



The Transit Reader

The Official Newsletter of the Transit Riders Union

transitriders.org

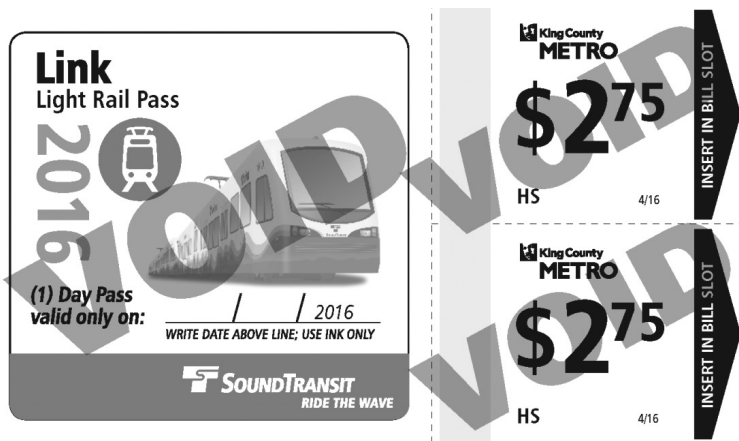
Volume 4, Issue 1 • Spring 2016

Who's Got a Ticket to Ride?

By Katie Wilson

Last year 138 social service organizations throughout King County distributed over 1.4 million bus tickets to the people they serve: low-income youth, the homeless, the unemployed, refugees, veterans, seniors and people with disabilities living off meager social security payments.

King County's pioneering ORCA LIFT program is a welcome relief for low-income riders who can afford \$1.50 per ride, or \$54 for a monthly pass. Still, it's important to remember that less than ten years ago the off-peak adult fare was just \$1.25, and economic conditions for the poor haven't exactly improved since then. For people who are living on very low or no income, ORCA LIFT simply isn't affordable



We organized and we won!! This new "combo-ticket" will be available to social service agencies starting in June.

all the time.

These are the people who rely on tickets. They number in the thousands, if not the tens of thousands. And as of March 26th, many of these people found another challenge added to their already chal-

lenging lives: Metro bus service has been restructured around the new light rail line, which they can't ride because Link Light Rail doesn't accept the tickets.

Starting in January the Transit Riders Union urged Sound Transit

and Metro to come up with a solution that doesn't leave some riders with a second-class transit system. And we won! Soon after we began a petition and announced a public action for April 16th, the transit agencies announced they had figured out a short-term fix: a light rail day pass attached to two bus tickets, so that riders can use both systems and transfer between them.

It's great that our voices are being heard now, but light rail access for ticket-users has been a problem in South Seattle for years, and the

transit agencies and elected officials have had years to anticipate how this year's U-Link extension would make the problem more acute. One can't help but notice the context of their sudden responsiveness: with Sound Transit 3 headed for the ballot this fall, they're wary of public criticism.

It's going to take concerted and ongoing pressure to make sure the needs of very low-income and no-income transit riders don't recede into the background again.

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Hillary Visits a Seattle High School, and Student Resentments Surface

By Ifrah Abshir

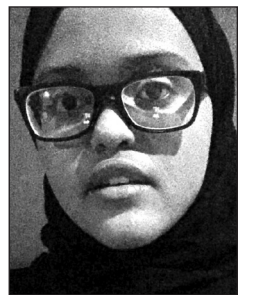
It was a typical Monday at Rainier Beach High School. Most students, including myself, were dragging our feet from class to class, counting down the minutes until 2:50 p.m.

Then, during third period, a classmate of mine shouted from the back of the room, "Hillary Clinton is coming to Rainier Beach tomorrow!" Instantly, the class swarmed to her, asking for her sources. At our school we are very politically aware and have discussions about presidential candidates nearly every week.

The news made us act as if we were two-year-olds force-fed several bottles of energy drinks. After about five

a particular candidate has their best interests at heart.

At Rainier Beach, we share a genuine interest in politics, largely because we have to. Being a school with over 90% students of color and more than 70% on free and reduced lunch, most of the things being said in the political world right now affect us directly.



Ifrah Abshir

For instance, Donald Trump has publicly insulted Mexicans, Muslims, immigrants, and those who are less affluent. Essentially, he is insulting nearly all of our student population. He has also proposed several policies infringing on our rights as Americans which he threatens to implement if he becomes president. This incites fear in our hearts and forces us to watch the campaigns while praying that certain personalities do not get elected.

Which is why a lot of our students hold animosity towards Mrs. Clinton.

Ahlaam Ibraahim, a senior, said, "I don't trust her because of her policies and how she's always switching up. Something in my gut says she isn't about what she states she is. It's like she's putting on a show for us."

Another student, Naima Yusuf, said, "I'm still hung over her calling [gangs of kids in urban areas] 'super predators' and then saying they needed to be brought to heel. This was and is still super insulting to me."

Continued as HILLARY page 2

A More Hospitable Seattle

By Hannah Long-Higgins

It is a typical Wednesday at noon – I am sitting in the lunchroom at the Westin hotel in downtown Seattle, surrounded by housekeepers and dishwashers from all over the world. Badatu, a struggling single mother suffering from health problems, sits across from me. She tells me that her rent was just raised to \$4,000 a month, a striking blow to a woman and family barely surviving. Badatu's story is one of nearly 200 I have heard over the past several months as part of a labor union campaign to hold hotel owners, developers, and city politicians accountable for the consequences of rapid urban development on Seattle's hospitality workers.

What began as an effort to quantify the displacement of Seattle's downtown union hotel workers in the midst of Seattle's housing crisis has turned into a story that is much larger and more complex than a classic tale of gentrification. Workers are moving to new geographic locations in search of cheaper rent, but those locations are not necessarily farther outside the city. Many who are being forced to move remain in the same area and make other sacrifices, including living with others in confined spaces, in order to do so.

Justina Guzman, a housekeeping attendant at the Washington Athletic Club, shared her family's story with me in the lunchroom.

"Four years ago all fifteen of us had to move in together in order to be able to afford housing."

When I asked if she was worried about the possibility of having to move again in the next couple of years, she answered calmly, "I will only be worried if we start splitting, but if we keep living together it will be easier." In her five-bedroom house, that's three people per room, with two people sleeping on the floor.

While housing options are few and far between for the average low-wage worker, inadequate public trans-



Badatu.

PHOTOGRAPH BY HANNAH LONG-HIGGINS.

sit adds another layer of stress to daily life. Seattle's heavy daily traffic makes for an unbearable commute downtown from south-end suburbs like SeaTac and Kent. And while regional light rail can transport some workers, many in the hospitality industry are confined to cars because they must be at work before morning rail service begins.

So what happens when the city cuts a bus line from, say, Kent to Seattle? In Justina Guzman's world, the alternative route is a one-way commute that involves two or three buses and a travel time of up to 120 minutes, depending on traffic. At the end of a physically exhausting workday, this type of commute not only detracts from valuable family and rest time, but it can also be unsafe.

Westin bartender Melody Swett opts to drive because, she says, "There are no options on that one. The buses don't run down there, and I never know when I'm going to get home. You have to go down to a dangerous area to get the bus. One guy got stabbed down there. I could get stuck until what, 5 in the morning?"

In the world of low-wage work, a lack of affordable housing and inadequate public transit options are in-

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RIDE: More tickets, please! —

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So, now that we’ve got their attention, there’s another problem that needs fixing: there are never enough tickets.

TRU hears this again and again from the people who run the social service organizations that distribute the tickets. Chris Langelier, the Executive Director of West Seattle Helpline, explains that although they received more tickets this year than last year, they still have to ration them carefully: “Even with that increase, we are still struggling to meet the need – many members of our community are struggling to afford bus fare for work, medical appointments, job interviews, or to access other resources and meet basic needs.”

Or listen to Caitlin Wasley, the Resettlement Support Manager at World Relief Seattle, who anticipates serving around 800 refugees arriving in Western Washington in 2016, the majority of whom will live in King County: “Folks participating in our Match Grant early employment program are required to come to classes at our office every weekday; but we are only able to provide them with bus tickets for about half of the month for each adult. This doesn’t even cover their children’s transportation needs at all!”

Why aren’t there enough tickets to go around? Social service organizations purchase the tickets for twenty cents on the dollar – for a single-ride ticket with a face value of \$2.50, that’s \$0.50. Even with this discount it’s a large expense for cash-strapped non-profits, and most don’t have the money to purchase enough tickets to meet the most basic transportation needs of the people they serve. King County also limits the number of tickets that can be sold in a year, so many organizations don’t get all they apply for.

This is artificial scarcity, and it can be easily fixed. King County should allow organizations to purchase more tickets at a lower cost, either by reducing the percentage of face value they pay, or by

charging 20% of the \$1.50 ORCA LIFT fare rather than the standard adult fare. Although Metro calculates their 80% “subsidy” as an expense for budgeting purposes, it needs to be acknowledged that, for the most part, the people who use bus tickets are not going to be paying their fare when they don’t have tickets — they are going to be riding without paying, or not riding at all. By making tickets cheaper and more plentiful, Metro will not lose significant revenue.

The bus ticket program may be clumsy in many ways, and the transit agencies should absolutely work toward new card-based solu-

“We are still struggling to meet the need.”

tions, disposable and/or durable, that could work well for many very low-income and no-income riders. But in the meantime, the bus tickets are what we’ve got.

Lowering the cost and making more bus tickets available should be part of any adequate response to our Homelessness State of Emergency. With over 4,500 human beings sleeping rough in King County and homeless deaths at an all time high, and with thousands more people losing their food stamps right now due to the reintroduction of workfare requirements, we don’t need to be squeezing pennies out of the desperately poor. We need to be making sure that everyone can get to the places they need to go to sustain and improve their lives.

Katie Wilson is general secretary of the Transit Riders Union. An earlier version of this article appeared on the Seattle Transit Blog.

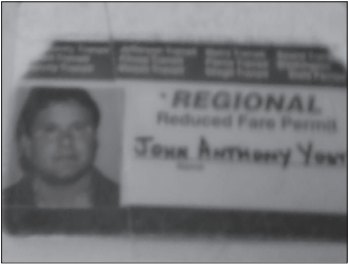
Riders and Service Providers Speak Out

Lower the rates!

“This is a picture of an old bus pass of mine when they were only \$5.00 to purchase at Bartell’s. It was loaded with a sticker for the month back then. I was new in Seattle though I was raised in Tacoma. I was lucky because I had a bunch of friends who showed me around and showed me the tunnel for the electric trolley busses. Now, as you know they share the tunnels with light rail. I was lost and needed help. I was really lucky that the passes were only \$5.00.

I know that today the reduced rate is \$36.00 a month! From 1999’s prices til now, it is an astronomical jump! I mean look at the difference in price! I was blessed because I had people show me around and then I was able to navigate my way through Seattle on the busses. That was 18 years ago and the bus has made my life easier and so much more affordable. I want others to experience the portability of the low rate so that they cannot be blocked from their appointments, doctor’s appointments, and housing meetings to get a permanent place to stay. I had this luxury and it made all of the difference in the world.”

– John Y



Let youth ride

“I am a service provider and work with youth who are dependent on bus tickets from social service agencies. They need to be able to ride light rail service too.”

– Anne Cotton

Close the class gap

“As a Health Care Advocate, each year I work with about 600 homeless women and families to help them coordinate their medical care. An enormous barrier that many of my clients face is getting transportation to medical appointments.

While the ORCA LIFT program has been tremendously helpful for people who have enough income to cover the \$54 monthly pass or the \$1.50 rides, the vast majority of my clients have so few financial resources that even this reduced cost is a tremendous hardship for them. As a result, I am able to provide Metro bus tickets to help clients get to their medical appointments.

However, as Link expands and Metro routes are deleted and changed, the class gap between my homeless clients and those who can afford their own Link rides will continue to increase. If Sound Transit wants to be a leader in transportation equity, as it has been by choosing to accept the LIFT card, I strongly recommend that Link consider a ticket system similar to Metro’s for social service agencies to participate in. My clients desperately need access to fast and easy transportation and cannot afford to be left behind as Seattle transitions its focus from bus to light rail.”

– Nina Cole

Survival should not be a luxury

“As a case manager working with the chronically homeless I see the struggle people go through to simply get from point A to point B. Many of my clients have primary care physicians in places like Tacoma and not having fare to get there can be a major hurdle for people who are just trying to take care of their health. With the restructuring of the buses around the expanding Link Light Rail it becomes more important to consider how these individuals will meet their basic needs.”

– Vincent Inch

Need for free transit

“I work at Queen Anne Helpline, a small nonprofit social service agency; we provide financial assistance to help pay rent and utilities, we have a small clothing bank and food pantry, we can provide vouchers for people to get a state ID – but the most frequent form of assistance is providing free bus tickets.

Queen Anne Helpline doubled our request for tickets for 2016. Last year we ran out, so this year we set aside twice as much money specifically to buy more tickets. We were still approved for less than we asked for.

ORCA LIFT does not help the homeless. Nor the people I see daily at work who are living on the most fixed and bare bones incomes: social security, child support, SSI, disability or veterans benefits, and unemployment insurance. There is a big question that needs to be answered: “How can we help the neediest among us get where they need to go?”

Public transit should be FREE for low-income seniors and the disabled (I see people in their 70s, who are not in perfect health, trying to walk up Queen Anne hill to get to our office for one of our pre-packed grocery bags – in the rain!).

We need more people to use transit; keeping fares affordable FOR EVERYONE – will help enable that.”

– Lisa Barnes

HILLARY: Not selling it —

Continued from page 1

If so many of our students feel this way about Clinton, how do you expect they felt knowing that she was coming to our school the next day? We felt that using Rainier Beach was a strategic PR stunt by the Clinton campaign, considering most of our students are young people of color.

Yet despite all of our internal feelings and desire to act upon them, we got the news so late that there was nothing we could do but attend the rally and see what Hillary was about.

The next day, we waited for hours to get into our own gym for the rally. We were tired, coming off a full school day, and our spirits were low because we felt like we were being sold for publicity without our consent. To add to that, in line we had offensive comments directed toward us. One woman approached us and said, “Can I take a photo with you guys so I can show people that I’m not afraid of Muslims?”

Another man and woman were snickering behind us, talking mess about our school and neighborhood. In that moment we felt like we did not belong because we were

some of the only people of color in that long line, which wrapped three times around in the parking lot and onto the front of the school. Can you imagine feeling like you don’t belong in your own school?

People from Mrs. Clinton’s campaign were picking out the few people of color in attendance and asking them to stand in the bleachers behind Hillary so the crowd would look more diverse then it really was. It looked as if most people there had never stepped foot in the south end, let alone Rainier Beach.

In Clinton’s speech, she didn’t mention what she would do for schools like ours. She didn’t talk about the school-to-prison pipeline. She didn’t talk about high incarceration rates. Exactly as our students feared, Mrs. Clinton had a lot of filler talk, but not the hardcore conversations that are needed. She didn’t even allow for a question and answer session, and the only people that got to talk to her and take pictures were those in the priority line.

This explains why a lot of our students and staff appreciate Bernie so much: Sanders actually talks about

things that matter to us. He has those uncomfortable conversations because he knows they’re needed. We appreciate Bernie because he knows our political and economic system right now only helps the rich get richer and the poor get poorer; that it only continues to be punitive and inconsiderate. This explains why he won the Washington state caucus on Mar. 26 by a sweeping majority. You would have assumed that somebody from Hillary’s campaign might have informed her about our school before she chose to attend.

Our time counts too

“The homeless have to spend their time getting one ticket a week here and two a month there and four every other month at another place. It’s very exhausting. I wonder, have they at Metro considered a homeless rate for the ORCA card? Do they understand how much time and money that would save? This is my highest hope.”

– Barb Balden

Chairperson, Transit Riders Union Homelessness & Transit Committee

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

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King County should fund SHARE

By Katie Wilson

On March 31st, SHARE (Seattle Housing and Resource Effort), King County’s largest shelter provider, closed their indoor shelter network and set up camp outside the King County Administration Building. With operating costs rising and their county funding cut entirely last year, SHARE was over \$70,000 in debt. Without new funding, they couldn’t reopen.

When I visited the camp on April 7th with other members of the Transit Riders Union (TRU), the plaza was filled to capacity with mats and tents. TRU has worked in coalition with SHARE for the past three years. I have nothing but respect for their over-worked, minimum-wage staff and for the hundreds of homeless people who live in and run SHARE’s shelters and tent encampments. They do immensely difficult and valuable work with scant resources, and they persist in the face of ignorance, malice, and the endless crises and conflicts that result from lack of stable funding. They persist because they believe in their work, and their persistence has created a sometimes messy but beautiful and remarkable community of the forgotten.

In less than a month after SHARE set up camp on March 31st, the number of people at Tent City 6 has climbed to over 200. Campers include victims of the “sweeps” of unauthorized encampments and people referred from full shelters, all looking for a safe place to sleep. King County Jail and Harborview Hospital have been sending over people they release who have nowhere else to go.



SHARE’s model is about shelter and survival. It is about empowering people through democracy and self-management. SHARE gives hundreds of homeless people a safe alternative to the streets, and many use this stability as a springboard to jobs and housing – although SHARE’s focus, much to the consternation of the political and non-profit establishment, is not on tracking those results.

Critics including the Seattle Times editorial board (April 7, 2016) demand that SHARE abandon their vision and adopt a fundamentally different model – one that is much more expensive, and that would not work for many of the people who thrive at SHARE. Even as the Times acknowledges that SHARE operates “at a cost that is a fraction of other government-funded shelter beds” they urge Seattle and King County to resist SHARE’s call for adequate funding and parrot baseless accusations of “sketchy financial management”.

SHARE has one enormous problem: underfunding. Demonizing SHARE also conveniently distracts from the fundamental issue. The overwhelming reason why homeless people do not find homes is not a lack of case managers. It is a lack of affordable housing.

Whatever one feels about the adequacy of

Seattle’s plans to address the affordable housing crisis, significant relief for low-income renters is years away. In the meantime, over 4,500 are sleeping rough in King County and homeless deaths are at an all-time high. To keep people safe and alive and off the streets, what is needed is shelter. SHARE is providing shelter, they are doing it on the cheap, and

it in a way that has proved life-changing for many disenfranchised and disillusioned people. If King County is really serious about addressing our homelessness state of emergency, they should be making every effort to support SHARE’s work.

A longer version of this article appeared on The Stranger blog.

JOIN THE Transit Riders Union!

Fill out the membership form below and help build a movement!



The Transit Riders Union is an independent, democratic, member-run union. We are workers, seniors and students; we are people with disabilities, low-income people, and people experiencing homelessness. We are organizing to make public transit affordable and accessible for all.

We know that a massive expansion of public transit is necessary to stop climate change, and we’re building a movement to make it happen.

We believe in progressive taxation. Working and low-income people already pay for public transit through fares, sales tax, and flat car tab fees. Washington State has the most regressive tax system in the country – we simply can’t build a true mass transit system, let alone fund education and other basic needs, until corporations and the wealthy begin to pay their fair share.


Do you ride public transit?
Then you’re a transit rider, and you belong in the Transit Rider Union. As a member, you have a voice and a vote at our monthly meetings, which take place on the 1st Monday of each month, 6:30 – 8:30 PM at the Labor Temple Hall 6, 2800 1st Ave. We have power in numbers and organization. Join us today!

This card certifies that its bearer is a



Member
of the **Transit Riders Union**

Name: *Transit Rider*
Member No. *10010000*
Local: *Seattle*
Member since: *05/16* Signature _____



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	[] email [] telephone [] mail (choose one)	
Frequent Email List	Do you want to be added to an email list for announcements and discussion among members in between meetings? You can always ask to be removed later.	
	YES [] NO []	
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. Membership dues are not tax-deductible.		
Dues Category	Monthly Dues	Income Guidelines*
[] Maximum	\$20 or _____	Over \$3000/month
[] Regular	\$10	\$1500 to \$3000/month
[] Minimum	\$5	Under \$1500/month
[] Nominal	\$1	Members making under \$750/month and for whom paying \$5 per month would cause 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. 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 Monday 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:		
[] Monthly		
[] Quarterly (Monthly Dues x 3)		
[] Annually (Monthly Dues x 12)		
Total amount of first payment _____		
(please turn over...)		

Raise Up Washington Mobilizes to Lift Wages & Win Paid Sick Leave

By Raise Up Washington

The Pacific Northwest has led the national movement to raise wages and fight income inequality that was sparked in Seatac, exploded in Seattle and Tacoma, and now has the promise to catch fire across Washington State. Raise Up Washington, a broad coalition of labor, faith, and community groups, has introduced I-1433 that will give over 700,000 workers a raise to \$13.50 phased in by 2020 and allow one million workers the ability to earn paid sick & safe leave.

“For many this will mean no longer choosing between rent and childcare, between food and transportation. When we raise the minimum wage, we lift people out of poverty, and reduce dependence on social services and government programs. It’s how we build a pathway to the middle class,” said Michael Ramos, Executive Director of the Church Council of Greater Seattle.

The initiative was officially filed by Ariana Davis, a grocery worker from Auburn. Davis said, “Passing paid sick leave and raising the minimum wage would change my life and the lives of thousands of workers like me. It would make us healthier and more able to take care of our families and customers.”

I-1433 would take concrete steps to address racial and gender disparities that exist in our workforce. From the health-care industry, to restaurants, professional childcare and home health care, women make up a majority of workers in many low-wage industries and are the least like-

ly to have paid sick days. Restaurants and food services are some of the worst, where only 19% of their workers can earn sick leave. As a result, many female workers are forced to come to work sick — and risk getting their customers sick — or stay home and lose a paycheck.

People of color are disproportionately represented among those not being paid enough to make ends meet. Discrimination and systemic barriers have left 41% of African-American workers and 45% of Latino workers earning less than \$13.50 per hour — double the rate of white workers — and the numbers are even worse for women of color. Raising the minimum wage will help thousands of people of color who now work in poverty earn more to provide for themselves and their families.

Raising wages and establishing paid sick leave doesn’t just help workers; it helps small businesses. According to the Budget and Policy Center, raising the minimum wage to \$13.50 would provide nearly \$2.5 billion more in earnings annually in the Washington state economy. Low-wage earners immediately spend paychecks on necessities like food and clothing in their communities and local businesses throughout Washington will benefit. A study by the Bureau of Labor Statistics found that states that raised their minimum wage actually saw 50% faster job growth — and a stronger economy — than states that left their minimum wage stagnant.

The Raise Up Washington coalition is organizing in communities across the



Ariana Davis, an Auburn grocery worker, filed I-1433

state to win the passage of this historic initiative. “This campaign is being fueled by hundreds of volunteers to gather signatures at public events and street corners in their own neighborhoods. We can only win when more people step forward and stand with us to reach our goal of 250,000 signatures by the end of June to place this on the ballot,” said Jon Grant, Outreach Director for Raise Up Washington. “We are seeing overwhelming support for our initiative, but to make it a reality we need even more volunteers to give Washington a raise!”

To sign up and volunteer on with Raise Up Washington, visit <http://www.raiseupwa.com/get-involved/>

The brand new Seattle Transit Map and Guide is here!

Seattle has long needed an easy-to-read and portable transit map. Now we finally have one! This map was designed by Oran Viriyincy and produced by the Transit Riders Union in collaboration with the Seattle Department of Transportation. It’s an invaluable tool for navigating Seattle’s increasingly integrated network of buses, light rail and streetcars. Line thickness and color intuitively emphasize high-frequency, all-day service. While app-based tools like One Bus Away and Trip Planner can help you figure out the best way to get from A to B, the Seattle Transit Map helps you visualize the transit system throughout the entire city, so you can discover new connections and destinations. It gives you the freedom to travel through the city with confidence without planning every detail of your trip in advance.

How can you get a copy, you ask? TRU has limited quantities available at our meetings and events – so check out the calendar on our website, <https://transitriders.org/calendar>. SDOT and Sound Transit may also have copies at their outreach events. You can visit <http://seattletransitmap.com> to order a poster version from Oran. And, if you become a member of TRU or make a donation online, we’ll be glad to mail you a map as a thank-you!



Method of Dues Payment	
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 1 st Monday membership meetings. Please select your preferred means of payment:	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> I will pay via PayPal - please send me an invoice by email (PayPal account not required).
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> I will pay via PayPal (link at transitriders.org/donate/).
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> I will mail a check or credit card information to the TRU's P.O. Box.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> I will bring cash, check or credit card to 1 st Monday membership meetings.
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.	
Credit Card Information	
Please charge Credit Card this amount:	
Credit Card* #:	
Expiration Date:	
Print card holder's name:	
CCV # (3 or 4 digits on back of card):	
Billing Address (if different than indicated on front of form):	
I hereby authorize <input type="checkbox"/> a one-time payment or <input type="checkbox"/> a recurring payment of the amount stated above.	
Signature: _____ Date: _____	
*We can accept the following credit cards: VISA, MasterCard, American Express or Discover.	
Mail completed form and payment to: Transit Riders Union P.O. Box 20723 Seattle, WA 98102	
Message	
Are there specific areas of interest or skills that you bring to the Transit Riders Union? Do you have any special requirements or needs?	
Member Pledge	
I, <u>PRINT NAME</u> , 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: _____	

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

Ask a Bus Driver

By Sam Smith

I receive lots of questions about disability and accessibility on public transit, so I'm dedicating this space to discuss things Metro should do to be more accessible, how able-bodied riders can help, and what disabled riders should know about their rights. I will mostly focus riders with mobility limitations. I could fill several more columns with my thoughts about transit accessibility in regards to deafness, blindness, developmental disabilities, and other invisible disabilities.

What Metro should do:

1. Allow passengers to opt out of strapping in their wheelchair

Metro currently requires every chair user to secure their chair with either straps or hooks (there is one exception that I'll address later). Many riders find this process overly invasive, demeaning, and unnecessary. Technically chair uses have the right to opt out of securement, but policy dictates that the driver must hold the bus and place a call to the Transit Control Center, which often takes several minutes to respond. Some other transit agencies, such as TriMet in Portland, have a simpler procedure: the driver pushes a button to register that the chair user declined to be secured. This should be enough legal protection for Metro, too.

2. Replace all of the high-floor buses in its fleet

Metro has more than a dozen different bus models in its fleet. The oldest ones are "high-floor," which have three steps on and off. Riders who cannot go up steps board by a mechanical lift, which is fairly slow and cumbersome. Metro's newer models are "low-floor," with just a small gap from the curb to the bus floor, meaning many disabled riders can board unassisted, and others board via a much nimbler ramp. Metro is slowly phasing in additional low-floors, but it will probably take a few more years before this is 100% of the fleet.

3. New buses should have wheelchair areas that don't require strapping in

Currently, RapidRide coaches are the only Metro buses outfitted with a space designed for chair users to ride unsecured. It's rear-facing, so the momentum of the bus keeps the rider's back to the wall, thus safe enough to ride without securement. This should be available on all buses. The biggest obstacle to this is King County's topography. For example, on the inbound C-Line, chairs must be secured if traveling from West Seattle into Downtown because of the steep uphill incline on Seneca Street. Metro should find innovative solutions to overcome this.

4. Wider aisles and more exit doors for easier pathways to exit

Metro policy is for able-bodied riders to exit through the backdoor, however, sometimes it's daunting if not impossible to find your way back there. Most of Metro's 60-foot articulated ("accordion") buses only have one set of rear doors, way in the back. Additionally, most bus aisles can only fit a single-file line of people, making it hard to walk past standing passengers. Newer buses have wider aisles and a set of center doors, which will speed up loading time by making backdoor exiting easier.

How to be an able-bodied ally

1. Give up your seat

The "Priority Seating" area at the front of the bus is reserved for seniors and disabled riders. If you don't have mobility issues, please sit further back. Or at the very least, be ready to give up your seat (this means paying attention to who's boarding the bus and not being completely consumed by Facebook).

2. Move to the back

Better yet, don't sit up front to begin with. Leave the front section as clear as possible. Similarly, if you are standing in the aisle, move all the way back. As space empties behind you, keep on moving back.

3. Exit through the rear doors

It's very charming to be thanked by so many riders as they walk out through the front door. However, this delays the bus. If able-bodied riders exited through the

rear door – yes, even if it's behind you! – I could more quickly deploy the lift or ramp to accommodate disabled riders attempting to board or exit.

4. Let disabled riders board the bus before you

This is a pet peeve of mine: I pull up right in front of a chair user at a bus stop, but in the half-second between opening the door and activating the lift or ramp, a mob of other riders barge past and start board-



ILLUSTRATION BY STEVIE VANBRONKHORST

ing. In the interest of time, it makes the most logical sense to let people needing the most time and space to go first.

5. Be ready to fold and stow your baby stroller

Riders with baby strollers have two options: either fold it up and stow it beneath your seat, or secure it in a wheelchair section. If you choose the latter, please fold it and move it out of the way if a chair user boards and needs that space. They have priority in these spaces. Stroller users have priority over everyone else.

6. Don't be a jerk

I've heard many people verbally complain about the slowness of boarding disabled riders. If you feel that this process lasts an eternity, just remember that it's more like sixty seconds. So just take a deep breath, and be patient and nice. And remember that almost everyone will spend part of our lives with a disability, so spread some good karma.

Know your rights

If a chair user cannot be accommodated, either because the spaces are full or the lift/ramp is broken and cannot be deployed (this is rare), Metro policy dictates that the driver calls Metro's Control Center, and doesn't leave the bus zone until this has been communicated. In other words, drivers should not pass up chair users without stopping and explaining the situation.

As I mentioned earlier, you technically have the right not to have your wheelchair secured, but because of the rarity of this request and the bureaucratic time-suck, most drivers either don't know or don't want to do this. You have the right to secure your own chair, without the driver's assistance, or to specify to the driver where to connect straps or hooks to your chair, so that you are the most comfortable and your chair is undamaged.

Everyone has the right to ask the driver to kneel the bus lower to the curb. Under no circumstances should the driver challenge your ability or need. We've all had trainings on "Invisible Disabilities."

If you need priority seating, you have the right to ask the driver to request that someone vacate a seat. Other passengers aren't required to comply with this request, but they usually will.

Finally, you have the right to pay a reduced fare of \$1. You can obtain your Regional Reduced Fare Permit at a Metro customer service center. You can call 206-553-3000 or visit metro.kingcounty.gov/tops/accessible for more information and to find out what is needed to qualify.

If you would like to Ask a Bus Driver, please email Sam@transitriders.org.

A Personal Story About Public Transportation

By Holly Eckert

Dancing was my adult passion. Having grown up in a dance studio, as an adult, I practiced it both as a performer and choreographer. That is why at age 34, I was shocked when a neurologist explained my recent episodes of mental confusion as the symptoms of the chronic illness called epilepsy. It damaged my identity to go from a woman in deep control of her body/mind, to one walking with a disease that includes regularly losing control of her full body/mind. Not only would it make it impossible for me to dance as I once did, the disease would require me to make other



Holly Eckert

receiving a wave hello from another human reminds you of your shared humanity, and it brightens your day. Of course these interactions can blossom into deeper friendships as you regularly share routes and conversations with people. "Bus time" is better than Facebook.

In addition to its social benefits, as time went on, I realized public transportation provides economic benefits as well. Between the costs of gas, parking, car insurance, and car maintenance, driving a car costs a lot of money. Eliminating those costs from my

life, saved me dollars.

My feelings about public transportation have evolved. I now

Just receiving a wave hello from another human reminds you of your shared humanity, and it brightens your day.

appreciate my "bus time".

Everyone benefits from public transportation. It reduces pollution and eliminates traffic in our cities. If more people hop on the bus or train more often, it's more justifiable to spend the money to make improvements to these systems. I encourage

everyone to put a book in their bags and leave their car keys at home.

This essay was first published in the Seattle Times.



TRU Wants to Hear From You!

The public transit system should be accessible for everyone.

Do you experience problems trying to use King County Metro, Access, and other transit systems as a person with disabilities? How could public transit be improved to better serve your needs?

Please take our short survey: transitriders.org/disability

Or leave a voice message: 206-651-4282

The People Who Work in Seattle's Hotels



Azieb, *Banquet Server*

"People are moving. Business is booming. You know, all the big companies are here. Amazon, Starbucks, Microsoft. So, in a way, I'm happy that it's growing. But we are not keeping up, the lower people, we are constantly struggling.

The issue is that the hours I get off of work in banquets, sometimes there is no bus or I am too scared to go to the Park 'N Ride. Think, in the middle of the night, 1 in the morning, if you

*"We are
constantly
struggling."*

find a bus by then...after certain hours the bus comes just once every hour. We still don't have a good deal for the parking. Bus time hours it's fine, I can take a bus, but banquet hours are crazy. Sometimes we have to be here at 5 in the morning, and there's no bus to take me here. The earliest bus is 5:15am."



Jenice, *Prep Cook*

"It's getting to the point where families have to live together in order to pay rent and make money. My daughter was on Section 8 but they sold her house. So then my grandkids were out on the street, and no, we don't do that. So I decided...let's get together.

After work I have to catch a bus up the hill, go to the A line, and then catch the train. Or I can come down the hill. It takes me 2 hours to get to the bus that will take me home."

*"It takes me 2
hours to get to
the bus that will
take me home."*

Melody, *Bartender*

"I have to drive. There are no options on that one. The buses don't run down there, and I never know when I'm going to get home. You have to go down to a dangerous area to get the bus. One guy got stabbed down there. I could get stuck until what, 5 in the morning?

No matter what the economy does across the country, there's so much residual money in Seattle that it will always be expensive. And we are a port city. We don't get hit like the midwestern states economically, and these big businesses aren't going anywhere. They are putting 1200 apartments in two to three buildings alone.

Food's getting a lot more expensive, especially meats. Because of all of the income in this area, higher specialty foods are coming in to this area and the price of everything is going up."



Jenny, *House Attendant*

"If I didn't get money from my daughter, I might have to get a second job. Even when I have 40 hours of work, I'm feeling so tired. If I work three or four days, I'm feeling ok if I have money. I need to spend a lot of time to work, to make the money, you know.

No it's the, you know, the bus fee. The bus fee is more expensive and I'm feeling it. Maybe 10, 8 percent of the money I have to take to pay my transfer you know, because the bus is very packed.

The bus is public and should be affordable. The price of oil is going down but the price of the bus is going up, up, up.

Now, they say, always, global warming. They say we should take the bus, but how can we when the price keeps going up? Also, you know the parking is so expensive. Today it's 6 dollars a day for employees."



HOSPITABLE: Who deserves time to have a life?

Continued from page 1

tricately linked. Convention Center server Maria Celis told me that she couldn't get a loan for a house in Seattle, which is why she got a house in Tacoma instead, which is about an hour away from Seattle.

"I got a hybrid car for the commute and spend all my money on gas, all my time on the road. Working two jobs is the only way I can afford my house and the new car I had to buy to be able to get to this job. I was forced to get a hybrid in order to work here. I have two jobs because I have to."

I often ask workers how they do it, day after day. How do they work two full time jobs and endure a horrendous commute only to wake up a few hours later to do it all again? The answer is unwaveringly straightforward and always the same: "I have no choice."

The success of corporate greed depends on a system in which some are ignored and seen as less-than human, or worse yet, not seen at all. In sharing their stories with the broader community, Local 8 members are making visible a system designed to be out of sight and out of mind. While many of

these stories portray the difficult reality of being a hotel worker in downtown Seattle today, it is important to keep in mind that these union jobs are the better jobs in the industry. Still silent are the voices of non-union workers who bear the crushing weight of this modern day Gilded Age without the opportunity to collectively bargain for good wages, affordable health care, and job security. There has perhaps never been a more urgent need and tremendous opportunity to support organized labor and unionization in this city.

When I look at the photo of Badatu at the

Westin, I am reminded of the resilience of the human spirit and the capacity a single story carries to drive social change. Now, whenever I pass a service worker of any kind on the street or in a hotel, I stop and take the time to see and appreciate all of who they are and what they bring to the table. And I wonder how they are surviving. I imagine their answers would be something along the lines of "we have no choice but to make it work."

To read more worker stories, visit www.hospitableseattle.org.

All photographs by Hannah Long-Higgins. To read more worker stories, visit www.hospitableseattle.org.



Michael, Banquet Server

“Professionals need service workers, and service workers need professionals. If they keep pushing people farther and farther outside the city, like San Francisco, people without six-figure jobs are being forced out of the city. Who’s going to take care of the professionals if the service workers can’t live anywhere near the city?”

The mayor was just here at a lunch talking about how he wants to dedicate millions of dollars to create low-income housing. But this problem is way deeper than money. You have to have a plan.

I ride the buses out of choice. And I hear these conversations everyday on the bus from the working class and poor people, I hear it from my fellow coworkers...people are moving further and further to the outskirts of town.”

“Who’s going to take care of the professionals if the service workers can’t live anywhere near the city?”



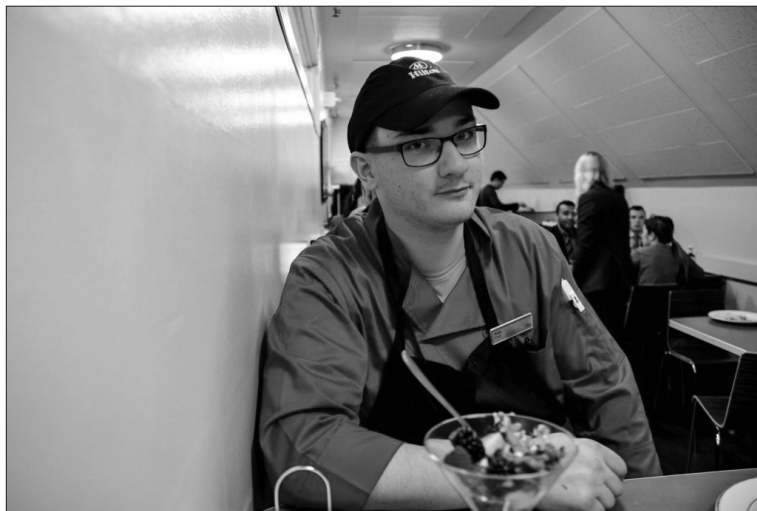
Tiblets, Server

“It’s not an easy life. I work two jobs and my husband does too. I do a hard job. I have four kids. My mom is a single mom. I finished high school and led a hard life. Now I try with four kids. My son, he does good job at school. I help him a lot. I’m not tired because of my family; I’m tired because of my job. In the morning, my friend drives me here. In the morning when I have to start at 5:30, there’s no transportation. So my husband gives me a ride. I’m not driving, I’m scared. And I can’t afford 5 dollars of parking a day.”



Anthony, Cook

“I used to live in Kent before Ballard. That was an hour and a half of two transfers. First I had to walk a mile to get to the first bus, and now I’m probably going to have to start doing that again. If I can’t get to work, how am I going to get paid, and how am I going to be able to have a place to stay?”



Nick, Cook

“I gave up my car to move to Capitol Hill. I got into a program that pays your rent for a year, but the housing is in Cap Hill, and there’s no parking in Cap Hill. Whenever I have to buy stuff is when it hits me harder. Just in everyday living, because I’m from Ballard originally and it’s getting expensive over there too. Just the cost of everything, especially moving here to Cap Hill, things are outrageously expensive.”



Yehuda, Banquet Server

“Lots of people are moving here to the city. Compared to thirty, thirty-five years ago there wasn’t too much traffic. Now it’s terrible. Even if I take the bus, for example, compared to the Light Rail, it takes me one hour. This is too much. So I always would rather walk twenty blocks to the train station and from there take the Light Rail. Parking here is six dollars a day for employees, so it saves me money, using Orca, because it’s subsidized. Sometimes I drive because my first Light Rail starts at 5:20am so I cannot catch it when I work early; so then I have no transportation. We talk about what we need to do to save money, and maybe in the future we need to leave and go to another state where it’s cheaper.”



James, Guest Service Agent

“I would love to live closer to downtown but rent is outrageous and parking is outrageous. I sold my car when I first moved here, and now I have no desire whatsoever to get a new one.”



Mirian, Cleaning Attendant

“Even to drive the traffic is really bad now. There are a lot of people coming here from other states. Perhaps they want a better future. You know, on the Discovery Channel they said Washington State is the third most expensive state now. The people who work in restaurants and hotels, the salary we have now, it’s not going to go up. Maybe a matter of cents, but not several dollars. We get a raise but it’s not enough according to the inflation. Everything is so expensive, the bus fare, rent, mortgage, etc.

Whenever we have a chance to work extra we do because we need the money, but not always because people cannot be working all the time. When it’s busy we work extra for when the slow time comes. For people not young anymore it’s not good for the body and the health to work more than 40 hours a week. The work is physical...we don’t think too much but it’s physical and my body hurts.”

