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Invest in Transit Equity, Invest in Transit Workers

National Campaign for Transit Justice
Alliance for a Justice Society
Labor Network for Sustainability
TransitCenter

February 2022



Introduction

Transit operators and maintenance employees are the heart of our public transit systems, working hard to get us where we need to go, when we need to go there. Public transit workers deserve recognition and appreciation – and the certainty that every transit job is a safe and secure job with family-sustaining wages and benefits.

Our country's public transit systems are crucial vehicles for economic opportunity, community vitality, and racial equity. Yet, currently, in many agencies, there are not enough skilled transit operators, maintenance staff, and other workers to meet the needs of riders and communities.¹ This reflects the aging of the transit workforce,² inadequate investments in job quality,³ and the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, which both pose serious health threats to transit workers and led to even greater underfunding of our transit systems. As a result, as of October 2021, employment in public transit and ground transportation was at 84 percent of pre-pandemic levels⁴ – levels that already fell short of what is needed to ensure fast, reliable, frequent service in every community.

There has never been a more important time to invest in public transit – including investing in the skilled, experienced transit operators, maintenance employees, and other transit workers that keep our buses and trains running. Such an investment will have widespread benefits, providing better service to riders, boosting local economies, and expanding opportunity and racial equity.^{5, 6} In short, what is good for transit workers is also good for the people who ride trains and buses, and good for the communities transit workers serve.

This report provides an overview of the need for transit workforce investment and shares recommendations for how public transit systems, working with community stakeholders and transit workers through their unions, can invest in building a skilled, stable transit workforce for the long-term strength of our transit systems.

Years ago, in a horrendous snow storm after midnight, I was stranded at a bus station not knowing there were no more buses coming. A tired, thoughtful driver leaving for the night to drop off his bus questioned me, and as I didn't have anyone to help me he took it upon himself to find out where I could catch any bus to get me as close as possible to home and delivered me to that stop narrowly getting home. You all endure more than expected and I appreciate you.

Cindy Waite | Golden, Colorado

1. For research on the lack of investment in critical infrastructure workforce, see: Workforce and Talent Management Study, President's National Infrastructure Advisory Council, September 2021, https://www.cisa.gov/sites/default/files/publications/NIAC_Workforce%20and%20Talent%20Management%20Study_Final%20508.pdf
2. Julio Monroy, et al, The Aging Transit Workforce: Investing in Human Capital, n.d., [https://www.apta.com/wp-content/uploads/Resources/members/memberprogramsandservices/Emerging-Leaders-Program/Documents/APTA%20ELP%20Group%202%20Handout%20\(PDF\).pdf](https://www.apta.com/wp-content/uploads/Resources/members/memberprogramsandservices/Emerging-Leaders-Program/Documents/APTA%20ELP%20Group%202%20Handout%20(PDF).pdf)
3. Aaron Short, Driver Shortages Causing Transit Delays Nationwide, August 27, 2019, <https://usa.streetsblog.org/2019/08/27/driver-shortages-causing-transit-delays-nationwide/>
4. Case Study: Managing the Labor Shortage at Transit Agencies, Shared Use Mobility Center, November 5, 2021, <https://learn.sharedusemobilitycenter.org/casestudy/managing-the-labor-shortage-at-transit-agencies/>
5. Economic Impact of Public Transportation Investment: 2020 Update, American Public Transportation Association, April 2020, <https://www.apta.com/wp-content/uploads/APTA-Economic-Impact-Public-Transit-2020.pdf>
6. Pedro Nicolaci da Costa, There's a major hurdle to employment that many Americans don't even think about – and it's holding the economy back, Business Insider, January 27, 2018,



To Get Us Where We Need To Go, We Need More Transit Operators and Mechanics

A bus driver I knew very well helped one of the elderly riders up my 19 stairs to my apartment to deliver some cat food she wanted me to have. He was on a break.

May Mundy | Latonia, Kentucky

Our country's buses, trains, and trolleys are essential for work, family, and community life. Every weekday, people in the United States take 34 million trips provided by one of the country's 6,800 public transportation organizations.⁷ Public transit plays an especially important role in giving an economic foothold to people of color, who are more likely than white people to use transit for their work commutes.

These buses, trains, and trolleys are powered by the transit workers who operate and maintain them. Yet, as noted above, even before the Covid-19 pandemic, there was insufficient investment in our workforce staffing and retention.⁸ Covid then pushed many operators and mechanics out as they grappled with an airborne life-threatening virus, budget cuts, and safety concerns.^{9, 10}

7. Public Transportation Facts, American Public Transportation Association, <https://www.apta.com/news-publications/public-transportation-facts/>
8. Chris McCarthy, 3 Key Strategies for Transit Agencies to Survive the Retirement Cliff, Metro, August 6, 2019, <https://www.metro-magazine.com/10007193/3-key-strategies-for-transit-agencies-to-survive-the-retirement-cliff>; Laura Bliss, There's a Bus Driver Shortage and No Wonder, Bloomberg, June 28, 2018, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-06-28/there-s-a-bus-driver-shortage-and-no-wonder>
9. As states reopen, transit worker death toll reaches grim benchmark, American Transit Union, n.d. <https://www.atu.org/media/releases/as-states-reopen-transit-worker-death-toll-reaches-grim-benchmark>
10. Updates on Metro's Workforce, Metro Matters, King County Metro, August 20, 2020, <https://kingcountymetro.blog/2020/08/05/updates-on-metros-workforce/>; Tackling the Driver Shortage: How to Create Schedules that Attract and Retain Drivers and Increase Driver Happiness, Optibus, 2022, <https://store.lmknowledgehub.com/storage/opti/f9eQRKT8cvuQxm5uLsgitnnveVOt8huQppGiqbB5.pdf>; Winnie Hu, Why Retired Subway Workers Are Getting \$35,000 to Come Back, New York Times, November 30, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/11/30/nyregion/retired-mta-workers-nyc.html>; Clayton Guse, MTA has slashed more than 4,000 jobs since start of pandemic, data show; NYC Transit buses and subway hard hit, New York Daily News, April 20, 2021, <https://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/ny-mta-job-losses-pandemic-transit-20210420-kzz2zziwhrh7tcyq4shdjwxb4-story.html>; Steve Kiggins, Nearly 90 jobs slashed at Pierce Transit as union worries about viral exposure, Fox 13, News, May 14, 2020, <https://www.q13fox.com/news/nearly-90-jobs-slashed-at-pierce-transit-as-union-worries-about-viral-exposure>

Without improved job quality, many of those transit workers will not return, and, without effective recruitment, hiring, retention, and training policies, new ones are not on their way. As Raymond Jackson, president of the Amalgamated Transit Union Local 689 in the D.C. region, put it, “We are having a problem, but I really don’t think the problem is the driver shortage. I think that the problem is the wage shortage.”¹¹ As of October 2021, employment in transit and ground passenger transportation remained at only 84 percent of pre-pandemic levels.¹² The omicron wave has only exacerbated the situation.¹³

As a result, the quality of bus and train services has suffered. In cities across the country – from Charlotte¹⁴ to Ann Arbor,¹⁵ from Pittsburgh¹⁶ to Columbus¹⁷ – service has been reduced or hampered due to understaffing. The loss of drivers is not limited to urban areas. Rural transit systems have also been hit in places like Northeast Missouri;¹⁸ Greater Peoria, Illinois;¹⁹ and Steamboat Springs, Colorado.²⁰ Transit service cuts like these fall most heavily on working people, and people of color in particular.²¹ The need to invest in the transit workforce is thus a matter of racial and economic equity.

11. Luz Lazo, Bus driver shortage hurts D.C. region’s ability to return to pre-pandemic transit service levels, Washington Post, November 26, 2021, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/transportation/2021/11/26/bus-driver-shortage-washington/>
12. Case Study: Managing the Labor Shortage at Transit Agencies, Shared Use Mobility Center, November 5, 2021, <https://learn.sharedusemobilitycenter.org/casestudy/managing-the-labor-shortage-at-transit-agencies/>
13. See, e.g., Kathy Novak, Muni suffers staff shortage as dozens of bus drivers test positive for COVID-19, KCBS Radio, January 5, 2022, <https://www.audacy.com/kcbsradio/news/local/muni-transit-suffers-staff-shortage-due-to-omicron-variant>
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15. Sarah Parlette, Workforce shortage forces Ann Arbor’s TheRide to reduce transportation services, All about Ann Arbor, December 18, 2021, <https://www.clickondetroit.com/all-about-ann-arbor/2021/12/18/workforce-shortage-forces-ann-arbors-theride-to-reduce-transportation-services/#/>
16. Ryan Deto, Driver, staff shortage at Port Authority causing missed trips and less transit frequency, Pittsburgh City Paper, August 30, 2021, <https://www.pghcitypaper.com/pittsburgh/driver-staff-shortage-at-port-authority-causing-missed-trips-and-less-transit-frequency/Content?oid=20106933>
17. Brent Warren, Driver Shortage Leads to Longer Wait Times for COTA Riders, Columbus Underground, January 26, 2022, <https://www.columbusunderground.com/driver-shortage-leads-to-longer-wait-times-for-cota-riders-bw1/>
18. Lucas Lord, Driver shortage affecting OATS, South Cass Tribune, October 17, 2021, <https://southcasstribune.com/2021/10/17/driver-shortage-affecting-oats/>
19. Will Stevenson, Paratransit and rural transit arms of GPMTD looking for drivers, 93.3 the Drive, November 16, 2011, <https://www.933thedrive.com/2021/11/16/paratransit-and-rural-transit-arms-of-gpmt-d-looking-for-drivers/>
20. Alison Berg, Staffing shortage leads Steamboat Springs Transit to cut late-night service, add free on-demand service downtown, Steamboat Pilot & Today, November 30, 2021 <https://www.steamboatpilot.com/news/staffing-shortage-leads-steamboat-springs-transit-to-cuts-late-night-service-add-free-on-demand-service-downtown/>
21. Cristof Spieler, Racism has shaped public transit, and it’s riddled with inequities, Kinder Institute for Urban Research, Rice University, August 24, 2020, <https://kinder.rice.edu/urbanedge/2020/08/24/transportation-racism-has-shaped-public-transit-america-inequalities>

My story is from my childhood in Long Beach, California. I started riding the city bus in 2nd grade. I needed a ride home from school. Every afternoon I would wait at the bus stop and my bus driver would show up with a smile and a friendly hello. I always sat in the front and he would ask how my day was. I'm certain I was a chatterbox!

Prior to moving to California, where my mom was living, I lived with my grandparents in Kansas. They were very caring and interested in my day. My mom wanted me to be quiet, she was too busy to talk to a kid. I feel like [the bus driver] was an angel that looked over me. I rarely paid for my bus fare because the other people waiting for the bus would pay my fare, more angels. I would use my money for food, which was a blessing.

Many days my bus driver would make an extra stop so that I didn't have to walk so far. As the days and years went by, he would sometimes drive the bus for seniors or special services for riders. He would pick me up and drive me directly in front of my apartment complex!! Okay, how cool is that!! I will never forget the kindness of all those angels that looked after me from 2nd grade up to the end of 6th grade. My bus driver worked hard and during his shift he took time to show a young kid what compassion, kindness, and grace was. I have taken those qualities with me my whole life and now I'm 58.

I have been blessed to live around the world and meet so many people. I know a smile and a cheerful hello can make someone's day whether they are young or old. Blessings to my Long Beach bus driver. Thank you.

Kasandra Frias | Gilbert, Arizona



Promoting Transit Jobs also Promotes Racial Equity

More transit operators and other transit employees mean more reliable and frequent service for transit riders. This, in turn, advances racial equity.

Public transit is especially essential for communities of color. Nationally, 60 percent of all public transit riders are people of color; one quarter are Black, and almost 20 percent are Latinx/Hispanic.²² This in part reflects the fact that people of color are far more likely not to have a car, including 18 percent of Black households, 13 percent of Native households,²² 11 percent of Latinx/Hispanic households, and 11 percent of Asian American/Pacific Islanders, compared to 6 percent of white households.²³ Buses and trains thus connect workers of color to their jobs: Asian American, Black, and Latinx/Hispanic workers are more likely than white workers to commute using public transit.²⁴ Furthermore, essential workers – such as home health aides, hospital workers, and grocery workers – are more likely to use public transit and to be people of color.²⁵ Investments in public transit thus contribute to economic opportunity for working communities of color.²⁶

Additionally, public sector employment itself is a pathway to economic mobility for Black Americans,²⁷ and public transit, in particular, is an important source of employment for workers of color overall, who account for half of vehicle operators and form a large share of frontline transit workers.²⁸ Investing in transit jobs, therefore, means investing in workers of color.

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23. Car Access, National Equity Atlas, https://nationalequityatlas.org/indicators/Car_access#/?geo=010000000000000000

24. Brian McKenzie, Who Drives to Work, American Community Survey Reports, U.S. Census Bureau, August 2015, <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2015/acs/acs-32.pdf>

25. Transit Is Essential: 2.8 Million U.S. Essential Workers Ride Transit to Their Jobs, TransitCenter, March 24, 2020, <https://transitcenter.org/2-8-million-u-s-essential-workers-ride-transit-to-their-jobs/>

26. Algernon Austin, To Move Is to Thrive, Public Transit and Opportunity for People of Color, Demos, November 15, 2017, <https://www.demos.org/research/move-thrive-public-transit-and-economic-opportunity-people-color>

27. Hayley Brown & Dean Baker, Public Sector Unions Mean Middle-Class Jobs for Black Workers, Center for Economic and Policy Research, February 25, 2021, <https://cepr.net/public-sector-unions-mean-middle-class-jobs-for-black-workers/>

28. Protecting Transit Workers is a Matter of Racial Justice, TransitCenter, April 8, 2020, <https://transitcenter.org/protecting-transit-workers-racial-justice/>



Investment in Transit Means More Vibrant Communities

Investments in public transit have a positive ripple effect for communities of all types — rural, urban, and suburban; Black, white, brown and Asian American. Abundant transit unlocks freedom of movement and fuels local economies.

Study after study shows the benefits of public transit to rural communities and small cities.²⁹ In larger cities, too, transit brings customers into local businesses, gives new life to business districts, and boosts startups.³⁰ In a virtuous cycle, the investment in high-quality transit jobs leads to more quality local jobs³¹ that cannot be outsourced away. Moreover, the larger the investment in transit, the more people of all races and backgrounds benefit.³² However, these benefits cannot be captured without workers to operate our trains, maintain our buses, and keep our transit systems moving.

For several years I worked late two nights a week, boarded a bus at 9 pm and arrived at my destination around 10:50. This was a parking lot in a strip mall across from the bus stop, usually deserted at that hour, in Greenwood Lake, New York. Two bus drivers, Joan and Diane, would wait a minute and watch until I had gotten into my car safely. How grateful I was for their concern.

Priscilla Costello | Warwick, New York

29. Ranjit Godavarthy, et al, Cost-Benefit Analysis of Rural and Small Urban Transit, National Center for Transit Research, July 2014, <https://www.nctr.usf.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/77060-NCTR-NDSU03-508.pdf>

30. Kevin Credit, Transit-Oriented Economic Development: The Impact of Light Rail on New Business Starts in the Phoenix, AZ Region, May 11, 2017, https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Kevin-Credit-2/publication/319042518_Transit-Oriented_Economic_Development_The_Impact_of_Light_Rail_on_New_Business_Starts_in_the_Phoenix_AZ_Region/links/5b0c6010a6fdcc8c25364d7a/Transit-Oriented-Economic-Development-The-Impact-of-Light-Rail-on-New-Business-Starts-in-the-Phoenix-AZ-Region.pdf

31. Public Transportation Facts, American Public Transportation Association, n.d., <https://www.apta.com/news-publications/public-transportation-facts/>

32. Algonon Austin, To Move Is to Thrive, Public Transit and Opportunity for People of Color, Demos, November 15, 2017, <https://www.demos.org/research/move-thrive-public-transit-and-economic-opportunity-people-color>



Recommendations: Building a Stable, Skilled, and Experienced Public Transit Workforce

Every public transit job must be a good job if our country's transit systems are to operate efficiently, safely, and reliably; meet the needs of our communities; and, drive opportunity. As outlined in the recommendations below, transit agencies should work with their workers' union representatives, riders organizations, and community stakeholders to improve their workforce recruitment and retention policies and their labor practices.

Moreover, transit agencies should take advantage of new and pre-existing funding streams to invest in workers and workforce development, and government funding at all levels must prioritize investment in our essential transit workforce.

The recently enacted Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) provides a significant increase in capital funding for state departments of transportation and transit agencies, which can help fund needed improvements in bus garages and facilities and on buses themselves to create a safer, healthier working environment. Furthermore, while many federal transportation programs could already fund workforce development activities, expanded eligibility and increased funding in the IIJA mean states and transit agencies will have more funds available for that purpose. In fact, the IIJA explicitly encourages states to coordinate with labor unions in their transportation workforce development, training, and education activities.³³ The newly established Transit Workforce Center, funded with a \$5 million grant from the Federal Transit Administration, will also serve as a resource to help with recruitment, training, and retention.³⁴

While these are promising steps forward, they will be effective only if state and local leaders maximize these opportunities by prioritizing workforce issues. Furthermore, though this funding provides an opportunity to address some workforce needs, much greater investment is necessary. As they spend federal funds, state and local government and transit agencies themselves should ensure adequate funding for investments in their transit workforce.

33. 23 U.S.C. § 504(e) (2018) as amended by Pub. L. No. 117-58

34. <https://www.transit.dot.gov/about/news/us-department-transportation-announces-5-million-award-launch-new-national-transit>

This report's recommendations are:

Partner with transit unions, rider organizations, and other community stakeholders to guide workforce investments and ensure that transit workers — through their union representatives — are part of every aspect of the decision-making process

The recommendations below provide a range of options for transit systems around the country. However, it is important to note that there is no single answer to transit agency staffing issues. In some cases, agencies need additional operators; in other cases, the need for additional maintenance employees is more urgent. The problem may be both hiring and retention of employees.

Whatever the problems, the first step to addressing them is engaging workers directly in the process through their democratically elected union representatives, as well as involving riders organizations and other community stakeholders. Transit workers' collective bargaining rights³⁵ should accordingly be respected and affirmed. (In agencies where workers are not represented by a union, agencies should ensure a free and fair process for determining representation.)

Ensure family-sustaining wages and good working conditions for all transit workers

- Provide wages and benefits, including signing and retention bonuses, that ensure transit workers can live and retire in the communities they serve and that allow agencies to maintain a stable workforce
- Embrace collective bargaining for transit workers
- Provide paid sick and family leave policies that allow workers to stay home to protect their own health, the health of their families, and the health of riders
- Provide hazard pay in times of public health crises like the Covid pandemic
- Set shifts to allow for reasonable days off and schedules
- Promote federal and local policies that adequately fund operations to enable agencies to compete with the private sector
- Invest in child care for transit workers
- Address employee complaints and concerns about discrimination, harassment, and workplace culture through labor/management processes with a focus on positive culture change beyond simple compliance

35. See, Unions help reduce disparities and strengthen our democracy, Economic Policy Institute, April 23, 2021, <https://www.epi.org/publication/unions-help-reduce-disparities-and-strengthen-our-democracy/>

Protect the health and safety of transit workers

- Ensure adequate restroom breaks and opportunities for physical activity
- Maintain federal mask requirements
- Invest in plexiglass, driver-side exits, and other operator protections whether as part of the vehicle procurement process or separately
- Design and implement fare practices that reduce operator assaults
- Ensure proper fresh air ventilation and personal protective equipment as needed
- Provide free on-site Covid testing for workers
- Invest in employee mental health

Expand access to transit jobs and invest in workforce development

- Remove barriers to transit jobs that exclude people with minor past offenses (e.g., marijuana possession)
- Develop programs to promote gender and racial equity in the workplace
- Invest in apprenticeship, pre-apprenticeship, and mentorship programs and employment pipelines developed through labor-management cooperation
- Invest in promotional opportunities for current transit employees
- Keep operations and maintenance in-house and prevent outsourcing of work

Provide training and workforce development to help protect workers who could be displaced by electrification and other modernization efforts

As we electrify our passenger bus fleet and transition away from fossil-fuel-powered vehicles, some workers risk being displaced as maintaining and operating electrified transit requires different skills. We should ensure that workers are protected in the process. Worker protection policies should be incorporated into all electrification plans, including:

- Job security for any worker potentially displaced by electrification
- Training and retraining of operators and maintenance employees on zero-emissions vehicles
- Ensuring that maintenance of vehicles is performed by agency employees and not outsourced
- Promote federal and local policies that adequately fund operations to enable agencies to compete with the private sector
- Invest in child care for transit workers

Addendum: Coverage of the Need for Investment in Transit Workers in Ten U.S. Cities

Los Angeles, California

“USDOT awards more than \$9 billion in ARP funds: CTDOT, L.A. Metro, NJ Transit and New York’s MTA were all awarded funds from the latest COVID-19 relief bill to keep services operating and workers on staff.”

“Metro looking to hire 500 bus operators amid labor shortage”

San Francisco, California

“Bay Area Transit Seeks to Woo New Bus Operators Amid National Shortage”

“SF’s Muni, short on bus and train operators, also needs maintenance workers” (2019)

Chicago, Illinois

“Service challenges posed by the pandemic”

“Confirmed: Current CTA unreliability is caused by staffing shortages. How do we fix that?”

Boston, Massachusetts

“Facing worker shortage, MBTA welcomes more bus drivers to the ranks”

“MBTA driver shortage made worse by COVID surge”

“MBTA to Cut Services Due to Shortage of Bus and Train Operators”

Ann Arbor, Michigan

“TheRide Announces Winter Service Schedule - UPDATED”

“Workforce shortage forces Ann Arbor’s TheRide to reduce transportation services”

“TheRide Implementing Reduced Service Plan Due to Workforce Shortage - Updated 12/23/21”

Detroit, Michigan

“SMART bus ‘significantly impacted’ by omicron, seeing 25% of services canceled or delayed daily”

“‘I wanted to cry’: Detroiters at their wits’ end with ‘cantankerous’ DDOT bus service hobbled by chronic driver shortages”

“DDOT to drop, shorten some bus routes this fall”

Minneapolis/St. Paul, Minnesota

“Metro Transit reducing service by 5% starting Dec. 4”

“Metro Transit: Driver shortage, COVID are affecting bus, light-rail service”

“Metro Transit Says Bus Driver Shortage Leading To Widespread Route Cancellations”

New York, New York

“MTA cuts subway service amid COVID surge, staffing issues”

“Why Retired Subway Workers Are Getting \$35,000 to Come Back”

“‘I’m Miserable’: Why the Wait for the Subway Feels Longer Than Ever”

“Subway Trips Canceled Over Staff Shortages Soar to a Pandemic High”

Charlotte, North Carolina

“CATS streetcar service to stay free for Charlotte passengers due to reliability issues”

“Charlotte’s streetcar operating off-schedule more than half of the 100 days it’s been open”

Columbus, Ohio

“COTA Faces Driver Shortage, Adjusts Services”

“COTA Not Bringing Back CBUS – or Late Night Service – Any Time Soon”

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

“SEPTA’s bus driver shortage is starting to impact service, riders say”

“SEPTA Warns Of Delays Due To Shortage Of Bus Drivers”

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

“Facing staff shortages due to COVID, Port Authority adapts and asks for patience”

“Driver, staff shortage at Port Authority causing missed trips and less transit frequency”

“Port Authority of Allegheny County hiring as driver shortage leads to missed trips for riders”

Redmond, Washington

“Metro Warns of Reduced Services Through January 21st Due to Staffing Availability”

“King County Metro Transit cancels 84 bus trips due to driver shortage”

Washington, D.C.

“More than 50 bus routes experiencing delays due to lack of drivers”

“Bus driver shortage in D.C. region hurts return to pre-pandemic transit levels”

Addendum: Rider Appreciation Stories

I often take my knitting when I ride our local bus. If I don't, the drivers ask why I'm not knitting. It touches me that they notice. Bus drivers are hard workers who help keep us safe — respect them!

Susan | Emeryville, California

I used to work back to back shifts, and would get on the bus to go from my full-time job to my part-time job. One winter evening I was on the bus, and I had a really bad cough. I was the only person on the bus because it was after 10 that night, and I remember the driver pulling over at a gas station. I thought he just needed a quick break, so I didn't think anything of it. He was gone for a few minutes and got back on the bus with a steaming hot cup of cocoa for me. I'll never forget his kindness.

Adia Major | Houston, Texas

I was waiting for a bus in Portland, OR, to go home in the mid 1990's at 9pm. It was a very cold winter night and the bus never showed — probably a legitimate problem arose. A bus heading for the end of route bus barn stopped and told me there would not be another bus, asked where I was going, and dropped me off near my apartment. Wonderful!

Justin Huffman | Lincoln City, Oregon

When I was 16, I worked after school til about 10pm each night and took BART and then a bus home. I had a bus driver who would drop me right at my front door so I didn't have to walk the dark streets. After that I had to take a bus to community college, and that driver would drop me right up to my front door as well. They were very nice to look out for me in that way and I will never forget them for that.

Heidi Moschetti | Tracy, California

When I first moved to New York, I was in between jobs and traveling to new places that sometimes did not have a working MTA card machine. The bus driver allowed me to stay on that bus anyway and made me feel like a person who was seen and heard and deserving of kindness. Another time, in a terrible storm leaving the hospital, the bus driver kept stopping for more people when the bus was full just to make sure he got as many people out of the storm as possible, especially moms and older people he was used to seeing on that route. Another time a brave driver stopped the bus to get a racist and drunk rider off the bus. He did it with kindness and firmness. I hope that all transit workers will one day be paid well and treated with respect that they deserve. I also hope that all transit workers receive protection and training to help them feel safer in such dangerous times.

Polly Garcia | Brooklyn, New York

Our 74 driver in St. Paul for years, Brad, is the best driver ever. He is unfailingly kind to everyone, all the time. If some kid is doing something they shouldn't, Brad finds a kind and firm way to give guidance, often with humor. If you had a bad day at work and got on the bus, his beautiful smile and greeting would make all the negative vibes fade away. Brad seemed genuinely happy to see all of us riders, from the regulars to the occasional riders. If someone couldn't make the fare now and again, he would let you ride, and not make a fuss about it – just pass you a transfer and say “go ahead.” This is what community looks like. We've all felt cared for and cared about. We've been very fortunate to have such a great driver. Thank you, Brad!

Gabriela Sweet | St. Paul, Minnesota

My husband of 34 years is a Transit Operator. He drives for the city of New Orleans and has done so for close to 40 years. He usually drives the same routes so he can get to know his passengers. He loves his job!

Valerie Prier | Hammond, Louisiana

My brother, Dennis Davenport, was a bus driver in Klamath Falls, Oregon for a number of years. He is now deceased. However he was the best! He had a wonderful sense of humor and was an Army Vet... that training gave him an extra sensitivity to the people he served. He knew his regular passengers by name.

Sister Margaret Davenport, SCN | Louisville, Kentucky

I have MS and am now disabled; since 2010 Pierce Transit Shuttle is my primary transportation, which gets me to my appointments, social and volunteer activities including those in Seattle. The Pierce Transit Shuttle drivers and those who schedule the trips are always friendly and helpful... Paratransit drivers serve passengers with a variety disabilities and therefore special transport needs. Because shuttle is a shared service, it is not uncommon to be on a shuttle where the driver assists passengers in wheelchairs, and with rollator walkers. Their kindness and compassionate demeanor has always made me happy to see them and grateful for the assistance they provide getting on and off the shuttle at my destination.

Linda Moran | Tacoma, Washington

This report was written by Julie Chinitz, Alliance for a Just Society, with support from LeeAnn Hall and Libero Della Piana of AJS, Elizabeth Bunn and Oren Kadosh of the Labor Network for Sustainability, Mary Dailey of TransitCenter, Sarah Kline of SK Solutions LLC, and other partners in the National Campaign for Transit Justice.