhoods of Seattle and King County have disrupted the lives of many who depend on transit. People who do not own a car or are unable to drive now must find other ways to get around, sometimes walking several miles to get to their destinations. Others must pay expensive taxi fares. In many outlying areas even taxi service is not readily available. People must walk along narrow sidewalks and dirt pathways, climb steep hills, walk along bridges, cross dangerous intersections and

go through seemingly risky areas with poor lighting. Late night travel and winter weather make conditions even worse. Women in particular may feel vulnerable. It is the elderly, the low-income, the blind and visually-impaired, people with other handicapping conditions, and the young who suffer the most when there is no public transportation.

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Then there is the question of peak oil. The United States began importing more oil than it produced in 1971. According to the Hubbert Peak Oil theory, world wide we are at the end of cheap oil.

Global warming has been recognized by the national science

academies of all major industrialized nations to be a reality. The loss of public transportation means more cars on the road, most of them burning fossil fuels and contributing to the carbon levels in our atmosphere.

Unlike their older counterparts, young people are choosing to drive less and are instead using public transportation. In the last few years public transportation usage has risen.

At a time when public transportation is absolutely crucial, the worst thing we can be doing is cutting back.

DOOM?: Building a Movement

Continued from page 1

ferred. In King County, an excise tax was passed that charges motorists \$20 to renew their vehicle tabs. However, it was just a stop-gap; Metro has already made some cuts despite the measure, and it is set to expire in 2014. In Pierce County, a referendum was put to the voters to raise sales tax by 0.3%. It failed by a mere 704 votes.

But should we expect voters to support such regressive tax measures? Incomes of working people have been stagnating for decades, while costs of living and taxes have been rising. The economic crisis of 2008

has made this situation worse. How can the dwindling and already-overtaxed incomes of working people make up for the massive shortfalls in transit budgets, or those of any other social service?

Only progressive taxation – raising taxes on the wealthy – can solve the problem. But the corporate-financial elite don't want to be taxed. They have concentrated the mass of this country's wealth into their hands, and they are not about to let it slip through their fingers by way of taxation. So they use their money, their lobbies, their political influence and their media power to defeat any attempts to tax

them. Thus they force working people to face the Sophie's choice of cuts in service vs. cuts in income.

The only power capable of defeating such a formidable force would be a new mass movement of working people. Such movements have arisen at various times in history, and they will rise again. We can already see the seeds of such a movement, in the Occupy movement and in organizations like the Transit Riders Union. These seeds, and many more, will have to sprout and grow before a they constitute a real movement capable of taking power from the financial elite and putting it back

in the hands of the working majority. Until this happens, things are just going to keep getting worse.

So we must face the fact that there are many battles before us that we are not likely to win. Even so, we must fight. Our only other option is to lie down and die – let the financial oligarchs have their way with our transit system and our social services. We have a bitter struggle ahead, but we must not lose heart. For social movements are born out of such struggle, and nothing else.

At least one thing is certain: the Transit Riders Union is in it for the long haul!

The Transit Reader is a publication of the **Transit Riders Union**, an independent democratic all-volunteer member-run union. If you are interested in contributing to future issues, contact us.

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Bus Stories: All Aboard, Together as a City

By Sarah O.

My bus ride home in the evening is always crowded, even before the bus gets to me, and I'm one of the midway stops downtown. By the time I get on the seats are all taken, and I have to find a handhold to balance myself. Usually I'm carrying a ridiculous amount of poorly secured belongings: a backpack for school, a satchel for work, a bag of vegetables from the downtown market if I've felt ambitious, a purse, a book, an umbrella, a scarf that's somehow come undone and is threatening to trip me up and strangle me, all at once. Today, a man offers me a seat, but I don't mind standing so I offer it to the woman behind me. She's older and shorter and wider than me, and after a tiny bit of back and forth,

"Are you sure?" "I'm totally sure," "I'll take it if you're sure," "I'm very sure," she settles into it, sighing a little as she eases down.

"This feels good," she tells me. "I've been on my feet since six this morning."

"We're the opposite," I tell her. "I've been on my butt since then." She snorts and tells me, "Well, girl, then you better be standing now," and I



laugh and agree, and we settle into the sort of comfortable silence that can exist between two total strangers who are crowded into touching each other, but have managed to sort out a manageable space.

The driver today is my second favorite. My first favorite

is a substitute and we hardly ever see her, but when she is there it's like unexpected Christmas: something exciting will happen and she will have something amazing to say. The driver today looks a little bit like Tom Petty and gives everyone a nod and says

"be cool" when they get on or off. Like some kind of benediction or admonishment, he gives it generously to all of us.

More people pile on and it's all kinds, young men in stylish sweaters and complicated watches with Kindles, a group of teenager girls giggling and slipping over each other, fresh and fidgety like birds. There's a woman who looks like a grandmother with many plastic bags all clutched up around her, a tired mom and her baby boy, leaning their heads together, counting out fingers, love. A triad of day workers from Mexico, smiling, speaking Spanish softly, their hands rubbed thick with dirt. More and more: a loud, nervous group of white-toothed Mariners fans eyeing the slightly drunk woman sitting towards the front, snaggles of hair poking out of her red knit cap, laughing sloppily with wet, sparkling eyes.

The rest of my day isn't like this. The rest of the day I spend in rooms with people who look more like me, talk more like me. People who exist in the same income bracket, who've read the same books and seen the same movies, whose voices rise or fall more or less like mine, and who re-

member the same cartoons from their childhood that I do. The bus ride is a vibrant line dividing my days. It's like an artery; the pulse of the life, the underlying reminder. For the next twenty-five minutes, I'll be skin to skin with people whose language I don't speak, whose skin doesn't look like mine, whose smells and shapes and interests and concerns are mysterious to me. For the next twenty-five minutes I'll be standing and slipping and bumping into people whose histories are inaccessible to me and whose futures I'll probably never know. And in these twenty-five minutes so much could happen. So much maybe will never happen. But so much could happen.

"All aboard" calls the bus driver, and the doors hiss shut, and the bus lurches forward and those of us standing shuffle our footing to be more secure, and the people sitting eye us a little nervously, making room on their laps. We move forward. I look outside the window and notice how dark it's become, how cold the rain looks from this angle. We keep moving forward. For the next twenty-five minutes, whatever happens, we move forward together.

FUNDING: Local Options Necessary

Continued from page 1

ing options for cities, counties and transit agencies. Allowing these local governments and agencies the ability to raise taxes on their own without having to go to the state for funding will be an absolutely crucial part of saving and improving our transit systems.

And yet, these bills are currently languishing in the legislature, and it's looking more and more like any transportation bill that does make it out of the House and Senate will focus on highway projects. The statewide transportation package recently proposed by House Transportation chair Judy Clibborn contains \$3.9 billion just to start new highway projects, while leaving only \$675 million for cities and towns throughout the state to invest in their transportation infrastructure and transit systems. This 20th century way of thinking will not effectively answer 21st century problems, and it is past time that our state's transportation funding reflects this reality.

For decades, our state legislators have faced organized industry and lobbyists who fa-

vor big highway projects. They make themselves heard in Olympia. Our state legislators have also faced an organized and vocal anti-tax movement. Our state legislators have heard from vocal anti-transit activists who think that our state's transit agencies should recover 100% of their revenue at the fare box. What our state legislators have not heard from are organized, informed transit riders. If we are to prevent the huge cuts that have recently happened in Snohomish and Pierce counties, if we are to prevent the looming 17% service cuts to King County Metro, including 65 routes facing elimination, we need to organize and think beyond the routes and stops we use most often. We need to be informed and concerned about the funding issues for C-TRAN in Vancouver, Spokane Transit, Pierce Transit, and other agencies around the state. Their funding issues are our issues, their cuts are our cuts, and in nearly every case those we elect to represent us have failed at providing the resources needed for adequate transit. You are transit's best advocate in this state, and the legislators need to hear you.



The Union Marches

On September 29, 2012 the Transit Riders Union led a funeral march to protest and mourn the elimination of the downtown Ride Free Area, a Seattle institution since 1973.

Many members of SHARE/WHEEL joined in the march.

Photo by Alex Garland.

Organize in Your Neighborhood!

The Transit Riders Union wants to be a voice for your neighborhood. Do you know a few other people who care about public transit? Do you want to find a few more? Start a neighborhood transit riders group!

We'll work with you to address problems and push for improvements in your neighborhood and we'll keep you and your neighbors in the loop about public transit issues and actions.

contact@transitriders.org

206-651-4282

Catch the #10 on Pike at 4th in downtown Seattle to Capitol Hill and get off on 15th between Prospect and Galer. Volunteer Park is home to the Seattle Asian Art Museum, which is free to visit on the 1st Thursday of every month. Nearby there is a 100-year old Victorian glass conservatory filled with tropical and seasonal plants. You'll also find a historic brick water tower, which you can climb for great views of Seattle: it's been called the "poor man's Space Needle".

— Pauline Van Senus

Destinations: Volunteer Park

Route 10, King County Metro



The Water Tower in 1930
National Park Service website

Keeping Communities Affordable While Building Transit-Oriented Development

By Erica Weiland

You might have noticed the new multi-story buildings popping up around Rainier Valley's light rail stations. Urban planners call these new developments Transit Oriented Development, or TOD, which means mixed-use (residential and commercial), high-density development near light rail, subway, or bus stations. TOD is designed to encourage transit use and in certain cases, offer mixed-income housing and reduce car ownership.

TOD can be positive for dedicated transit riders and for those new to transit use, especially when new transit service improves transportation access to existing and new housing. But sometimes TOD permanently displaces existing residents whose homes are demolished to make way for new homes. These new homes are usually too expensive for displaced residents, due to property value increases, construction, permitting, and a lack of political will to mandate affordability. For example, the value of the mixed-use zoned properties near Othello Station increased 585% between 2004 and 2009, the beginning and end of light rail construction activities (1). Properties that rise this much in market value are unlikely to be converted to affordable housing. Even when they are, "affordable" housing often isn't affordable for people in

the neighborhood: a large proportion of "affordable" housing development targets people making as much as 80% of area median income.

Rainier Valley has one of the most transit-reliant populations in Seattle (2). One-third to one-half of households do not own a car. TODs that are more expensive than existing housing raise the income averages of the neighborhood, and people of low incomes tend to take transit more than people of middle or high incomes. As a result, TODs that provide a lot of amenities for car owners or that are geared toward middle or upper income residents may actually increase car usage in the area.

The demographic changes caused by new development and rising housing costs are already apparent. The migration of people of color from South Seattle to the suburbs south of Seattle is well-documented both anecdotally and through census data. In general, the suburbs have cheaper housing, but less transit service, reducing transit accessibility for those who move. According to census data, the white population in the Rainier Valley grew over three times faster than the population of people of color between 2000 and 2010 (3). In the same years, the population of people of color grew 47% in King County, while the population of white people went down 2%. American Community Survey data from 2006 to

2010 showed that growth in the white population in Rainier Valley was correlated with increased average incomes. In other words, lower income people and people of color are becoming less represented in Rainier Valley.

What can be done to prevent further displacement? People in communities where new TODs are proposed can organize to demand that more TOD funds be spent on remodeling or expanding existing affordable housing units and building a wide range of truly affordable new units, including larger 2+ bedroom units that can accommodate families. All of us will need to stand together and organize to keep Seattle neighborhoods affordable.

References

- (1) Puget Sound Regional Council: A Regional TOD Fund: Ensuring That Transit Communities Grow Equitably - <http://www.psrc.org/assets/8674/TODFund.pdf>
- (2) City of Seattle: 2012 Transit Master Plan Final Summary Report - <http://www.seattle.gov/transportation/docs/tmp/final/TMPFinalSummaryReportandAppendices.pdf>
- (3) Puget Sound Sage: TOD That Is Healthy, Green, and Just - <http://pugetsoundsage.org/downloads/TOD%20that%20is%20Healthy,%20Green%20and%20Just.pdf>

We're All Better Off...

By Tom Geiger
Communications Director,
UFCW 21

We're all better off when we're all better off. My family is better off when our kids get a good education at our local public elementary school and when every other child does too. The same goes for higher education, libraries, public transportation, public safety, and on and on.

When workers decide to have a union in their workplace and take action together to win a fair contract, they see higher wages and benefits than non-union workers. But union members don't just look out for their own interests. They take actions that support better health care coverage, a higher minimum wage, paid sick days, fair and affordable housing, immigration reform, and public transit for everyone.

Likewise, the support of community organizations is vital for workers struggling to earn a decent living and gain a voice and respect on the job. When these forces come together – organized workers and organized communities – we are a force for change. Together we can make the cities and towns we call home better

places to live. Public transit is critical to ensure that we all have freedom of mobility. Our schools, places of employment, health care facilities, and a thriving economy in general depend on people of all income levels being able to get where they need to, when they need to. An effective public transit system is not just important for those with lower incomes. It reduces pollution, reduces congestion, improves access to education and social services, and provides an alternative to driving to and from work. Those values are good for everyone.

By working together – and putting pressure on our elected officials and policy makers – we can achieve a better place to call home. We're all in this together, so let's do what we can for each other and remember that when we do, we're all better off.

UFCW 21 is the state's largest private sector union with over 43,000 workers in grocery stores and retail, health care, and other industry jobs. UFCW 21 is one of twenty-eight organizations that have joined the Transit Riders Union in supporting a low income reduced fare.

Did you know?

If you have a cell phone, you can use One Bus Away to find out when your bus is coming. (There is a smart phone app, but you don't need a smart phone.) You'll need your stop number, which is often printed on the bus stop sign or shelter. If you can't find it, call the number below and listen to all the options for advice.

Phone:

- Call 206-456-0609
- Press 1
- Enter the bus stop number, then the # sign
- Listen to the real time arrival information

Text:

- Text "onebus [bus stop number]" to 41411
- Wait for text back listing upcoming arrival times

The first time you use One Bus Away, you will be asked to enter your home ZIP code. The texting feature does not work with certain cellphone carriers.

** WORST BUS STOP CONTEST **

A Project of the Transit Riders Union

Dirty?

Dangerous?

Uncomfortable?

Help us find the worst bus stops in King County!

WIN PRIZES!

...and possibly an improved bus stop

Send entries by July 31 to: worstbusstop@gmail.com or Transit Riders Union, P.O. Box 30104, Seattle, WA 98113

Submissions should include:

- Stop location
- What makes it the worst stop?
- Suggestions for improvements
- Photographs
- Your contact information

