



The Transit Reader

The official newsletter of the Transit Riders Union

www.transitriders.org

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WTF, Olympia?!?! Save our Metro!

17% Metro bus cuts are coming your way

By Chris Mobley

The Metro bus route you ride may be cancelled or run much less often! Imagine even more 30 minute waits in the rain only to be passed by a packed bus, little to no late night service, complicated transfers between bus routes, and less time doing the things that matter most to you.

This is despite a booming local economy, with the ever-present sight of construction cranes dotting the urban landscape as a constant reminder of the billions of dollars of private and public investment the Seattle area is absorbing. In fact this booming economy is straining our local transit system, which hasn't expanded to meet the growth in population and employment.

You may ask yourself, what is the cause of this calamity? Natural disaster? Did a sink-hole absorb a fleet of Metro buses? Is 17% of our service being cut as a result of a bu-



Senate
"Majority"
Leader Rodney
Tom

reaucratic oversight or a sick practical joke?

The answer is that your bus may be cut as part of a calculated plan of political maneuvering by out-of-touch politicians at the state Capitol in Olympia. Specifically, the blame squarely rests with

the "Majority Coalition Caucus" (MCC), i.e. Republicans and two "Democrats", Sen. Tim Sheldon (35th) and most notably Senate majority leader Sen. Rodney Tom (48th).

Despite meeting for TWO additional "special" sessions (State Government-speak for extra innings), politicians failed to pass a state transportation budget. The transportation package would have funded much-needed maintenance of the state highway system (see I-5 bridge collapse), highway expansion east of the Cascades, highway expansion west of the Cascades, and more highway expansion everywhere, all paid

for by a 10.5% gas tax increase. Importantly to King County bus riders, the transportation

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Vote Kshama Sawant for City Council



See page 3 for an interview with Sawant and other Transit Riders Union endorsements.

Are State Politicians Endangering Your Route?

It's time to get organized!! State politicians are starving our public transit system. The legislature refused to pass a funding option for King County Metro, and now bus service is set to be cut by 17% next year. Riders who depend on transit will be left stranded, traffic congestion will get worse, and the environment will suffer. **We can't let this happen. The Transit Riders Union is fighting back. Join us!**

Routes at risk for deletion (65 routes): 7EX, 19, 21EX, 22, 25, 27, 30, 37, 48NEX, 57, 61, 76, 77EX, 82, 83, 84, 99, 110, 113, 114, 118EX, 119, 119EX, 123EX, 139, 152, 154, 157, 159, 161, 173, 179, 190, 192, 197, 200, 201, 203, 205EX, 210, 211EX, 213, 215, 216, 237, 243, 244EX, 250, 257, 260, 265, 268, 277, 280, 304, 308, 601EX, 907DART, 910DART, 913DART, 914DART, 919DART, 927DART, 930DART and 935DART.

Routes at risk for reductions and revisions (86 routes): 1, 2S, 2N, 3S, 3N, 4S, 4N, 5, 5EX, 7, 8, 9EX, 10, 11, 12, 14S, 16, 21, 24, 26, 26EX, 28, 28EX, 29, 31, 36, 41, 43, 47, 48N, 60, 65, 66EX, 67, 68, 70, 71, 72, 73, 106, 107, 116EX, 118, 121, 122, 125, 148, 156, 177, 181, 182, 186, 187, 193EX, 202, 204, 209, 214, 221, 224, 226, 232, 234, 235, 236, 238, 241, 245, 246, 248, 249, 255, 269, 271, 309EX, 311, 312EX, 331, 355EX, 372EX, 373EX, 901DART, 903DART, 908DART, 909DART and 931DART.

"50% for the 50%" Local transportation budgets should match local habits

By Chris Mobley

As first reported by the Seattle Bike Blog (www.seattle-bikeblog.org) and followed up by the Seattle Times:

"New Census Bureau data show that last year, 50.8 percent of Seattle residents found some way other than driving solo to get to work. In 2011, the Census Bureau estimated the number at 46.4 percent.

In crossing the 50 percent threshold, Seattle joins an elite "club."

Among the 50 most populous U.S. cities, Seattle is now one of just five where the majority of workers take public transit, carpool, walk, bike, or have some means of commuting

other than driving alone."

With this fantastic news, perhaps it's time that our City, County and State transportation budgets reflect this new reality. Instead of pouring more money into suburban highway expansion and waterfront tunneled highways, perhaps we should match the transportation budgets to the habits of Seattle area residents. Significant improvements could be made to our local transit, biking and walking infrastructure. Even without these much needed changes, people have voted with their feet (quite literally). Imagine how much more attractive, faster and safer these alternatives to driving alone could be



with the right set of priorities.

This wouldn't mean a new source of funding (although this is much needed), but a re-prioritization of existing funding. Much-needed funding for the Seattle Transit, Bicycle and Pedestrian master plans is being spent on more asphalt and highways, despite our population moving away from single occupancy vehicles as our primary means of getting about town.

The Transit Riders Union will be following up with more research and policy proposals that could form the basis for a "50% for the 50% campaign" - 50% of the transportation dollars for the 50% who don't drive alone. Stay tuned.

OLYMPIA: Act Now!

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package would have granted King County the right to levy a motor vehicle excise tax (MVET) to fund Metro bus service. This would have just enabled King County to ask us for a MVET, i.e. we would still all vote on whether to tax ourselves to save Metro transit.

Even with widespread support from big business, local politicians and labor unions for the transportation package and the MVET local funding option for King County Metro, the plan failed to even come up for a vote in the State Senate, instead languishing in the Senate Transportation Committee.

Now these same out-of-touch politicians have organized a statewide “listening” tour to develop a new state transportation package. In reality, the tour is designed to try and build support for a set of rabidly right-wing “reforms” which will eviscerate environmental protections, cut the living wages of hard-working construction workers, and reward the wealthy backers of these politicians by introducing more big business-friendly “Public-Private Partnerships” i.e. privatization of government services (see Beau Morton’s article for more in depth information on these reforms).

The Majority Coalition Caucus is holding

your bus service hostage for their vile agenda, in a manner that would be admired by even the most depraved comic book supervillain. Chief villain, Senate majority leader Sen. Rodney Tom, even told the Seattle Times as much: “If you don’t link [the MVET and the gas tax], what happens is, once the transit crowd gets what they consider they want, the road package gets torpedoed”.

But we still have a chance to save our Metro. Governor Inslee has talked of calling for a third special session this fall to pass the transportation package, including a local funding option for King County. If no local funding option is passed before February 2014, service cuts of 17% will go into effect next fall. We need to demand that Metro receive local funding to avert this disaster, but not at any cost. The MCC would like us to accept their terrible “reforms”, or even an increase of the deeply regressive and recession-prone sales tax to save our Metro.

If the politicians in Olympia can’t pass a local funding option, they will greatly inhibit our ability to move freely – so perhaps we can return the favor during the next legislative session in early 2014. Sit-ins, blockades, and protests may greet the politicians of Olympia next year if they don’t avert the great bus cut disaster now.



Transportation Reforms to Nowhere

By Beau Morton

Despite having the time allowed by the regular legislative session and two special sessions, the Washington State legislature failed to pass a transportation budget when Senate Republicans refused to allow the transportation package that the House had passed to come to a vote. With a third transportation-only special session in November still a possibility, the Majority Coalition Caucus (MCC), led by Senator Rodney Tom,

has decided that the best way to find out what should be in a transportation budget is to hold a series of ten “listening tours” around the state, where people can tell members of the MCC and other members of the legislature what they already know - that they need to pass a transportation package.

Somewhat hidden in the long lines of people waiting to speak at the tour stops and the prepared speeches of business, city and county leaders are the actual “reforms” that make up the MCC’s transportation agenda. There is nothing new about these proposals, rather they are simply the same kinds of neoliberal, privatizing, anti-environment, anti-worker ideas that will do nothing to actually improve our state’s transportation system, but could do plenty to line the pockets of business interests and reduce the quality of life in Washington.

The reforms include ten points, ranging from ferry capital costs to reforming the state’s regional transit authority boards. All of these reforms are to come about through the “streamlining” of various processes, or conjuring up of new “efficiencies” after years of previous rounds of budgets cuts and streamlining at the various state, regional and local agencies that make up our state’s integrated transportation systems. The resulting “efficiencies have left us with crumbling and neglected infrastructure, and stalled or reduced transit service.

We’ll see more of the same of the MCC’s reforms are to pass. A quick look at five of the

proposed reforms that would most impact King County transit riders includes:

- *Return sales tax from transportation construction to the transportation budget*

This reform is based on Senator Doug Ericksen’s SB 5003 and would exempt goods and services used in capital and construction and transportation projects from sales tax. While the MCC’s stated purpose is to prevent the state from taxing itself, it would in reality increase the profits of construction companies, likely without passing any of that profit on to its employees in the form of wages, while at the same time reducing the sales tax base for local transit agencies both for projects and especially operations funding.

- *Open a dialogue about prevailing wage and apprenticeship requirements*

With this vague reform the members of the MCC look to “examine costs associated with prevailing wage and apprenticeship standards for transportation projects while adhering to federal requirements”. This reform follows on the heels of a class-action lawsuit settled in 2012 ruling that workers outside Wenatchee who were building concrete bridge pieces for Sound Transit’s Link light rail should have been paid the same higher prevailing wage that workers doing a similar job in Tukwila were paid. The play here for the MCC is obvious; lowering or changing how the state recalculates prevailing wages weakens unions, and helps to

suppress wages as a whole.

- *Streamline environmental permitting*

The streamlining of environmental permitting for transportation projects is something that Washington State as already done a good job of. From 2001 to 2006 the Transportation Permit and Accountability Committee (TPEAC) worked to streamline the permitting process, leading the Washington State Senate Republican Caucus to laud TPEAC, saying “Washington is a national leader in environmental permit streamlining for transportation projects”. Seven years later Washington is still leader, but the MCC seems to think it’s not enough, favoring instead less strict federal standards.

- *Use of Public-Private Partnerships*

Washington has been slow well adopting the public-private partnerships (or P3’s) that other states and countries have used to fund, build, maintain and operate their transportation systems. While P3’s can have upfront, illusory “savings”, they push the spending down the road, and there can be real issues with who benefits from public-private partnerships and who pays. A study in Toronto have found that projects built with P3’s cost an average of 16% than those funded entirely with public money. Public-private partnerships open the door to normalizing the privatization of transportation systems entirely, while at the same time encouraging the construction

of megaprojects while diverting money from transit systems, maintenance and repair budgets, and smaller, human-sized projects such as local Complete Streets projects.

- *Reform the state’s regional transit authority boards*

This reform, based on Representative Mark Hargrove’s HB 1877 “Would make changes streamlining the state’s existing regional transit authority boards.” Under HB 1877 each board would have five districts, with one representative per district, each representing an approximately equal population. Smaller boards with districts set up like this would not be complex enough to deal with the issues that a transit authority like Sound Transit faces, and would dilute the influence of denser cities that need transit the most.

The members of the Majority Coalition Caucus have an agenda, and it’s full of exactly the kind of sham reforms, the same kind of thinking that has caused our state’s transportation infrastructure to deteriorate over the years. The issue isn’t that we don’t permit projects fast enough, or that the Washington State Department of Transportation isn’t “lean” or “efficient” enough; the issue is that the legislature and the members of the Majority Coalition Caucus refuse to raise revenue and refuse to truly face the transportation needs of the state and its cities. No amount of “reforms” will change that.

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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Interview with Kshama Sawant

TRU-Endorsed Candidate for Seattle City Council Position 2

1. *Living in Seattle is getting less and less affordable for working and poor people. Why do you think this is, and what's necessary to change it?*

Soaring housing costs are a major reason our city is becoming unaffordable. Rents are skyrocketing in Seattle for several reasons. One is that big property developers are buying up rental units and then increasing rents dramatically. The only remedy to this artificial increase is to regulate rent increases to the overall cost of living, in other words, rent control.

For decades now, the city has seen a two-tier development program from the government wherein working people are steadily losing out and the wealthiest benefit. Market rate housing is becoming increasingly expensive, in keeping with a minority of higher-salary people moving into the city. Low-income and middle-income people are being forced to move out into the farther reaches of the city or outside city limits, and have to commute long distances for their city jobs. People are further burdened by expensive bus fares and cuts to transit services.

Policymaking on the City Council is deeply skewed to the interests of real estate and other corporations. The land giveaway in the South Lake Union rezoning, with my opponent Richard Conlin leading the opposition against modest costs to be imposed on developers to finance affordable housing, is a recent clear example. We need new development projects to prioritize affordable housing. We also need publicly owned housing to be expanded to provide affordable living.

2. *If elected, what will you do to improve public transit in Seattle and King County?*

I will use my position and resources on the Council to campaign for a low-income

fare and a monthly unlimited low-income ride option for the ORCA pass system, to make more buses accessible to the disabled, and to restore the Free Ride Zone. Instead of cutting service, like the 17% anticipated cuts to Metro, we need to be expanding transit options, especially to lower-income neighborhoods in Seattle and neglected cities in Seattle's periphery.

The main problem with

enact a luxury or privilege tax on the luxury and privilege of having more than \$1 million income per year. The model legislation for the Millionaire's Tax we are calling for was drafted by the Economic Opportunity Institute, the same organization which drafted Seattle's paid sick leave act.

At least three recent academic studies have revealed that neither tax increases nor tax cuts have affected migration rates of the rich beyond "negligible" levels, especially if they have strong ties to the region. New Jersey had a small millionaire tax (until Governor Christie vetoed its continuation), during which time it raised \$1 billion every year, compared to its loss of \$16.4 million from migration.

4. *You're also advocating for a \$15 minimum wage. Is this realistic? Wouldn't it hurt small businesses?*

A \$15 minimum wage is necessary because there is no realistic way an ordinary person can afford to live in Seattle on the current minimum wage. The City of Seattle has cited that in order to comfortably afford a one-bedroom apartment in Seattle, you would have to make \$19.52/hour.

Paying \$15/hour to tens of millions of workers will increase the amount they and their families can spend on goods and services, giving a huge boost to the local economy. Money spent by workers has a far bigger impact on economic growth rate than handouts to the top 1%, who sit on much of that money.

Starbucks, McDonald's, Subway, Pizza Hut, and a majority of other big corporations are raking in mega-profits. CEO salaries and bonuses are at record highs. Estimates show that Walmart's CEO is paid more per hour than the average Walmart worker is paid in a whole year.

While corporations that employ a low-wage workforce are highly profitable, small businesses that cannot afford the wage increase could be subsidized by taxing the big corporations and ending corporate welfare. We also call for lowering B&O and property taxes on small business, while increasing them on big corporations. The current tax system is highly regressive with the burden landing disproportionately

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Kshama Sawant speaks at the Transit Riders Union's "WTE, Olympia?" Rally in July. (Photo courtesy of Peter Brannan)

Metro is the lack of a stable source of funding through progressive taxation. I am calling for a Millionaire Tax on those with incomes over \$1 million a year to help fully fund a world-class bus service throughout the city.

An improvement of public transit must also include improving the working conditions of Metro bus drivers, such as guaranteeing them more breaks, access to restrooms and rest areas, and safety precautions like installing shields.

I cannot make all the changes that we need in transit by myself. We need transit riders, community leaders, and social welfare organizations to mobilize together and organize a movement outside the city council to defend and expand transit.

3. *You call for "a Millionaire's Tax to fund mass transit, education, and living-wage union jobs providing vital social services." Does the City of Seattle really have the authority to enact such a tax, and wouldn't it cause the millionaires to move out of Seattle?*

Although an outdated and conservative State Supreme Court ruling does outlaw income taxes, it is legal for the city to pass a tax on "privilege." Cities have the authority to

REMEMBER TO VOTE by NOVEMBER 5

TRANSIT RIDERS UNION ENDORSEMENTS:

- ✓ **MIKE MCGINN**
for Mayor of Seattle
- ✓ **KSHAMA SAWANT**
for Seattle City Council Position 2
- ✓ **SALLY BAGSHAW**
for Seattle City Council Position 4
- ✓ **NICK LICATA**
for Seattle City Council Position 6
- ✓ **MIKE O'BRIEN**
for Seattle City Council Position 8
- ✓ **DOW CONSTANTINE**
for King County Executive
- ✓ **ROD DEMBOWSKI or NAOMI WILSON**
for King County Council District 1
- ✓ **DAVE UPTHEGROVE***
for King County Council District 5
- ✓ **SHARI SONG**
for King County Council District 9

* Dave Upthegrove's opponent, Andy Massagli, did not respond to our survey for local candidates. However, he did respond to our 2012 survey for candidates running for state legislature, and expressed the opinion that a "bicycle or walking shoe tax" would be a more appropriate



way to fund public transit than taxing cars. Or better: "an alcohol or gang tax would target the riding demographic beautifully. Maybe a sagging pants that shows your underwear tax is in order".

Do you live in District 5 or know people who do? Vote for UPTHEGROVE, people!

Clip this out—Keep for when you fill out your ballot

The Citizens Who Call the Transit System Home

By Randy Whitelock

The Night Owl lines. For some, the routes are a means of getting home after a late night job, or a safe transportation alternative after one too many from the bars; for others, the service provides access to and from the red eye flights coming out of Seatac Airport long after the Link Light Rail stops. For anyone who's used one, it's safe to say that a late night bus route can serve a variety of needs and is truly the unsung hero of Metro (just ask the folks from Magnolia, who recently lost bus service after 10:30pm).

There are some citizens, however, who utilize the Night Owl service for an entirely different purpose. For them, a

late night bus, with its warm seats and dim lighting, becomes a place to rest, safe from rain and the din and danger of city streets. For these folks, Night Owl service, soon to face the chopping block with the threat of upcoming service cuts, provides a basic human need: emergency shelter.

The number of people lacking emergency shelter in King County is glaring. On one night last January, 2,736 men, women, and children were counted sleeping without shelter in King County. That means on benches, in doorways, under freeways, in the woods, under makeshift tents, in parked cars, and, of course, on public buses. Meanwhile,

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Whose City Is This?

By Katie Wilson

If you’ve been reading the news, you’ve heard that Seattle and King County are doing pretty well on the economic front. Our region is booming compared with the rest of the country. In many ways of course this is good, but it also means that for a large swath of the population – all those of us who don’t make the big bucks – this city and county are becoming less and less affordable to live in.

The Seattle Times recently reported that Seattle rents are rising faster than anywhere else in the country. How many of us relinquish over a third – even half or more –

of our paycheck every month just to keep a roof above our heads? It’s not just renters that are in trouble, either: more than a third of homeowners with mortgages in the Seattle Metro Area are underwater. We have a quiet foreclosure crisis going on – and while the banks are sitting on their empty properties, the number of homeless people in King County has been steadily creeping upward.

How many of us have chafed at the indignity of searching for a job and finding that employers are asking years of experience for the privilege of making \$10 an hour? The flip side of a booming economy is an expanding and marginal-

ized “servant class” – all those of us working stressful low wage service jobs, as baristas and waiters and line cooks, or in hotels and office buildings cleaning rooms and hallways. We can’t afford to eat or stay at the establishments we work at, increasingly we can’t afford to live nearby – and the cost of getting to work, by bus or by car, keeps rising.

When it comes down to it, there’s a fundamental question at stake: Whose city is this? Is it a playground for the rich, a place where developers and multi-million dollar corporations come to make their profits, and where a parasitic class of big landlords skims the cream off the top, while

the rest of us are relegated to the role of a servant class barely eking out a living? Or is it our city – the city of the people who live here, whose destinies and quality of life are so intertwined with the city’s geography and buildings, resources and services, limits and possibilities?

In 1968 the French sociologist Lefebvre wrote a book called *Le droit à la ville*, “The Right to the City”. This is an idea that citizens and intellectuals are picking up again today. What does it mean?

First of all, it means that cities don’t just grow and change organically by themselves, through the decisions of individual people and businesses – although this happens too. They are also shaped, more profoundly than most of us realize, by the deliberate planning of governments, developers, big property owners and big corporations. And they can be shaped deliberately by us, the people who live here.

The “right to the city” means that we have the right to shape our own city, which in turn shapes our lives and our destinies. But this isn’t an individual right, it’s a right we hold in common and have to exercise together if at all. The powers that be are not just going to hand us this right – we have to claim it, together. To do this we have to be organized. We

have to be capable of deciding together, democratically, what kind of city we want to live in, and we have to have to figure out how to wield our collective power as citizens and as workers to make it that way.

Being organized means building organizations, through which we can formulate our common interests and exert our power. That’s what the Transit Riders Union aims to do, and we want you to join us. Public transit is not an isolated issue. It’s not just about our buses and our rail lines, or about how we get from here to there. It’s related to all the other urban issues that affect our daily lives – how much we pay in rent, what neighborhoods we can afford to live in, how many dollars per hour we make and how much we give back in taxes, how much we pay for medical care and child care, and what resources and services are available to us.

Big money is organized – they’ve got it easy, because money can pay people to do work, pay lobbyists, buy publicity, and fund politicians’ campaigns. We’ve got the difficult job. We have to organize ourselves and fight for a future that is shaped by the needs and desires of people, rather than the selfish and short-sighted requirements of profit. Let’s claim our right to our city!

SAWANT: Times are changing

Continued from page 3

tionately on small businesses.

5. You are running as a socialist. Won’t people see you a “fringe” candidate?

We won 29% or over 20,000 votes last year running for state House against Speaker Frank Chopp, which was more than double the challenge by any of his previous opponents. This year, in a three-way primary race, we received 35% of the vote, over 44,000 votes, even though we were well outspent by our opponents. This is the strongest result for a socialist in many decades.

Times are changing. In spite of near universal demonization of socialist ideas in the US corporate media and political establishment, according to a 2012 Pew Research Center Poll, 50 percent of young people aged 18-29 view socialism positively while only 43 percent react negatively to the term. In the same age group, only 46 percent have positive views of capitalism, while 47 percent view capitalism negatively.

The political system under capitalism is increasingly being exposed as sham democracy. How can there be any real democracy when the richest 1% owns more wealth than the bottom 90%? This allows the rich elite to dominate the political system while manipulating public opinion through their ownership of the mass media.

Socialists argue that we have to fight to reform the capitalist system – reforms such as a

higher minimum wage, single-payer health care, taxing the wealthy to fully fund transit and education, and to close the gender pay gap. But that reforms will be short-lived and limited, unless we fundamentally move away from the system of capitalism and

“We need transit riders, community leaders, and social welfare organizations to mobilize together and organize a movement... to defend and expand transit.”

toward an economy in which major corporations are owned and democratically run by the 99%.

6. Why should transit riders and supporters of public transit vote for you over your opponent, Richard Conlin?

Richard Conlin vaguely talks about expanding mass transit, while at the same time showing no leadership on the issues of the impending 17% cuts to Metro and the death of the Free Ride Zone. The devastating cuts to Metro demand a sense of urgency and deter-

mination to fight against the corporate agenda that Richard Conlin sorely lacks.

In contrast, he used city resources to sue citizens who petitioned for a referendum on the environmentally destructive deep-bore tunnel, until a judge found that he had no authority to do this and went “too far”. Conlin was one of the most vocal advocates on the city council for the \$4.2 billion tunnel project that rejected transit spending. As the council president, he voted twice to freeze spending on the Transit Master Plan, and did not carry through promised funding for the Bicycle Master Plan.

Unlike my opponent who has taken the maximum possible donations from Microsoft, the coal train company BNSE, venture capitalists, and commercial real estate giants, my campaign does not accept any corporate donations. We rely solely on the support and sacrifice of ordinary people and activists.

Conlin is just one player in an entire city establishment that is beholden to the interests of the 1%. I am campaigning to give political power and representation the rest of us, ordinary working class people that make up the majority of transit riders. I hope you will join me in this movement to make Seattle affordable for all, fund world-class infrastructure by taxing the wealthy, and helping to create a long-delayed political alternative to the corporatized and failing two-party system.

Take a Ride in a Historic Motorbus!

Did you know that the Metro Employees Historic Vehicle Association (MEHVA) runs excursions using their fleet of historic trolley and motorbuses? All trips depart from 2nd Ave. S. and S. Main St., across from the Seattle Fire Department Headquarters. Fares are \$5, cash only. Upcoming trips:

Sunday, October 20: FALL FOLIAGE TOUR
A scenic 4-hour trip through the Cascade foothills along the quiet back roads of east King County as the autumn leaves are turning color. Tour stops for photos and lunch. Buses depart at 11 a.m.

Saturday, December 14: SANTA’S LIGHTS
Santa Claus takes time out from his busy schedule at the North Pole for a 3-hour tour of Seattle’s best Christmas lights. Buses depart at 7 p.m.

Visit www.mehva.org for more information.



Photo by Wayne Horn

Building Bridges and Solidarity

By Lorraine Carlucci

Saturday broke bright and clear in Seattle, a welcome change after the

rain and clouds of the previous days. As I donned my Transit Riders' t-shirt, I anticipated many would turn out for the Seattle 350 "Draw the Line" dem-



Transit Riders Union Members march in the Pride Parade

onstration against the Keystone XL Pipeline. "Here in the Pacific Northwest, we're uniquely positioned to have an impact on fossil fuel use worldwide: we stand in solidarity with frontline communities scarred by extreme energy extraction, and communities already suffering the devastations of climate change, by challenging the fossil fuel companies to keep it in the ground" is what the flyer said. And I felt proud to represent TRU at an event meant to have such a wide and positive impact on our environment.

Yet many might ask why an organization of transit riders would want to participate in a demonstration by an environmental organization. My answer is "for solidarity". TRU also participated in UFCW21's Rally for Respect at the Renton Wal-Mart and passed a resolution to support UNITE HERE Local 8's boycott of the Hyatt at Olive 8 and the Grand Hyatt Seattle. The Justice for Trayvon Rally at the U.S. Federal Courthouse in downtown Seattle on July 19 was also attended

by The Transit Riders Union. Again, TRU's goal was building solidarity in participating in these events.

"Solidarity" is a word that is thrown around a lot and has become a cliché in some circles. But today the word is gaining new meaning. We are seeing new types of organizing; building bridges between labor, diverse communities, the homeless, students and other organizations who recognize that we have many needs in common. We all want to live free of fear, to have respect and human dignity, to have our basic needs met, to have equal opportunity and to be rewarded for hard work and creativity. "Solidarity" has become the way we are learning to support one another in our fight for common needs and to succeed together while alone we might fail. And the Transit Riders Union intends to be in the forefront of the struggle by fighting for safe, affordable and reliable transportation for everyone while supporting others in their struggles.

On Public Safety on Public Transit

By Sam Smith

In late 2012, after my dream job of seven years fell apart, I found myself in search for a completely new job—one in which my schedule and job responsibilities would be unambiguous, I would not need to stare into a computer all day, I would have support in the event of maltreatment from a supervisor, and I could exercise my extroverted tendencies by interacting with people.

Through organizing with the Transit Riders Union I had met several Metro bus drivers, some who are TRU members, others who are active in the ATU Local 587, and others who asked me about my "Save Our Metro" T-shirt as I boarded their bus. I began asking them how they like their jobs. "I'd give it a 10 out of 10," one veteran driver replied. "It's a different and exciting adventure every day!" To my surprise, most drivers offered similarly positive responses. I applied to be a Part-Time Operator as soon as a position became available, and I have been happily serving the good people of King County since February.

On the morning of Monday,

August 12, I returned home after an early shift on the route 120. I started to receive texts from friends with unintentionally cryptic messages, asking me how I was doing and if I was safe. This was how I learned that Martin Duckworth had shot Metro driver Deloy Dupuis. Duckworth then boarded another bus—incidentally, it was the route 120, two trips after mine—

where the Seattle Police killed him. Very fortunately, Dupuis is recovering from his injuries, and the passengers, pedestrians and the other Metro driver were not injured.

Several hours after the shooting, I had to return to work for my afternoon rush hour shift. Was I supposed to report to work like any typical day? Was bus service cancelled? I had no clue what I was supposed to do in a situation like this. But without any word to suggest otherwise, I arrived at Metro's Atlantic Base, as I do every weekday afternoon. This time, however, I arrived with fear. I wanted to know why this happened, and how I could prevent it from ever happening to me.

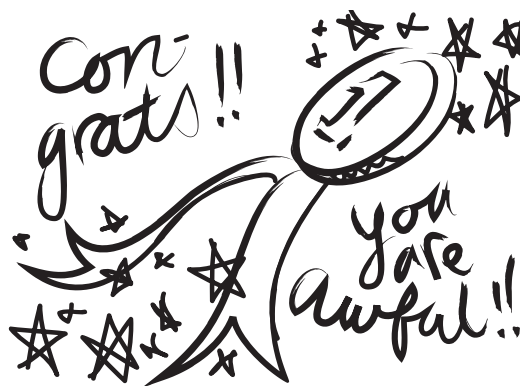
What I learned is that there's nothing I could do as

"...Further demonizing people in poverty will not actually make us safer."

By Katie Wilson

But it's a dubious honor: we're the best at **taxing the poor**. Every six months or so another study comes out reminding us that Washington State wins the prize for having the most regressive tax system in the nation. According to the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy, **poor families in Washington State now pay 16.9%** of their income in state and local taxes, more than in any other state – in second place is Illinois, at 13.8%. By contrast, **the wealthiest households pay only 2.8%**.

What makes our tax system so awful? Washington State relies heavily on **sales taxes,**



property taxes, and excise taxes. These are regressive, taking a much bigger chunk out of the incomes of working and poor people than the incomes of rich people and the profits of corporations.

What's the solution? The states with the least regressive tax systems tend to have **highly progressive state income**

taxes (like the one proposed a few years ago by I-1098, which would have taxed individuals with incomes over \$200,000/year), tax credits or refunds for low income households, and lower sales and excise taxes. A capital gains tax and closing some of those corporate tax loopholes wouldn't hurt, either!

a Metro driver. Deloy Dupuis did not misbehave. He asked Duckworth to pay his fare, but as far as I can tell, he did so without rudeness, ridicule, or persistence. This could have happened to any bus driver.

So who was Martin Duckworth and why did he shoot a Metro driver? The main points repeated in the media were that he was homeless, used drugs, had been arrested, and had a mental illness. The Seattle Times story on the shooting tied this incident to ongoing complaints from downtown businesses about "aggressive panhandling," drug dealing, and "visibly mentally ill people on the streets" making tourists and local residents uncomfortable. In the days following the shooting, the Times' Editorial and Opin-

Continued as SAFETY, page 6

HELP, WE'VE BEEN ROBBED!



Every day, someone gets cheated by an abusive employer or landlord.

Alone we have no power. Together, we can fight back and win.



JOIN US!

Find out when fellow workers and tenants are taking action and need you to be there.

Leave your name, number and email:

www.seasol.net/contact



Seattle Solidarity Network
206.350.8650 **www.seasol.net**

We are a volunteer network of working people who defend each other through collective action and mutual support.

CITIZENS: Shelter needed

Continued from page 3

shelter beds in the county, which run at an 80% or higher capacity, number around 2,600. Beds are slowly being added, but not nearly enough to meet the need: thousands still sleep outside. The simple fact is that without shelter, people die. Last year, thirty four citizens died without shelter. This year, as of September 2013, thirty four have already died. That’s about half the average number of vehicle fatalities at this time of year in King County. The average life expectancy of a person living on the streets is 47 years. In 2005, The Committee to End Homelessness in King County, the current governing board of which includes Seattle Mayor Mike McGinn, King County Executive Dow Constantine, Car Toys CEO Dan Brettler, along with other local community and business leaders, implemented a Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness in King County.

Organized encampments like Camp Unity in Kirkland, SHARE’s Tent Cities 3 and 4, and Nickelsville provide food, clothing, shelter, and security to over 400 of the county’s homeless, but are not supported by the CEHKC as viable interim survival mechanisms. In fact, Nickelsville, which shelters men, women, children, and pets, was evicted by the City of Seattle from their site of over two years on September 1st, and residents have had to move to three new temporary sites. Without more options being created and with others unsupported, that leaves the Night Owl buses to pick up the slack. And if these routes are cut, it will mean not only a loss of transportation options, but also a net loss of emergency shelter, and for some people, that will turn their lives upside down.

SAFETY: Don’t criminalize poverty

Continued from page 5

ion Pages were filled with demands that the City and the SPD do something about this perceived public safety crisis. The thinly veiled implication was that poor and mentally ill people are dangerous, violent and a threat the safety of the “public”, which in this case generally refers to the middle and upper classes. In fact, while many people in this country have guns, very few homeless people do. Occasionally people who have been labeled as mentally ill are violent, but they are not inherently more violent as a group than other people. There is a double-standard at work here. If and when a white middle class male, perceived to be in good mental health commits violence—and this quite literally happens all the time—there is not a crusade to protect the public from white middle class men. Rather, it is treated as an isolated incident, a bad apple. Perhaps he was just having a rough day. It is an understandable reaction to want to point a finger and solve the problem, but this finger-pointing is rooted in fear, rather than truth. As a society, we allow ourselves to be enveloped in fear whenever someone from a marginalized group, like Martin Duckworth, does a scary thing, and it is sensationalized in the media. But further demonizing people in poverty will not actually make us safer. If you want to do something about homelessness, fight to end it. Don’t try to criminalize the people suffering from it. While it is true that everyone deserves to feel safe on the street and the bus, and no one ever deserves to be assaulted, the Times and sympathizers

are missing the astronomically larger public safety crisis: homelessness, abject poverty, untreated health conditions, food insecurity. How could you possibly feel safe on the street if you were living in those conditions? If you feel uncomfortable when approached by a homeless person on the street, ask yourself, “Who has it worse in this interaction?” Is it the person whose day is being briefly sidetracked, or is it the person who doesn’t know where their next meal is coming from or if they will be able to stay warm overnight? Why is it that our society has become so complacent to the idea of homelessness as an unavoidable reality that can only be dealt with through heavy-handed policing? The crisis is homelessness, not homeless people. Do we lack the compassion and humanity to address this form of extreme poverty in this rich region of this immensely wealthy country? I love my job as a Metro bus driver. I get to interact with so many different and amazing people all day long and get to be a part of their journey to wherever they’re headed. Sometimes the job can be very taxing. I’ve been yelled at several times by someone hovering over me, and the fear of being assaulted, however uncommon, is a very realistic one. But however easy it is to demonize homeless people, however easy it is to say that we should arrest anyone who seems crazy, in the name of public safety, it is a false dichotomy. There should not be a war between homeless people and people with stable housing. Instead we need to reframe the term “public safety” to include safety from poverty, illness, and hunger.

Organize in Your Neighborhood!

The 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

STRIKE ALERT!!!

Do you shop at Safeway, QFC, Fred Meyer, or Albertsons?

Then your grocery checker may go on strike to stand up for workers’ rights. These employers are trying to strip workers and their families of health care coverage. They are proposing no health care coverage for anyone working under 30 hours per week – and at the same time, they’re systematically reducing workers’ hours. In September 2013, grocery workers voted by 98% to authorize a strike. If their bosses don’t back down, they’ll need your support.

Text “Checkers” to 313131 to sign up for “Strike Alert Service”, and go to [Facebook.com/standwithourcheckers!](https://www.facebook.com/standwithourcheckers/)



The Great Streetcar Debate

Should the City of Seattle suspend its support of expanding the streetcar system?

Statement For:

Streetcars Are a Poor Use of Limited Resources

By Al Rasmussen

State and local budgets are under severe stress. The legislature is struggling to comply with the Supreme Court decision regarding funding of basic education and has not funded completion of either the SR-520 Bridge across Lake Washington or the SR-99 tunnel through downtown Seattle. There is no reserve to help withstand an unexpected disaster such as caused by wind or earthquake.

Demand for transit is rising but even current levels are under serious threat. Transit in both Snohomish and Pierce counties has already suffered massive curtailments. King County Metro is facing a possible 17 percent reduction of funding in 2014.

The proximate cause of the cutbacks is diminished funding, but the ultimate cause is political opposition in the legislature, where there is little support for the public sector generally and for public transportation in particular. There is resistance in the legislature to authorizing counties to enact local taxes to fund transit. Even if renewed, authorization will likely be for only two years, as was the case with the King County car tab fee expiring in 2014. In this grim financial environment it is wise to fund transportation in cost effective ways.

Spending on public transportation, along with on other utility systems, falls in three categories: installation, maintenance, operation. The maintenance backlog for streets and bridges in Seattle is notorious. At this time, with the enormous maintenance backlog and drastic threat to funding transit operation, resources should be devoted to those vital needs – maintenance and operation – and expansion should be postponed.

Streetcars do have their place in a balanced transportation system, as is done in other cities, where they complement other modes. In Seattle, by contrast, they compete with other modes. An example is the proposal to extend the line on Broadway East to East Aloha Street.

That line was justified as a consolation to residents of First Hill when the light rail station there was canceled, to provide them access to the Capitol Hill station. Extending that line to Aloha duplicates three Metro routes. Another example is the proposal to run a streetcar line along Eastlake to connect downtown and the University District, which is what the nearly finished light rail line will do.

Instead of competing with existing transit systems, the City of Seattle should be collaborating to help them be more efficient. Instead of investing in laying streetcar tracks, more effective would be (1) modifying traffic signals to give preference to transit, (2) building curb bulbs so buses do not have to compete with other vehicles to get back into the travel lane, and (3) creating bus-only lanes by removing parking on selected streets at selected times.

Expanding the streetcar system in Seattle would be the opposite of cost effective. According to an economic analysis of King County Metro Transit archived in the National Transit Database, for 2011, cost per passenger mile varies from \$0.91 to \$1.51 for various types of buses and is \$3.79 for streetcars. Moreover, laying streetcar track costs about \$35 million per mile, whereas installing the electrical system for trolley buses is \$1 to \$4 million per mile.

We should not be fiddling with streetcars while Metro is burning.

“We should not be fiddling with streetcars while Metro is burning.”

Statement Against:

Streetcars Where They Make Sense

By Martin Duke

Making the case for streetcars can be like making the case for bicycles: they’re not the solution to everyone’s problem, but they have their role. In many places, a bus is perfectly adequate, in particular where all-day demand is weak. But in our most intensely used corridors, streetcars bring numerous advantages.

Streetcars Guarantee Service

Critics see heavy capital investment as a drawback of streetcar lines, but in many ways it’s a benefit. A big budget overrides the local objections that constantly obstruct bus projects. Indeed, we’ve never built a modern streetcar line without some combination of signal priority and dedicated right-of-way. Although cities are getting better about doing these for buses, it’s hardly universal.

Moreover, the tracks in the street are a statement that the service won’t go away. Streetcar lines are expensive and carry a presumption of frequent service that politicians are reluctant to repudiate. For cost reasons, streetcars are less likely to have confusing changes in the route at different times of day, and time-consuming detours through giant parking lots. Instead, streetcar routes are direct and unchanging.

Streetcars Mobilize New Money

Most federal funds must be used for capital projects and therefore can’t simply be diverted to operating more buses. Streetcar projects have been very competitive nationwide in competing for those funds.

Meanwhile, American voters associate rail with high quality transit, while they associate buses with the service level we know and endure every day. While rail critics like to argue that many rail-like features can be imitated with buses, after over 50 years of promises, voters are right to be skeptical that this will happen. We can and should support efforts to improve bus service – but we shouldn’t

put all of our hopes on them.

Private interests paid half the construction cost of the South Lake Union streetcar and the full cost of running a third streetcar in rush hour, because streetcars are a worthwhile investment. Whatever else you might think of Vulcan, they’re astute businesspeople, and we can learn from their business decisions.

When streetcar critics say these projects are robbing money from buses, that’s seldom true. For better or worse, those bus alternatives simply won’t win the federal funds, private contributions, and public votes that rail will.

Streetcars Have Inherent Quality Advantages

Streetcars, as actually implemented, differ from real buses in that they aren’t delayed by fare payment; they have level boarding to make wheelchair and stroller boarding a breeze; the driver can’t be distracted by passengers trying to use her as a trip

planner; and they offer a comfortable ride. A comfortable ride isn’t just about luxury: it means people are more willing to stand, meaning you don’t need as many seats, which in turn means that the streetcars can fit more people.

How many hours of our lives have we lost because passengers were slow to pay, or had difficulty with the lift and restraints, or asked the driver a series of questions, or because the bus simply couldn’t fit us? How many missed transfers and missed appointments? These things don’t happen as often on streetcars.

It’s going to be a long time before streetcar and light rail lines go everywhere they ought to go. We should fight for more bus service AND more streetcar and light rail lines AND for reforms to make buses work better. Teaming up with the anti-transit lobby to kill streetcars isn’t going to improve bus service, but transit advocates sticking together will. Don’t be divided by those who are mostly interested in reducing the taxes they pay for transit, no matter what that means for the quality of that transit.

Martin Duke is Editor-in-Chief of the Seattle Transit Blog. <http://seattletransitblog.com>

“Teaming up with the anti-transit lobby to kill streetcars isn’t going to improve bus service.”



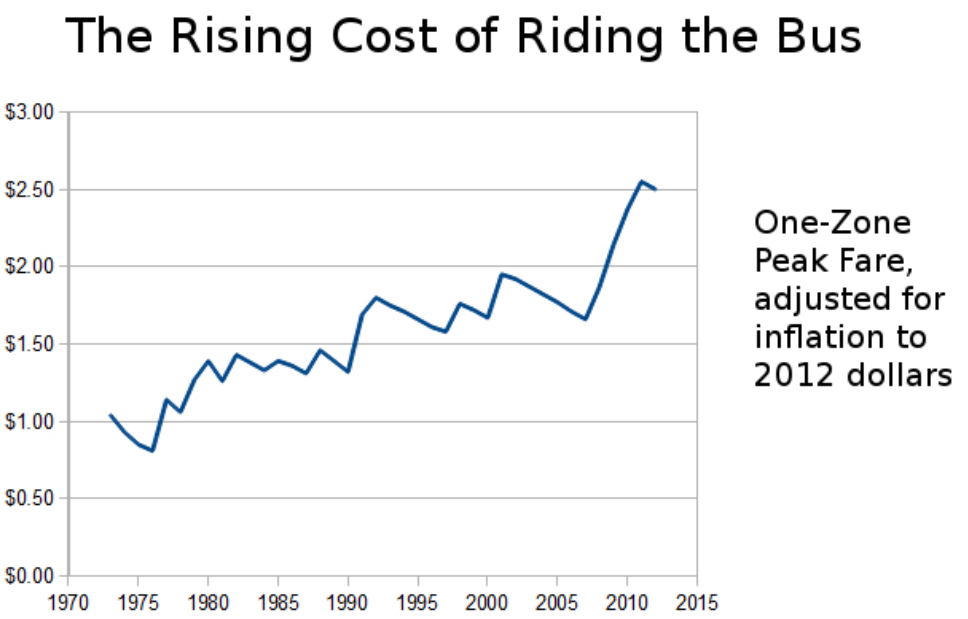
Streetcar on Yesler Avenue, 1909

Please see the rebuttals to these statements on page 12!

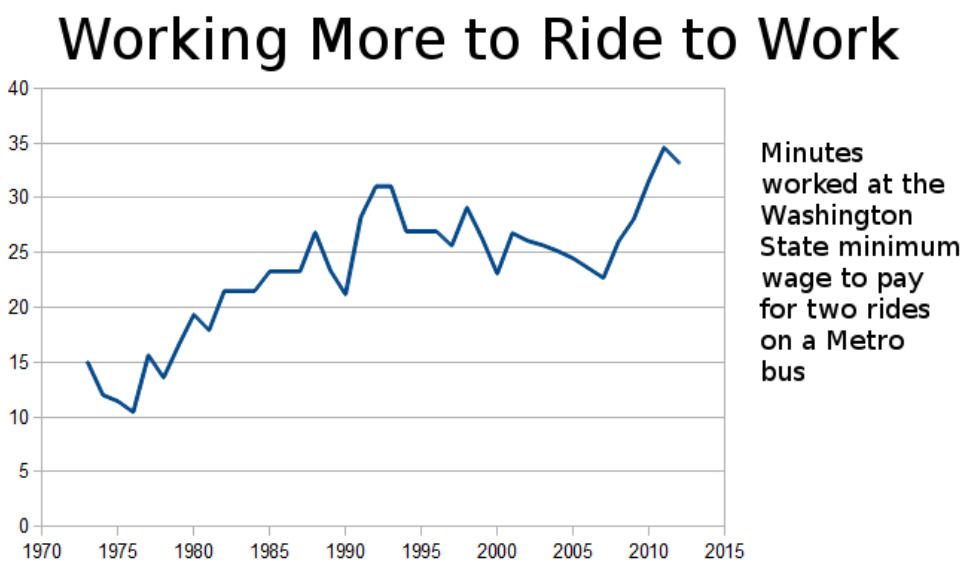
Let's Win a Low Income Fare!

Has Riding the Bus Really Gotten More Expensive?

IN THE MID-1970S, it cost 20 cents to ride a Metro bus. Adjusted for inflation, that's still less than a dollar. Today we pay \$2.50 in peak hours – that's a **fare increase of 250%**. And fares are likely to go up again next year.



WHEN YOU TAKE into account stagnating wages, this picture gets even worse. It used to be someone in Seattle earning minimum wage had to work for just over 10 minutes to pay for their bus rides to and from work. Today, **you have to work for 35 minutes to cover your commute** – and Washington State's minimum wage is the highest in the country!



ANSWER: Yes.

By Katie Wilson

The Transit Riders Union is campaigning for a low income reduced fare – and the King County Council is taking notice. On July 22 we presented council members with a petition of over 1,000 signatures, and TRU members and allies testified to the importance of affordable public transit.

In September the council also got a briefing from the Low Income Fare Options Advisory Committee, which they formed at the beginning of 2013. The first recommendation of this committee was that a low income fare program should be created!*

There's no question that a lower fare would improve the quality of life of thousands of citizens of King County. Our County Council knows this, and they say they support the idea in principle.

Then what's the hurdle? As usual, it's all about the money. A good low income fare program is likely to cost at least \$12 million per year. So the critics ask: where is this funding going to come from, when Metro can't even keep the buses running?

A low income fare shouldn't mean

more service cuts – this program needs its own dedicated funding source, and the money is out there. For example, the county already has the power to pass an Employer Tax that could fully fund a great low income fare program. The City of Seattle could contribute funding too.

In politics, where there's a will, there's a way. Our elected representatives need to know that a low income fare program is a priority for the people of King County. We're continuing to submit petition signatures to the County Council as we collect them. We need your help! Cut out the petition sheet printed in this newsletter, and ask ten of your friends and fellow bus riders to sign it – then mail it to the Transit Riders Union, P.O. Box 30104, Seattle, WA 98113 – or better yet, bring it to our next Membership Meeting on the 1st Monday of every month.

Together we can win a low income fare!

* You can find the full recommendations and report of the advisory committee online, at: <http://www.kingcounty.gov/transportation/LowIncomeOptions.aspx>

Who is Low Income?

Household Size	200% FPL
1	\$22,980
2	\$31,020
3	\$39,060
4	\$47,100
5	\$55,140
6	\$63,180
7	\$71,220
8	\$79,260

A common measure of low income is twice (200%) the Federal Poverty Level

According to the 2010 Census, **48% of the U.S. population was low income**. That's almost half of us!

Take a look at the chart. Is your income below this level for your household size? If so, then you're "low income" according to this measure. Join the club!

Low income isn't "them," it's "us": young and old, parents and single adults, high school drop-outs and people with college degrees, people laid off from decent jobs, working three part-time jobs for low wages, or relying on social services to make ends meet.

ANSWER: Probably you.



Transit Riders Union members Pauline Van Senus and Chuck Lare present petitions and testify before the King County Council.

Photos by Sam Smith



We, the Undersigned, support a Low Income Reduced Fare

PRINT YOUR NAME	YOUR SIGNATURE	YOUR EMAIL ADDRESS or PHONE NUMBER	ZIP CODE	Add me to the Transit Riders Union email list
				<input type="checkbox"/>
				<input type="checkbox"/>
				<input type="checkbox"/>
				<input type="checkbox"/>
				<input type="checkbox"/>
				<input type="checkbox"/>
				<input type="checkbox"/>
				<input type="checkbox"/>
				<input type="checkbox"/>

To sign this Petition, you do not need to be a registered voter. You need only be a King County resident who supports a Low Income Reduced Fare program and believes that public transit should be affordable for all.
RETURN PETITION SHEETS TO: Transit Riders Union, P.O. BOX 30104, SEATTLE, WA 98113 or CALL 206-651-4282



Transit Riders Union Application for Membership

Member Information	
Name	
Address (Street, Apt. #)	
Address (City, State, Zip)	
Phone Number	
Email	
I prefer to be contacted by	<input type="checkbox"/> email <input type="checkbox"/> telephone <input type="checkbox"/> mail (choose one)

We, the members of the Transit Riders Union, *are* the TRU. Together we decide how our organization runs and what it does, and together we fund its projects and campaigns. Paying our Member Dues is what makes the TRU *independent*. We are not reliant on money from corporations, foundations, or government agencies - so we are not beholden to them. As members of the TRU we fund our own democratic organization - so it is truly accountable *to us*. All voting members of the TRU, including organizers and officers, pay dues.

Dues Category	Monthly Dues	Income Guidelines*
<input type="checkbox"/> Maximum	\$20 or _____	Over \$3000/month
<input type="checkbox"/> Regular	\$10	\$1500 to \$3000/month
<input type="checkbox"/> Minimum	\$5	Under \$1500/month
<input type="checkbox"/> Nominal	\$1	Members making under \$750/month and for whom payment of minimum dues would result in severe hardship may pay nominal dues.

* This income scale is meant as a guideline. For instance, a single person making \$1000/month may nonetheless choose to pay regular or maximum dues, while a parent supporting children and making \$2000/month may pay minimum dues. You may also choose to pay more than \$20/month. Please honor the contributions of all TRU members by selecting the dues level most appropriate to your income and situation. Should you need to change your dues level, you may request and submit a change of status form.

Frequency of Dues Payment
Dues are due by the 1 st of each month. Dues may be paid one month at a time, three months in advance, or twelve months in advance. Please select your preferred option:
<input type="checkbox"/> Monthly
<input type="checkbox"/> Quarterly (Monthly Dues x 3)
<input type="checkbox"/> Annually (Monthly Dues x 12)
Total amount of first payment_____

(flip over)

SAVE OUR BUSES! Fund King County Metro, don't cut service!

[illegible]

To sign this Petition, you do not need to be a registered voter.
RETURN PETITION SHEETS TO: Transit Riders Union, P.O. BOX 30104, SEATTLE, WA 98113
or CALL 206-651-4282. Website: <http://transitriders.org>.



Method of Dues Payment
<p>Dues may be paid via PayPal, or by cash, check, or credit card. Checks and credit card information may be mailed to the TRU's P.O. Box (see below). Cash, checks or credit card may be brought to 1st Monday membership meetings. Please select your preferred means of payment:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I will pay via PayPal - please send me an invoice by email (PayPal account not required).</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I will pay via PayPal (link at saveourmetro.org/membership/).</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I will mail a check or credit card information to the TRU's P.O. Box.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> I will bring cash, check or credit card to 1st Monday membership meetings.</p> <p>If none of these methods of payment will work for you, or if you need help setting up a PayPal account, please talk to a TRU organizer or officer.</p>

Credit Card Information
Please charge Credit Card this amount:
Credit Card* #:
Expiration Date:
Print card holder's name:
CCV # (3 digits on back of card):
Billing Address (if different than indicated on front of form):
I hereby authorize [] a one-time payment or [] a recurring payment of the amount stated above.
Signature: _____ Date: _____

*We accept the following credit cards: VISA, MasterCard, American Express or Discover.

Mail completed form and payment to:
Transit Riders Union
P.O. Box 30104
Seattle, WA 98113

Associate Membership
If you wish to receive TRU news, announcements, and invitations to TRU events, but do not want to pay dues or attend membership meetings, you may apply for Associate Membership. Associate members are not eligible to vote.
<input type="checkbox"/> I am applying for Associate Membership

Member Pledge	
I, _____ <small>PRINT NAME</small>	as a Member of the Transit Riders Union, support the purposes of the TRU as expressed in its Mission and Principles and agree to abide by the Constitution of the Transit Riders Union.
Signature: _____	Date: _____

Membership Dues are not tax-deductible.

Questions about Membership? Email: contact@transitriders.org Call: 206-651-4282 www.transitriders.org

Keep Our Metro “Ours”

Why Public-Private Transit Is A Bad Idea

By Linda R. Anderson

The Perennial Campaign to Privatize Transit

Every ten years or so, usually during a recession when the State’s tax receipts are slim, talk crops up of contracting transit out to private corporations. Right wing think tanks hand around glossies to Legislators which promise big savings and less hassle for elected officials if they agree to “public-private partnerships”. Since the recession, private transit companies have launched high-pressure campaigns for privatization in cities across the US and Canada. While there is no direct threat to Metro at this time, once again, the pressure is on for Legislators to put the idea of transit privatization, or public-private partnerships, on the table for discussion. What are the facts?

Public-Private Partnerships are NOT Cheaper

It is sometimes assumed that government is always inefficient and that private enterprise could do things better. But the idea that a private company could run Metro Transit more efficiently and save taxpayers money is mistaken. When independent researchers studied 142 transit agencies, they were surprised to find that public transit provides lower costs per hour than private contracting. The notion that a private company

could make transit pay for itself and the taxpayers wouldn’t have to pay for it is also untrue. Taxpayers pay for transit either way—public or privatized. The days when private transit systems made a go of it without tax subsidies ended right after World War II! Fares pay for only about 25% of the cost of operating a modern transit system.

Public Transit Gives Riders More Say over Routes and Fares

Publicly run transit like Metro has many advantages in addition to lower costs. We, the public, through our elected representatives on the County Council, make all the decisions about fares, routes, and safety standards. In addition, Metro is required to hold public meetings about service changes and fare hikes, allowing rider input. Under private transit, such public meetings are often not required. With Metro, all finances are subject to public disclosure. But courts have ruled that the finances of private companies are proprietary, secret even from the elected officials who are supposed to oversee the private contractors. This denies the public a say in fares and routes, and the ability to oversee costs.

“The pressure to boost profits is a constant incentive to cut corners on service quality, safety, and vehicle upkeep.”

Won’t Competitive Bidding Benefit Taxpayers?

There are only three private companies that run virtually all privatized large transit systems. The largest, Veolia/Transdev and First Transit/First Group, are multibillion-dollar corporations based in France and the United Kingdom. Three bidders are not enough to provide market competition. Each company knows what the other is doing and frequently the bids are lowballed. But then, halfway into the contract, providers can threaten to shut down service and leave the community in the lurch if they aren’t given more money. Even the strongest legal protections could not stop private providers from shifting cost over-runs to the taxpayers in Denver, Melbourne and London. There

is also added expense to the government to hire an extra layer of transit experts to oversee the private companies. This requires considerable expertise because transit is very complex and not easy to supervise. In the end, the private service more often than not costs more than had it been kept public.

Metro Provides Better Quality than Outsiders Could

Metro has highly skilled planners who are intimately familiar with local culture and traffic needs. No way can a multi-billion dollar company based in France offer that. People stay working at Metro because they believe in Metro and its mission to serve the public. Metro pays its employees decent wages, and that is why riders will frequently find that their bus drivers have 15 or 25-year safe-driver awards. Many drivers have driven the same routes for years and know all of the destinations and addresses on their route, know the regular passengers, and look out for those passengers who need it. By contrast, large private companies glean their profits primarily by paying very low wages. They accept a very high turnover rate of inexperienced drivers, more customer complaints, and

higher accident rates as a cost of doing business.

Profit Motives are Detrimental to Safety and Quality

The central problem with private transit providers is the profit motive. Public agencies answer only to the public. All their money can be put right into running transit. That is not the case for corporations that run private transit. Legally, they **MUST** take some of the tax money we give them to provide transit, and use it instead to pay shareholders. Why should we let mega-corporations mine our tax dollars for out-of-country profits? The pressure to boost profits is a constant incentive to cut corners on service quality, safety, and vehicle upkeep.

The Bottom Line...

Metro is an essential service and an award-winning agency. We can do what’s best by fully funding Metro and keeping it a stable public agency that we can control up front. We the public can be proud that it is OUR Metro—let’s keep it that way. Keep the “our” in SAVE OUR METRO!

The full article, with references, can be found at <http://transitriders.org/pdf/Anderson>

Linda Anderson is a Metro driver and ATU Local 587 Executive Board Officer.

Join the Transit Riders Union!

Fill out the Membership Application on the opposite page and mail it to:

Transit Riders Union
P.O. Box 30104
Seattle, WA 98113

– or bring it to the next TRU Membership Meeting, on the 1st Monday of every month:

TRU Monthly Membership Meeting:

1st Monday of every month
6:30 – 8:30 pm
(doors open at 6:00 pm)

Labor Temple, Hall #6
2800 1st Avenue
Seattle, WA 98121



Pass it on!

Want to distribute the Transit Reader newsletter to your fellow bus riders, or leave some at your neighborhood library, community center, or cafés? We’ll be happy to give you a stack of papers. Just call us at 206-651-4282 and leave a message or email contact@transitriders.org to arrange delivery or pick-up.

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:

- a) Call 206-456-0609
- b) Press 1
- c) Enter the bus **stop number**, then the # sign
- d) Listen to the real time arrival information

Text:

- a) Text “onebus [bus stop number]” to 41411
- b) 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.

STREETCAR DEBATE CONTINUED...

Rebuttal to: “Streetcars Are a Poor Use of Limited Resources”

By Martin Duke

MR. RASMUSSEN makes a number of interesting points:

Duplication of Service: The idea that an Eastlake Streetcar duplicates University Link is an extremely common misconception. The point of an Eastlake Streetcar is not to provide a way to get from the U-District to Downtown, and the First Hill Streetcar does not get people from Capitol Hill to Pioneer Square. Instead, those lines connect the places in between: the Broadway Corridor, Yesler Terrace, Little Saigon, South Lake Union, and Eastlake with our regional Link line - and with each other.

Bus Improvements: Mr. Rasmussen suggests a number of extremely worthwhile improvements: curb bulbs, turning parking into bus lanes, and signal priority. And those are great things to do! But they’re also very inexpensive. The obstacle to doing these things is political, not financial, and a City that prioritizes transit can easily to both.

“Metro is burning”: It’s true that the

legislature has created an artificial crisis at Metro. But previous generations have always found something to do with the money other than invest in transit projects that will benefit future generations, leaving us to do that hard work far more expensively than they could have.

This neglect of the future stops now. If the City spends tens of millions of dollars to shore up Metro’s operating budget, much of that will inevitably bleed into the suburbs. More importantly, at the end of that year or two, we have nothing to show for it except for the rides provided during the interval. If Seattle spends that money on creating high-quality transit, the people of Seattle will treasure it for decades.



Rebuttal to: “Streetcars Where They Make Sense”

By Al Rasmussen

THE IMPUTATION that we need streetcars because Metro Transit is unpopular has to contend with two facts. One is that there are about 400,000 boardings a day. In addition to voting with their feet, voters have repeatedly approved tax increases to fund Metro Transit.

Some advantages ascribed to streetcars are not intrinsic to that mode. With ORCA, Metro Transit is creeping toward a proof-of-payment system. It’s not necessary to adopt streetcars to reduce fare collection delays.

A mode packing in more passengers by having fewer seats is hardly suitable for an aging population.

Whether aspiring passengers are

stranded at the curb is a function of how loaded the vehicle is, be it a bus or a streetcar. It is a simple question of supply and demand.

Relative permanence of tracks, which were all over Seattle before being torn up after WW II, is not a convincing argument for streetcars. Having few bridges across the Ship Canal by itself enforces relative fixity of transit routes. Another consequence of Seattle’s geography is that Eastlake Avenue, for instance, will always be a transit route.

In this time of budget trauma, enormous capital costs are a dubious benefit. Public transportation has a severe funding shortage, not a surplus.

Streetcars are enjoying a resurgence of popularity, in large part because of their novelty. The late Route 99 streetcar was beloved by Seattleites and especially tourists visiting the waterfront. Most of Metro Transit’s 400,000 a day, by contrast, are off to work, school, appointments, shopping, etc.

Your Ticket to Health

By Dale Terasaki

What makes you healthy? For far too long, we in the medical field have been wagging our fingers at you: “Just eat better and exercise!” While not exactly wrong, this attitude oversimplifies the issue and ignores a crucial element to health: everything else in your life. Recently, there has been growing interest in “social determinants of health” – factors that dramatically shape your world like income, race, education, neighborhood, and yes, transportation.

Think about it: eating fresh produce is hard to do when the corner store sells only chips and soda. Exercise isn’t easy when you have no time after work, can’t afford a gym membership, and can’t walk safely to a park. Landing and keeping a job – one which might provide health insurance – can be nearly impossible if your bus line just got cut.

So why not just drive to a better grocer, to a safe park, and to a job? Well, driving might not work for someone who is poor, visually impaired, hearing impaired, mobility impaired, too young, too old, undocumented, on sleep-inducing medications, sick of traffic jams, sick of parking, or simply trying to limit their carbon footprint. These constituents (listen up, politicians!) need and want more options than just a car to fully engage with society. So state and local leaders

who value social inclusion and equity should invest in public transportation. And in doing so, they can empower many communities to make healthier choices.

But there’s more to it. The act of taking public transit itself can be healthy. Researchers at the Centers for Disease Control documented that transit riders get significant amounts of exercise every day just by walking to and from the bus; many of them even surpass recommended levels! Other studies have found that commuting by car might make it harder to lose weight and that long commutes are associated with high blood pressure. Then there’s air pollution and car accidents to think about, and public transit may be a way to reduce these health problems as well. So state and local leaders who value public health and safety should invest in public transportation.

The World Health Organization states on their webpage that “health is a shared responsibility, involving equitable access to essential care...” I hope you’d agree that transportation has quite a lot to do with equitable access, so transportation is therefore an important determinant of health. King County’s budget for Metro, on some level, is public health spending. Organizing for transit is taking a stand for a more inclusive, healthier society. Eat better and exercise? Yes, and advocate for transit.

Destinations: Carkeek Park Seattle’s Best Park?

Rapid Ride D or Route 40

Take Rapid Ride “D” to NW 100th Pl. or Route 40 from the Northgate Transit Center, jumping off on Holman Rd. near the Q.F.C. Walk behind Q.F.C. to NW 100th Pl., then east about one block to the upper park entrance. The 1.25 mile-long trail starts at the back of the parking lot, and leads down into the park past large cedar stumps from logging in 1889. Soon you will pass the 120-year old Piper Homestead Orchard, eventually emerging from the canyon onto the large south meadow.

Continue west to the beach and main picnic area. Attractions include a salt water beach, a unique Salmon-themed play area, miles of trails and spawning Chum Salmon (late October through early December). Catch the Salmon Celebration in the park on Friday, November 29th, 10am – 2pm. With all this good stuff many consider this Seattle’s best park.

— Pauline Van Senus

