

Transit Stories

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Krystal Monteros

Tacoma, Washington

I live in a redlined community. People may know about redlining, racism, and housing segregation. But it affects what's available to entire communities. I live in an apartment complex in a neighborhood that's purposely structured so that you're not going to find a school or supermarket or church or other essential services within walking distance — the kinds of things you find in close proximity in a rich, white neighborhood.

There are four wheelchair users in my apartment complex, including me — all people of color. The nearest supermarket is a Grocery Outlet more than a mile away. I had to fight for four curb cuts along the way in order to be able to get there.

As the chair of the Tacoma Area Commission on Disabilities, I also want to know if wheelchair users like me can ride the buses when we need to.

I live right at the border of south Tacoma and University Place. On my side of the street, there's sidewalk and a crosswalk. On the other side, there's no sidewalk. I have to go through gravel to get to the bus stop. Imagine going through that in rain and snow. I've gotten my wheels stuck in the pebbles. If the sidewalks were actually there, it would make my life so much easier.

And I need frequent bus service I can count on. When I first moved here, we had two bus routes, but one they cut — the #3 — and now the other one, the #53, comes by just once an hour. The fact is that bus routes suck in Tacoma.

Before they cut the #3, I used to take it to Lakewood pretty often. I'd go to the Safeway supermarket, but it also was my chill spot, just to get away and walk around, because it's fully accessible, and the transit center was right there in the middle of all the stores.

And having a bus that comes by just once an hour is a real problem. What happens if there are already two wheelchairs on that bus? Or a wheelchair and a lady with a stroller? This has happened to me multiple times. I'm cool with a couple of bus drivers, and they've told the person with the stroller they have to move it, fold it, hold the baby, because it's a wheelchair spot. But I've also had a bus driver just look at me, say the bus was full, close the door, and just keep going. Other drivers have said they'll "call it in," and then they just keep driving. I have no idea what it means to call it in. But I just have to wait for the next bus an hour later.

That's why I'm so passionate about improving public transit. I want Congress to invest in transit services so we can make frequent, reliable, accessible bus service a reality.

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. For media inquiries, contact Doug Gordon, doug@upshiftstrategies.com.

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