

# Transit Stories

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## Freda Tepfer

Erie, Pennsylvania



My name is Freda Tepfer. I live in Erie. Growing up in New York City, public transit was my ticket to a world of possibility. I saw sites and met people I wouldn't have crossed paths with if it wasn't for transit. These

people and places taught me lessons that I carry with me. As I write this today at 71 years old, I believe now more than ever that funding for public transit is a necessity if we are to have a reasonable transit system in Erie County, Pennsylvania or anywhere in our country.

I'm retired now, but I spent a good part of my life working across the country helping people who are blind or visually impaired as a certified orientation and mobility specialist. Part of my job was to help connect people to public transit, and answer questions that came up as they used it.

The people I worked with are truly amazing. They may not be able to see or drive cars, but they have so much to contribute to society. Although time and time again, what

kept them and the rest of the community from doing so was a lack of access to quality transportation. Either buses run too infrequently or fail to reach the places needed to access life activities, supports and services.

Public transit is absolutely essential. I saw that every day helping others, but I also understood that from a very personal level too. I lived 9 years of my adult life without a car. From New York to Iowa, Washington State to Anchorage, Alaska to Erie, Pennsylvania, I saw what good transit can do for a person. It connects people to civic meetings, cultural events, healthcare, and meaningful work. Unfortunately, what I often see is transit failing people and communities. After living for a few years in Erie, hurting my knee, with my route stopping at 6 pm with no Sunday service, I had no choice but to buy a car. It was impossible to get the healthcare and resources I needed without one. I know plenty of people who have no choice but to put up with that, but you shouldn't have to be a hero to ride public transit.

**(Continued...)**

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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I've spent years as a transit rider, member of Citizen's Advisory Committees and advocacy campaigns in the transit sector. I have a basic understanding of how transit agencies work. Since public funding for public transit rarely increases, agencies are forced to just shift the same amount of service from one place to another, maybe a little more frequency here or a little less coverage there. But with this framework, someone is always going to get left out. It is time to flip the script. So many people have so much to contribute to society if they could only access the opportunity. Politicians need to recognize this and invest money in expanded service to connect our country to its full potential.

[transitjustice.org/transit-stories/freda-tepfer](https://transitjustice.org/transit-stories/freda-tepfer)

## 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.



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