

# Transit Stories

Tuesday June 8, 2021

## Paolo Solorzano

Aurora, CO

I started going to RTD (Regional Transportation District) board meetings back in 2017. I wanted to know why bus service had gotten so unreliable, and I wanted them to fix it.

At the time, I was trying very hard to get my life back on track. I'd gone through a period of mental and emotional disorders and substance abuse. I was on probation and got a job at a grocery store. I'd get off work at 10pm, 11pm at night and take the last bus back home. The trip took an hour on a good day. But the schedules they gave out didn't line up with the actual service. Often the bus would come 10 or 20 minutes late, which meant missing a transfer. Sometimes the bus just wouldn't show up at all. So, the two hours round-trip turned into four.

The explanation I kept hearing from RTD and in the news was: bus operator shortage.

I was picking up my life then, making an hourly wage, with funds really tight. And, in that situation, you're trying to build your reputation, show you're putting your life together, start building a career. I wondered, "Will I ever get a promotion if I'm late once a week? Should I even try?" It feels like society is working against you. This is the bus service you get, and you just have to deal with it.

Probation has a lot of requirements. You have random urine analysis (UA), mental health appointments. But you just wouldn't know if you'd get there on time. You could get called for a random UA, and with the bus travel that 15 minute appointment would take your entire day. I'd look and see I'd left at 11 in the morning and wasn't back home until 5. And it was so psychologically stressful. A lot of times I just felt very sad and angry. I felt pathetic having to call my probation officer and say, "I can't make it today. The bus isn't here."

What I had working in my favor was social capital. I started calling RTD customer service and piling up complaints, I was showing up at the board meetings, I was talking with the community resource outreach staffer. I started meeting with the deputy chief of police for RTD. So, I was able to be up front with my probation officer about what was happening and had the contacts at RTD to back me up. I could ask the police chief at RTD to connect with my probation officer.

But that didn't make the bus come on time. At work, I was pushing shopping carts, and my legs were tired from that, and I had Achilles tendonitis. One night I got off work, and

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# Transit Stories

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the bus just didn't show. It just didn't come. I couldn't pay for a taxi. It was an hour walk home in pain.

If you look at the numbers, you can see that the number of lost bus service hours exploded by 2017. Finally, instead of adding more service, they wound up cutting routes. We've had more cuts since then, and there are still ongoing cancellations. We really need to invest in better bus service.

For me personally, things are better. Now, I live five minutes from a light rail station, and cancellations are rare, so I can get to downtown Denver in an hour. I've got a new job as a Bilingual Resources Advocate at a women's shelter. But public transit is still as important to me as ever, and funding bus service should be a priority. Reaching 15-minute frequency would be huge for people. Buses are such a critical service.

[transitjustice.org/transit-stories/paolo-solorzano](https://transitjustice.org/transit-stories/paolo-solorzano)

## Transit Justice Principles

Abundant transit unlocks freedom of movement. But good transit is very scarce in the U.S. today. Americans Need Transit That Is ...

- **Equitable.** Transit investment must prioritize the needs of Black and brown people, people with low incomes, and people with disabilities.
- **Sustainable.** To avert severe climate change, models consistently show that some car trips must shift to transit.
- **Economically productive.** Better transit expands worker access to jobs, employer access to the workforce, customer access to businesses, and business access to a customer base.
- **Safe and accessible.** Transit investment should eliminate the full range of limitations and achieve broad-based safety and universal access.
- **Affordable.** Access to transit should never be contingent on one's ability to pay. Transit investment should establish programs that provide fare relief for everyone who needs it.

Every Tuesday, we will feature the first-hand experience of public transit riders from across the country in this short newsletter. From large cities to small towns, we will document the experiences of the millions of users of busses, trains, ferries and other forms of public transit in the US. Public transit is essential to our communities, to cooling the planet, to advancing equity. Transit is essential to our very lives.

This year there is a unique opportunity for the country to make an historic investment in public transit funding to help the country build back better. This story and all the others will be archived at [transitjustice.org](https://transitjustice.org). For media inquiries, contact Doug Gordon, [doug@upshiftstrategies.com](mailto:doug@upshiftstrategies.com).

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