

# Transit Stories

Tuesday Aug 10, 2021

## Chris Chavez

Long Beach, California

I was born and raised in Long Beach. Like many children here, I had asthma because the air is so polluted. On many indicators of poor air quality, we're at the top among cities across the country. Asthma is assumed to be something that just happens, but like other respiratory conditions it's worsened by air pollution — and the predominant source of pollutants is transportation in the form of cars and trucks. So, good public transit is a health issue.

Pre-pandemic, I rode public transit every day into downtown LA, where I work as Deputy Policy Director of the Coalition for Clean Air, and I will get back onto transit again as soon as my office reopens. I also was a daily transit user when I worked at the State Capitol in Sacramento. There's a light rail station right underneath the office building where I currently work. Transit is both more convenient and more affordable for me, especially with gas prices on the rise again.

My job takes me all over the region, to meetings with local officials, state officials in district offices, and down to the South Coast Air Quality Management District. I use public transit everywhere I go. Between going to work or to meetings, I've ridden every light rail and bus rapid transit line in LA Metro's system.

As much as I count on public transit, I've seen ways we can improve our system. More consistent service is a perennial issue. It wasn't until I went to Sacramento that I realized trains and buses run on a schedule. I'd also like to see more dedicated bus lanes. The light rail line I use was closed for

about a year, and they replaced it with a shuttle bus in regular traffic. When they finally did create a dedicated lane, it saved a lot of time. Having zero-emission buses is also very important for improving air quality. And, since I have a parent who lives in Orange County, I've learned that we need a seamless transition from county to county to make public transit a real option. My parent lives 10 miles away but it would take me an hour and a half to get there on public transportation — three times the drive on a normal day.

And equity remains a huge concern in LA's transit system. One issue is prioritizing trains over bus service because the train has tended to favor choice riders, whereas the bus tends to be more localized and serves low-income people. The primary goal of any transit system needs to be getting people where they need to go and help those who need it to be mobile, for whom transit is a lifeline. That should be a top priority.

[transitjustice.org/transit-stories/chris-chavez](https://transitjustice.org/transit-stories/chris-chavez)

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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