

# **WORKING FAMILIES RIDE THE BUS**

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**NATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR TRANSIT JUSTICE  
ALLIANCE FOR A JUSTICE SOCIETY  
LABOR NETWORK FOR SUSTAINABILITY**

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**Everyone in the United States deserves access to reliable, safe, and affordable transportation – especially working families who need to make the most of their earnings.** Working families rely on public transit, whether they live and work in big cities, small towns, or rural communities.

Increasing access to affordable transportation options is key to improving affordability for working families in the United States. Eighty-nine percent of Americans report concerns about the cost of living.<sup>1</sup> Housing and transportation are typically the two highest household expenses for most families in the United States. In 2023, U.S. households spent an average of \$13,174 on transportation, making it the second-largest annual household expenditure after housing.<sup>2</sup> Research from the Union of Concerned Scientists shows that while the cost burden of housing and transportation expenses are high for all families, they are especially high for households of color. Further, their research indicates that households without cars are disproportionately lower income and households of color.<sup>3</sup>

It's not just urban households that lack access to personal vehicles. According to an analysis of American Community Survey (ACS) data done by Transportation for America in 2020,<sup>4</sup> *“the majority of counties with overall high rates of zero-car households are in fact rural.”*

***“One of the biggest challenges is the lack of affordable housing near transit. Too many families are forced to live far from where they work, spending two to three hours commuting every day.”***

**– Eddie Alvarez, California | LA-OC Building Trades**

Based on ACS data, *“there are 292 counties in the U.S. where at least 10 percent of households don't have access to a car (out of 3,142 total counties nationwide). Of those 292 counties, **56 percent of them are majority rural.** These 164 rural counties are primarily located in Kentucky, West Virginia, South Dakota, Arkansas, North and South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alaska. There are pockets of rural America where a disproportionately large share of residents are completely reliant on transit, deliveries, or help from neighbors to access basic necessities, like Wolfe County, Kentucky, and Allendale County, South Carolina, where more than 20 percent of households don't have access to a car.”*

1. Certified Financial Planner Board of Standards, Inc. (2023, April). CFP Board survey reveals cost of living is a worry for 9 in 10 Americans polled. Retrieved from <https://www.cfp.net/news/2023/04/cfp-board-survey-reveals-cost-of-living-is-a-worry--for-9-in-10-americans-polled>
2. Bureau of Transportation Statistics. (n.d.). Transportation cost burden falls significantly for second-lowest income group, no other income group sees relief. Retrieved from <https://www.bts.gov/data-spotlight/transportation-cost-burden-falls-significantly-second-lowest-no-other-income-group>
3. Union of Concerned Scientists. (2024, November). Freedom to move: How public transit can make our communities more equitable and sustainable. Retrieved from <https://www.ucsusa.org/sites/default/files/2024-11/freedom-to-move-report.pdf>
4. Transportation for America. (2020, May 15). More than one million households without a car in rural America need better transit. Retrieved from <https://t4america.org/2020/05/15/more-than-one-million-households-without-a-car-in-rural-america-need-better-transit/>



**Further, people without access to personal vehicles in rural communities may also be more at risk of traffic violence.** While rural roads account for a smaller percentage of total vehicle miles traveled, they are the sites of about **25%** of nationwide pedestrian and bicycle fatal and injury crashes.<sup>5</sup>

The significant proportion of household income spent on transportation and housing highlights the financial challenges working families face. High transportation costs, particularly for those who rely on personal vehicles, combined with housing costs, can limit disposable income and impact overall quality of life. Enhancing public transit accessibility and affordability could alleviate some financial pressure by reducing the necessity for car ownership and associated expenses. The cost burden has increased in recent years as car ownership costs have increased. AAA reported the cost of owning and maintaining a new car in 2024 was \$12,297<sup>6</sup> — about 15% of the 2023 real median household income of \$80,610. This does not take into account the cost of vehicle purchase payments for a new car. Used vehicles, which have a lower purchase value (according to Kelley Blue Book,<sup>7</sup> used car transactions averaged around \$25,251 in July 2024), may also have higher costs associated with maintenance, repairs, and even insurance, depending on the age and condition of the vehicle.

Public transit unlocks freedom of movement in urban, suburban, and rural communities nationwide. When working families can count on the bus or train to get where they need to go, they can easily access jobs, education, medical care, culture, goods and services, and the daily life of their communities. They benefit from greater economic mobility and lower household costs. Transportation systems that maximize people's access to good transit are necessarily inclusive, without barriers linked to race, income, age, or ability.

***“Owning a car has never been a realistic option for me. Between the costs of buying a car, maintaining it, and paying for parking, it’s just not feasible.”***

**– Jordan Kelly,**

**Michigan | Laboratory Technician, AFT MI 6739**

5. Federal Highway Administration. (n.d.). Making local and rural roads safer for pedestrians and bicycles. Retrieved from <https://highways.dot.gov/safety/other/making-local-and-rural-roads-safer-pedestrians-and-bicycles>

6. AAA Newsroom. (2024, September). Your driving costs: The price of new car ownership continues to climb. Retrieved from <https://newsroom.aaa.com/2024/09/aaa-your-driving-costs-the-price-of-new-car-ownership-continues-to-climb/>

7. Kelley Blue Book. (n.d.). Wholesale used car prices rise: A sign of price increases soon? Retrieved from <https://www.kbb.com/car-news/wholesale-used-car-prices-rise-a-sign-of-price-increases-soon/>





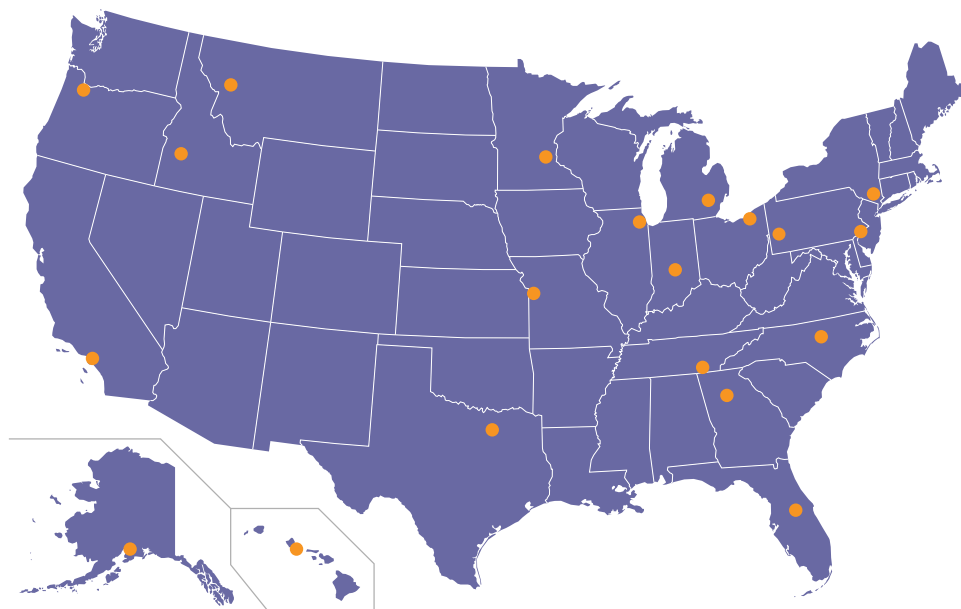
Public transit moves working families. In the subsequent pages, you'll find stories of 21 union workers and their families from 19 states. In their stories, workers share their experience using public transit, what having access to it means for their families, and what increased investments in public transit would mean for them. The people we spoke with work in varied fields, including health care, agriculture, education, and building trades, but they all use public transit to get them from place to place. As Eddie Alvarez, a union representative on the Los Angeles/Orange Counties Building and Construction Trades Council, said, *"Transit isn't just about moving people — it's about building a better future for working families."*

***"Since we launched our service improvements starting in 2018, I've heard from tons of riders who have said 'this allows me to pick up overtime at my job' and 'this means I can make it to a doctor's appointment' and 'this means I can make it to this job that pays me \$30 an hour now.'"***

***- Will Hazen, Indiana***

*Bus Operator, ATU Local 1070*

***Workers and families from cities and small towns across the country shared their stories***





## Keith Williams

Newburgh, NY

*For the Many /*

*Workers United Rochester Regional Joint Board*

***“No one should be killed just trying to get to work, but these are the kinds of risks that working people take when there aren’t better options.”***

**My name is Keith, and I’ve lived in Newburgh for most of my life.** I’m a father of five and currently a community organizer with For the Many. Before this, I worked at Amazon as a driver and in the warehouse. No matter my job, one thing has been constant — the struggle to get to work.

In Newburgh, public transit is almost nonexistent. The buses don’t reach many places, including where I used to work at Amazon. If you don’t have a car, your options are paying \$20 one way for an Uber or taxi, which adds up to \$160 a week or more, or walking miles in dangerous conditions. Because there aren’t options for people to get to work, it’s not uncommon to see people walking out to the Amazon warehouse in the dark. At best, it’s undignified, and at its worst, it’s dangerous.

In early 2014, a friend of mine was tragically hit and killed by a drunk driver on his way to work. He was walking to work because he had no other way to get there. No one should be killed just trying to get to work, but these are the kinds of risks that working people take when there aren’t better options.

When I worked at Amazon, we tried to solve the problem ourselves by carpooling. But relying on one person’s car is risky. If their car breaks down — and with Newburgh’s potholes, that happens often — it leaves everyone stranded. Amazon’s attendance policies are so strict that being late by a few minutes can cost you your job. But instead of offering solutions, they tell workers to figure it out themselves. Even in snowstorms, when other workplaces are more flexible, Amazon expects you to show up — and their parking lots aren’t even plowed. It’s frustrating and unfair.

Public transit could change everything. It gives people access to jobs, reduces financial stress, and ensures we’re treated with dignity. If employers like Amazon partnered with transit agencies to run shuttles or invested in bus routes to their facilities, it would make life easier for thousands of workers. People shouldn’t have to choose between paying for a ride and paying for rent, and they shouldn’t have to risk their lives walking to work at 3 a.m.



## Celeste Thompson

Missoula, MT

Caregiver / SEIU Local 775

***“Right now, my husband and I are experiencing housing challenges, so being able to get around without worrying about car expenses is a big deal for us.”***

**I’m Celeste, and I live in Missoula, Montana,** where I work as a home care provider. I rely on public transit daily to get to my clients and run errands. Right now, my husband and I are experiencing housing challenges, so being able to get around without worrying about car expenses is a big deal for us.

Missoula’s bus system has been a lifesaver for me. Since 2015, buses have been free in Missoula. This makes a huge difference for me with everything else increasing in cost, especially rent. The buses are typically reliable, although I always leave a little early, just in case, to ensure that I get to my clients on time.

That said, some things could be improved. Some stops don’t have shelters or benches, which isn’t great when it’s raining or snowing. The weather here can be rough, and it would help to have more places to wait comfortably. Also, while the routes work for most of my needs today, I know other workers who would benefit from more coverage, especially express routes to nearby areas like Lolo. Many people travel there for work or appointments, and having better connections would save so much time.

I’m grateful that local businesses and the University of Montana sponsor the fare-free transit system, but I think federal funding could make it even better. If we had more resources, the transit system could expand routes, add more frequent buses, and improve stops with shelters and seating. Public transit is about more than just getting from point A to point B — it’s about giving people access to work, health care, and their community.

Public transit helps people like me stay independent and keep moving forward, even during tough times. It’s not just transportation — it’s a lifeline.



## Francisco Silva

Portland, OR

Farmworker / PCUN

***“Most people don’t realize how hard it is to plan your life around a bus that only comes every two hours or doesn’t run at all.”***

**I’ve used public transit in many places – Salem, Woodburn, and Portland, Oregon—and even Vancouver, Washington.** It’s something I really enjoy because it lets me meet new people, see new places, and connect with my community. Public transit is clean, affordable, and a lifeline for people who can’t drive, like students or those who don’t have much money. I see it as necessary for society as a whole. In my experience, there are challenges to using public transit. I can’t use public transit for work—the buses just don’t go to the fields. That means we farmworkers have to figure out our own rides. And on weekends, it’s even worse. I live in Salem but need to get to Woodburn on the weekends, and there’s no bus service on Sundays, so I’ve had to walk to the freeway with a sign saying “Woodburn” just to hitch a ride. Most people don’t realize how hard it is to plan your life around a bus that only comes every two hours or doesn’t run at all.

I remember one trip when I had to go to a doctor’s appointment in Stayton. A friend dropped me off, but after the appointment, I found out there were no buses in the afternoon. The receptionist said a taxi would cost \$120 because they’d have to come from Salem, and that was just too much for me. I called all my friends, and one finally came, but I waited outside for hours until 8:15 p.m., with everything closed around me. It made me wonder — how is this my only option in 2024?

We need changes. Bus service should run more often and include weekends. On-demand transit service would be immensely helpful for people who need to get to doctor appointments or other destinations not served well by transit today. I also think about how mass transit could help the environment. The buses in Salem use green energy, and that means less pollution. It’s better for everyone. I believe we don’t need more cars—we need fewer. I look at cities like Tokyo, where my daughter said everyone uses public transit. That’s what we need here. Mass transit is the best way to address climate change, reduce traffic, and help people get where they need to go. It’s hard for me to understand why immigrants like me, who pay taxes, don’t see those taxes come back to help us. People like us work hard, but we’re left without the services we need, like good public transit. Expanding public transit service would mean so much to people in my situation.





## Lisa Miller

**Kansas City, MO**

*CNA / Missouri Workers Center, Stand Up KC*

***“It’s also comforting to know that when I’m tired after an overnight shift, I can catch the bus home and not have to worry about staying awake or alert.”***

**I started working when I was 14.** For decades, \$9.66 an hour was the most I had ever made in my life. I’m far from the only Kansas City resident whose low wages required me to use the bus as my main mode of transportation. It’s a lifeline for me and thousands of people in Kansas City. It’s how we get to work, to the doctor, to run errands, and live our daily lives.

I am a certified nurse assistant. I have been a CNA for almost 16 years. For the people in the city trying to do better and get up on their feet, having affordable and accessible public transportation helps a lot. It’s hard enough to try and survive on poverty wages. But without transportation, low-wage workers like me would find it impossible to get my foot in the door at a job, much less keep one.

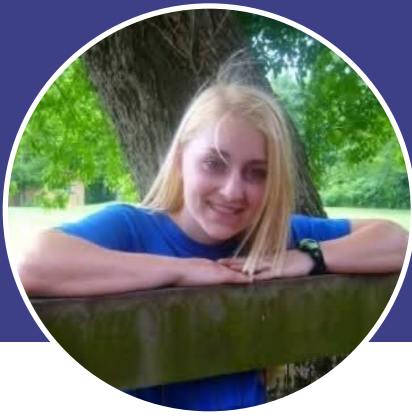
It’s also comforting to know that when I’m tired after an overnight shift, I can catch the bus home and not have to worry about staying awake or alert. Plus, it’s convenient. The stop is about three blocks away from home, and it’s a nice walk and good way for me to get exercise. And the transit app tells me when the bus is coming so I don’t have to wait in the cold.

I also enjoy riding public transit. I have taken it to Kansas and ridden most of the routes. I enjoy the scenic views, especially in the summer. Another rider who uses a wheelchair told me that the bus is his way of getting out of the house, getting fresh air, and seeing the town. I can relate to that.

The bus is an environmentally friendly way of experiencing and being in community with other people who I might not otherwise cross paths with.

And for the bus drivers, that’s their livelihood. Our public transit system is a means of creating jobs for people — union jobs with livable wages and good benefits. I’ve been in this fight with Stand Up KC for many years now, because we all deserve to have jobs that pay us what we’re worth and treat us with the dignity and respect we deserve.

It’s why we need to protect and strengthen our public transit system. This is a public good and a public necessity, and we need to preserve it and make it better, not worse, for the people who need it most. The bus has saved me and so many people like me. It’s time we all save our buses.



## Jordan Kelly

Ann Arbor, MI

Laboratory Technician / AFT Local 6739

***“If I could ask policymakers for one thing, it would be to prioritize public transit funding. More frequent buses, better stops, and extended service hours would make a huge difference for workers like me.”***

**I’ve lived in Ann Arbor for years, and public transit has been essential to my daily life.** I work as a laboratory technician at the University of Michigan, and I rely on the bus to get to work. Owning a car has never been a realistic option for me. Between the costs of buying a car, maintaining it, and paying for parking, it’s just not feasible — especially in a city as expensive as Ann Arbor.

The integration of university buses with the city’s public transit system is a great resource, especially since university buses are free to everyone. But even with this access, there are challenges that make relying on transit frustrating and time-consuming.

For instance, my apartment is only a five-minute drive from work, yet my bus commute takes an hour or more each way. That’s because buses don’t run frequently enough, and I have to plan for delays or early arrivals. Missing a bus can mean waiting another 30 minutes or more. The stops themselves could be improved, too — many don’t have shelters or benches, which is tough during Michigan winters and hot summers.

Evenings and weekends are another problem. My bus doesn’t run at all on Sundays, and Saturday service is minimal. While I don’t work weekends or holidays, many people do, and they’re left scrambling for alternatives. For those of us who rely on public transit, these gaps in service make life harder than it needs to be.

If I could ask policymakers for one thing, it would be to prioritize public transit funding. More frequent buses, better stops, and extended service hours would make a huge difference for workers like me. Public transit is about saving time, cutting costs, and reducing stress.

Ann Arbor is so expensive. What used to be a quaint college town is now only really accessible to those who can afford the sky-high housing prices. The longer leaders wait to improve access to transit and housing, the more expensive and difficult it will be to fix. We have the tools and examples from other cities — now it’s time to act.



## Will Hazen

Indianapolis, IN

Bus Operator / ATU Local 1070

***“One thing I’ve learned in my five years operating the bus is that the bus is the most unbeatable ‘third place’ in any city.”***

**As both a transit rider and a bus operator here in Indianapolis, I get to experience our transit system from a range of perspectives.** While my boyfriend and I own a car, I take the bus to work every day because it’s faster than having to find a place to park downtown and then walk the remaining distance to work. It’s also so much less expensive than paying for gas and the insurance costs that come with driving a lot. My boyfriend would like to be able to take the bus to work as well, but as a teacher, he needs to get to work early and is limited by the fact that the bus doesn’t run early enough to get him there on time.

**As a rider,** I experience firsthand some of the barriers that may make it difficult for others to ride the bus, like inaccessible bus stops or a lack of frequency that can leave people with no option but to take an expensive rideshare service if they miss their bus or transfer. But it has some phenomenal upsides too: Back when I didn’t have access to a car and first started riding the bus regularly, I would look at my bank account and think, “Wow, there’s so much more money in here!” Prior to that I didn’t really think about how much driving was costing me.

What I did think about a lot — and still do — is the freedom and community support that comes with access to reliable public transit. My grandfather lived in Ottawa, Kansas, and when he forfeited his license, we were all worried that he was going to lose his freedom to get around. But thankfully, the city, for as small as it is at 13,000 people, had a decent city bus that could take him to the grocery store, to doctor appointments, or even just to sit in the park for a while. For my family and me, that meant a ton, because I obviously didn’t live anywhere near him to help him get around. But him being able to maintain his freedom up until he was 99 years old was *huge*.

Here in Indy, one thing I’ve learned in my five years operating the bus is that the bus is the most unbeatable “third place” in any city. People will get on there that haven’t seen each other in 40 years, will recognize each other, and suddenly they’ll have plans to have a cookout next week. The ability of the bus to connect people in more than one way is just unparalleled, and that’s what I love about it. It does a better job at that than a coffee shop, it does a better job at that than a park.

***“The ability of the bus to connect people in more than one way is just unparalleled, and that’s what I love about it.”***

It’s just the best community space in the city, and it’s phenomenal **as a transit worker** to be a part of that every day.

**There are some real struggles, too.** For an underfunded transit agency — which is pretty much all of them right now — not being able to run a good service that’s accessible is restricting the freedom of a lot of riders in systems across the country, especially working folks and families who rely on the service.

Since we launched our service improvements starting in 2018, I’ve heard from tons of riders who have said “this allows me to pick up overtime at my job” and “this means I can make it to a doctor’s appointment” and “this means I can make it to this job that pays me \$30 an hour now.”

And it’s not just about new opportunities, but also making life easier for people in their current situations. In the case of the Purple Line (our newest Bus Rapid Transit line), I heard one rider say “this means I can sleep in now. I don’t have to wake up at 4 a.m. — I can wake up at 5.” The new rapid service means they don’t have to leave an extra hour early to make it to their job on time.

We’re so lucky at IndyGo to have programs like Wellness in Transit and Food in Transit that give transit riders easy access to health services and fresh produce. We also have Art in Transit and Music in Transit that not only expose riders to local arts and artists that might otherwise just be in a gallery or a concert venue but that supports the work of those artists too. All of this improves the lives of working people and provides support and dignity in all the ways that we deserve.

These are the sorts of things that don’t get reflected when you just look at the ridership numbers. It might be the same people riding, but their lives have been made easier because we’ve made these investments in transit funding. For working families, it’s worth every penny we put into it and more.



## Grace Chung

Honolulu, HI

*Humane Society Worker*

***“I do have a driver’s license, but I’m a tentative driver and feel safer taking the bus.”***

**I grew up in Seattle and Korea and then went to college in Chicago,**

where I studied technology and fine arts. For a while, I worked in fashion doing graphic design, but the work was very taxing. So, last August, I moved to Honolulu to live with my aunt and uncle and found a job at the Humane Society. I really enjoy playing with the cats and dogs at the end of my work day.

When my aunt works from home, I get up at 6 a.m. to take the 6:45 a.m. bus to work. The bus ride is about 40 minutes. Sometimes, my aunt can give me a ride to work, which only takes 10-12 minutes.

I do have a driver’s license, but I’m a tentative driver and feel safer taking the bus. I used to take the bus everywhere in Chicago and Korea. In Chicago, the buses were incredibly convenient and ran everywhere. In Korea, the buses ran on time, and the bus stops had shelters where you could go inside and wait in air conditioning in the summer and heat in the winter. The air was even purified. In Korea, where there were no shelters, there were large umbrellas for shade.

Here in Honolulu, I have waited 20 or 30 minutes for a bus and sometimes have just given up and walked. It gets very hot to wait in the sun in Hawaii. One time, I missed a bus because I couldn’t find the bus stop. I walked right past it and didn’t notice it because it was just a small sign on a pole.

I would really like to see Congress make funds available for good bus shelters and more visible bus stops, as well as more-frequent and -convenient bus service.

Going to work on the bus takes up a lot of my time. If it was more frequent and efficient, I would be able to spend less time traveling to and from work and be able to enjoy more of the things that I want to do and like to do. If the waiting periods weren’t as long, it would motivate me to travel on the bus to more places rather than just using it to go back and forth to work.





## Sandra Ellington

Cleveland, OH

Sanitation / SEIU Local 1

***“These drivers have earned our respect and deserve compensation; they keep us safe, have shown through COVID-19, and are responsible for de-escalating conflicts. Good pay and dignity on the job are not too much to ask for.”***

***“The bus is a place where I meet my neighbors. It is an important source of connection.”***

**My name is Sandra Ellington. As a member of SEIU Local 1 in Cleveland, I clean large public facilities.**

You may have seen me at the Cleveland Hopkins Airport, where I worked for 17 years. Now, I am working at the Cleveland Water Department. These facilities and the role that cleaners play are critical to making Cleveland a smooth-running, vibrant city. The same can be said about public transit and the people who clean, fix, and operate it. I know because I ride the number 15 bus regularly to go downtown. The bus is an essential public service. It gets me to work if I can't get a ride from my husband or the car isn't working.

The bus is a place where I meet my neighbors. It is an important source of connection. Many people are riding the bus that can't drive; they may need to get groceries or go to a doctor's appointment. The bus stops in front of the hospital, providing an essential service.

We need to invest in this public service. We need buses to be flowing regularly, and service needs to be frequent and dependable. Bus stops need to be lit. We need to be able to access information quickly when a bus is taken out of service or running late. I work the second shift, from 4 p.m. to midnight, and the waits are longer at night, and there is no downtown trolley service.

One barrier to good service is being able to recruit and retain drivers. Transit workers are an essential part of our everyday life and of everyday Americans, and they get us to and from work and to see our loved ones, and they are lifelines. Like all of us who go to work and work hard each day, they deserve dignity on the job and to be paid for their work. I have seen bus drivers go out of their way. I was on the 14, and there was a man who was standing in crisis in the middle of the street, and the driver had to take critical action to keep all the passengers safe. These drivers have earned our respect and deserve compensation; they keep us safe, have shown through COVID-19, and are responsible for de-escalating conflicts. Good pay and dignity on the job are not too much to ask for.

Transit works for working families. Riders like myself are making an important contribution to our city, as are the bus drivers who get us where we need to go.



## Eddie Alvarez

Los Angeles, CA

*Building Trades / LA/OC Building Trades*

***“At the end of the day, public transit, good housing, and union jobs go hand in hand. Families have more opportunities. They can spend less time and money on transportation, have more time together, and get to enjoy the fruits of their labor.”***

**I’m Eddie Alvarez, a union representative for the Los Angeles/Orange Counties Building and Construction Trades Council.** I grew up in the trades. My father is an elevator constructor, and I started as a laborer. Now, I work for a council of all the trades, where we negotiate agreements to put all our members to work. In the trades, our goal is to create better opportunities for our members and their families, and I see public transit as a key part of that. We have a Community Workforce Agreement with LA County Metro that targets local and disadvantaged people for hiring when building the new subway, light rail, and bus infrastructure. We’re building these lines right now. That’s bringing true opportunity to people all over LA.

Public transit is about more than getting from point A to point B. It’s about building communities where people can live, work, and spend time with their families without wasting hours stuck in traffic. Our members usually have to drive to job sites because they carry tools, but their families rely on buses and trains to get to school, run errands, and enjoy the city. If we can build more transit-oriented housing — places where you can hop on a train and be downtown in 15 minutes — it will change everything. It would give people more time with their loved ones and less time on the road. And we want our skilled, local union workers to be the workforce to create that housing. Economic mobility is a sign of a thriving city. We need more of it, especially as we rebuild after the fires.

One of the biggest challenges is the lack of affordable housing near transit. Too many families are forced to live far from where they work, spending two to three hours commuting every day. That’s why I advocate for transit-oriented development. I’ve seen how this works in other cities, like Washington, D.C., or Mexico City, where transit is fully integrated into daily life. We need that here in Los Angeles.

At the end of the day, public transit, good housing, and union jobs go hand in hand. Families have more opportunities. They can spend less time and money on transportation, have more time together, and get to enjoy the fruits of their labor. That’s what I want for our members: strong working conditions, good wages, and communities where they can thrive. Transit isn’t just about moving people — it’s about building a better future for working families.



## Eshawney Gaston

**Durham, NC**

*Food Service / Union of Southern Service Workers*

***“Having the buses and stations be safer would make me and others in my community more likely to use the bus system. There are rougher parts of the city that sometimes I don’t want to ride through, so I take an Uber instead, which eats up my wages.”***

**My name is Eshawney Gaston, and I’m a food service worker in Durham, North Carolina.** In the past, I’ve been a cook, but I’ve worked the register and have done warehouse work as well. I’m also a proud member of my union, United Southern Service Workers (USSW). I’ve been using the public transit system since I was 15 and have relied on it for most of my adult life to get to work and the other places I need to go. I recently got a car, but due to some maintenance issues, I’m using public transportation as my primary way of getting around.

I generally like the bus system in Durham and think it’s a good service that everyone should have access to, but there are some things about it that could be better. For starters, the bus stops could have better protections against the weather, like coverings for rain, indoor areas where people can sit for longer while they wait for the bus, or some kind of heating so that people aren’t waiting in the cold. They could also have seating available, because people shouldn’t have to stand while they wait for the bus, and that’s especially true for people with disabilities. The bus routes are typically fine, but it would be better if the timings were more predictable or if the buses came more frequently. Sometimes, I have to plan extra time into my schedule to catch the bus when it’s coming, even if it means getting to my job or wherever I’m going an hour early just because there isn’t another bus coming later that would be able to get me there in time. Having more stops would make things easier too, because then people wouldn’t have to walk as much to get to a bus stop or to get to places like the doctor or a grocery store they want to go to.

Having the buses and stations be safer would make me and others in my community more likely to use the bus system. There are rougher parts of the city that sometimes I don’t want to ride through, so I take an Uber instead, which eats up my wages. When the weather is bad or really rainy, I also prefer not to ride the bus, because I don’t always feel the safest.

The buses themselves could also use better maintenance or an upgrade. There are times when the routes are unavailable just because the buses are out of service. The heating and cooling on the buses is not super reliable, so fixing that would also make the rides better. So would having charging ports available on the bus.

***“At the end of the day, workers are essential, and the bus drivers are workers too who deserve to be paid more, because we rely on them to get around.”***

Another thing I've noticed is that even though there's some space for people with disabilities on the bus, there isn't enough. There have been times where someone in a wheelchair or using a walker hasn't been able to get on the bus because there wasn't enough room for them, so they had to wait for another one to come.

**The biggest issue in my opinion is the working conditions of the bus drivers.** They aren't being paid enough, and that definitely contributes to the experience of the ride. Sometimes they talk about wanting to go on strike over the conditions, or they're disgruntled or running behind because their work just isn't valued enough.

When it comes to climate change, I support reducing greenhouse gas emissions and I think having better transit systems would make people less likely to rely on cars. Climate change affects everybody. I don't drink the tap water because I don't trust that it's clean. And I don't want our weather here to get worse, because it's already bad enough when it snows when it comes to being able to use the bus.

So if the government decided to better fund the transit system and fix up the stations, routes, and buses, I think that'd be them making a direct investment into workers. More funding could also mean keeping the services here in Durham free. They used to cost \$2 — or sometimes more in other areas — to ride for the day, and for some people that really adds up. If it's public transportation, it should be free. At the end of the day, workers are essential, and the bus drivers are workers too who deserve to be paid more, because we rely on them to get around. We all deserve to have efficient and accessible transportation.



## Gio Roman Torres

Chattanooga, TN

*Researcher / Graduate Employees' Organization /  
University of Michigan*

***"I saw firsthand how the built environment — public spaces, transit systems, schools — can foster connection or create barriers for people trying to find their footing in a new country."***

**Growing up in Los Angeles, my single mom didn't drive, so we took buses to get around.** From school drop-offs to trips to work, the DASH and Metro systems were lifelines for us. Even now, living in Chattanooga, I continue to use public transit, though the experience is a bit different here.

I'm working on my PhD in sociology at the University of Michigan while living in Chattanooga. My research focuses on how place shapes the experiences of Latino immigrants across the United States, particularly how they navigate belonging and incorporation in their communities. Growing up in a first-generation immigrant family, I saw firsthand how the built environment — public spaces, transit systems, schools—can foster connection or create barriers for people trying to find their footing in a new country. While my work isn't explicitly focused on transportation, it often surfaces as a factor.

In LA, public transit wasn't perfect, but it worked. In Chattanooga, it's a different story. When I first moved here, it was challenging to figure out where the bus stops were. Some stops don't have any signs, benches, or shelters. I'd be walking around trying to guess where to stand, only to have the bus pass me by. It felt like a scavenger hunt.

I frequently use a shuttle that runs between my neighborhood and downtown. The service can be inconsistent, with limited hours on weekends and evenings. That makes it hard for people like me who might want to use it for a night out or for workers with nontraditional schedules.

Through my research, I've observed that using public transit can be difficult for immigrants, especially in places where immigrant populations have grown in the past decade — places like Chattanooga. Many don't know about the services because information isn't accessible in their language, and even when they do, the routes often don't connect to their neighborhoods, which can be a barrier to opportunity.



***“In LA, buses connected us to schools, jobs, and even simple joys like trips to the beach. In Chattanooga, I can see the potential for transit to do the same.”***

**I’ve seen how public transit can transform lives and communities.**

In LA, buses connected us to schools, jobs, and even simple joys like trips to the beach. In Chattanooga, I can see the potential for transit to do the same. We need better infrastructure — signs, shelters, and benches at every stop — so riders feel valued. We need more-frequent and -reliable service that runs later into the night and reaches underserved and spatially isolated neighborhoods.

I believe in the power of public transit to bring people together and create a more-equitable and -connected community. A good transit system is a good start to leveling the playing field, giving everyone access to the resources they need to thrive. Transit in Chattanooga has room for improvement, but with new investments, we can have a system that meets the community’s needs.



## Teba Gonzalez

**Atlanta, GA**

*Cashier / Union of Southern Service Workers*

***“There were times that my manager asked if I could come as early as I possibly could, and I had to explain that first buses don’t even run that early.”***

**My name is Teba Gonzalez, and I am a former Dunkin’ Donuts worker, now working as a cashier at the State Farm Arena, in Atlanta, Georgia.**

I am also a member of the Union of Southern Service Workers (USSW). I need reliable and good public transit because I rely on it to get me most everywhere I need to go. If I need to go out and shop for groceries or other needs, I take public transit. If I need a haircut, I take public transit, if I need to get to work, if I need to go to the doctor, or if I need to see my family and friends — I’m taking public transit.

I take a decent mix of the bus and the train, and most of the time, I have to take both to get to where I need to go in Atlanta. Without a functioning transit system, I would need a car or I’d need to move my whole life to another area. A good majority of time, public transit is going to get me eventually where I need to go. But the bus system is not so great. There is no real time period where you can completely rely on it. The updates on the online app are not correct, and it’s tough because buses being even five minutes early or late can make all the difference. I’ve missed so many buses because I looked at the app on my phone, knew how long it takes to walk to the bus stop, but then the scheduled time ended up not being correct.

And there are plenty of occasions where I just can’t wait for a bus to come, trains are delayed, and I just have to spend extra money that I don’t necessarily have to take an Uber because of time constraints — even and especially to work. When I was working at Dunkin’, there were times that my manager asked if I could come as early as I possibly could, and I had to explain that first buses don’t even run that early. I would have to take an Uber for \$30 all the way downtown to satisfy the manager. I had no other choice. Trains would take me to a certain point, then I’d have to transfer to the bus. When I lived in Lithonia, I would have to take a 45-minute ride, and that was the only bus that would get me close to my home. I had no other options, so I often had to take a car ride. In my new work, I’ve actually met an older lady I work with that doesn’t live too far out from me. Her biggest joke to me is that when she doesn’t see me it’s because she made sure to leave two or three hours earlier to make sure she’s at work early enough to not be late. Two or three hours! A better transit system would get us closer to home and would save us so much critical time in our lives.

***“It’s always in the back of your mind if it even makes sense for you to apply to that place, because it’s two or three bus rides to even get to that area.*”**

**I do have to keep transit in mind during job searches**, do homework on whether it’s possible to get there, and double-check whether there is a bus line, train line, or multiple lines that transfer to where the job is. And then sometimes you just have to make do. But it’s always in the back of your mind if it even makes sense for you to apply to that place, because it’s two or three bus rides to even get to that area.

In other parts of life, like seeing friends, I can remember times where I’ve wanted to do something or see someone, and you have two options: 1) look up routes and the many transfers to get there or 2) have to cough up money to pay for an Uber. This can be a big obstacle to being a part of your community and socializing. In terms of equity and access, I think in certain areas in Atlanta that race and income are definitely factors. There are certain areas that I try to get to, where it’s quite hard and long to get to. I can imagine that there are areas in North Atlanta that simply can’t access transit at all.

Funding for improvements would greatly improve my life and freedom to move. We need better communication and updates that are real, meaningful, and accurate. Anything would be better than nothing. Let me know that the bus broke down or that it’s delayed, so I’m not left stranded, waiting, and wondering. I’ve often had to wait for an extra hour and not even be sure if it is coming at all. What am I supposed to do then? Be an hour late to work? We need much more frequency, reliability, and communication. Also, there’s no one to ask about directions or navigating the service. When I lived in New York, where I’m from, they had someone at the station that could talk to you about directions and support for using the transit system, so I would like to see that happen here in Atlanta, too.

The climate solution piece of transit is important. I’ll be honest — it’s not something I think about all the time, but it definitely is important to me. I think things are the way they are for a reason because of who has influence on the decision-making. Wealthier people can get by without having a larger train system, and companies might like that because more roads means more cars to sell to those who can afford it. So that seems like a big barrier for regular people being able to get everywhere by public transit and help the environment and our health. It’s helping someone’s bottom line but hurting the air we breathe.



## Katrina Owings

Boise, ID

Child Care

***“If the bus routes were restored or expanded, it would make a huge difference for me. It would mean getting to work or the grocery store without spending a fortune on rideshare services.”***

**My name is Katrina, and I live in Boise, Idaho, where I work at a daycare.**

Until recently, I relied on the bus to get to work and run errands. It was really helpful for me, especially since I don't drive. Public transit gave me the freedom to get where I needed to go without the stress or cost of owning a car.

Before the bus system changed last year, my commute was simple. I had a short, six-minute walk to the nearest stop, and the bus would drop me off just a minute away from my job. It was quick, reliable, and affordable — only \$1.50 per ride. But after the transit agency shortened the routes last year, everything became more complicated. Now, I'd have to walk 14 minutes to the nearest stop, and then another 20 minutes from the drop-off to my job. That's just too much, especially when the weather's bad or I'm pressed for time.

Because of these changes, I had to switch to using Uber. It's faster, but it's also much more expensive. On a normal day, I spend \$6.50 for a ride, and on busier days, it can be as much as \$10. That adds up quickly. The bus was not only cheaper, but it also ran on a consistent schedule, so I could plan my day without worrying about delays or long waits that I sometimes experience using Uber.

If the bus routes were restored or expanded, it would make a huge difference for me. It would mean getting to work or the grocery store without spending a fortune on rideshare services. Public transit helps people save money, reduces stress, and offers the freedom to live without depending on cars. I hope decision-makers invest in expanding and improving transit systems, not just for me but for all the working families who depend on it.



## Marty Harrison

**Philadelphia, PA**

*Nurse / Pennsylvania Association of Staff Nurses and Allied Professionals*

***“We deliberately chose to live near reliable transit because we knew we couldn’t afford to be stuck at home during bad weather or emergencies. Snow, sleet, rain – we had to get to work, and public transit made that possible.”***

### **I’m Marty, a nurse at Temple University Hospital in Philadelphia.**

Public transit has been a key part of life for my family and me for years. My husband and I are both essential workers — he spent over three decades at Verizon, and I’ve been at Temple, which serves some of the poorest ZIP codes in the country. We deliberately chose to live near reliable transit because we knew we couldn’t afford to be stuck at home during bad weather or emergencies. Snow, sleet, rain — we had to get to work, and public transit made that possible.

We own one car, but it mostly gets left behind in our driveway. Transit has saved us from the expenses of owning two cars. Gas, insurance, maintenance — those costs add up quickly.

Another thing I value about transit is the mental break it gives me. Nursing is a stressful job. Many of my coworkers talk about sitting in their cars in the driveway after work just to decompress before going inside to deal with family and household responsibilities. My ride home on the train or bus gives me that time to transition. I can just sit, think, and let go of the day’s stress before I walk through the door.

That said, Philadelphia’s transit system, SEPTA, has its challenges. It’s been underfunded for decades, and the impact shows. Staffing shortages during COVID were especially bad—trains and buses would be canceled back-to-back due to operator unavailability, leaving riders stranded. Safety is another issue. Problems like the opioid crisis and homelessness manifest on the system, but I believe the solution isn’t more transit police—it’s more staff, more frequent transit service, and addressing the root causes of what people are facing.

To decision-makers, I’d say transit is essential. It keeps families in cities, makes housing affordable, and connects people to jobs, schools, and communities. It’s also critical for the environment, reducing traffic and emissions. We need more investment in transit to make it frequent, reliable, and safe. Transit is a lifeline for workers, families, and the future of our cities.





## Sara Mullen

Anchorage, AK

Teacher

***“Having a bus pass allows many students to attend school and work daily when they otherwise would not be able to. This support makes life easier for many students, and that allows them to do better in school.”***

**As an educator of preschoolers through graduate students for 34 years in three different states, I have witnessed the challenges families face in providing transportation for their children to area public schools.**

In 1992, in St. Louis, Missouri, many African American students were bussed from failing inner-city neighborhood schools to the suburbs to thriving public schools with more resources, where I taught second grade. While this benefited many students with a better education and support for food security, parents and guardians were unable to participate in their children's conferences and special events because of a lack of transportation options.

While teaching in Michigan, new specialty public schools, such as Spanish Immersion or Magnet Schools with a focus on Science or Fine Arts, were available to all families with a lottery system; however, if the school was not in your neighborhood, you needed to provide transportation to and from school. No buses were provided by the districts, so the populations of students at these schools are mostly families with their own vehicles, one parent who is able to adjust a work schedule to drive their children, and families with white-collar salaried jobs who attended post-secondary school.

Currently, I am a public school teacher in Anchorage, Alaska. I have learned to watch out for moose and bear before I leave the house and have discovered that a child can get an excused absence if a moose is blocking their vehicle needed to get to school!

I have also seen the struggles of my students and their families in attending school. Parents often work long hours to provide for their children, and the new scheduled hours for the 2024-2025 school year have caused great difficulty for transportation and childcare. In Anchorage, families come from many different backgrounds, and over 100 different languages are spoken as the primary language at home. The Anchorage School District does offer support for transportation, which I have not seen anywhere else I taught.

***“Reliable public transportation is one key to equity for all in public schools.”***

One benefit that makes a huge difference in the Anchorage School District is that students who attend East High School get a free bus pass. The bus pass allows students to take the bus to and from school, and they can use it after school. Having a bus pass allows many students to attend school and work daily when they otherwise would not be able to. This support makes life easier for many students, and that allows them to do better in school.

Not only does that save families the cost of owning a car, but it **allows older students to participate in after-school activities, get to a job after school, help their families with shopping and errands, or visit friends, despite limits in bus schedules and routes available.**

In addition, taxicab service or gas cards are provided for families with a “Child In Transition,” so they can finish a school year where they started. Students who are frequently moving homes, are homeless, or are in a temporary foster care setting qualify for this support. I taught elementary students, as well as high schoolers, who could maintain some stability with friendships, schooling, and after-school activities because of this service.

While every school district I taught in did its best to equalize the educational experiences for every student regardless of their background, much is still needed to help every student have access to high-quality public education.

Reliable public transportation is one key to equity for all in public schools.



## William Sheets

Chicago, Illinois

*Delivery Driver / Teamsters Local 705*

***“I feel that many others have similar experiences to me and rely on good public transit. It’s a vital part of the community.”***

**My name is William Sheets. I am an Amazon delivery driver, and I bring packages to Chicago’s doorsteps.** I’m a member of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters. Transit has been essential for me since coming to Chicago. I ended up losing my car in May. It impacted me significantly, and I needed to start riding public transit. I was taking two buses to get to work at my last job. Since I started working with Amazon, I sometimes take the train but also still have to take buses often.

At the Amazon warehouse I work at, we have the Chicago Transit Authority bus stop and the Pace bus stop. The CTA bus gets you only so far, then you have to wait for the Pace bus, which can be a huge time-suck. There have been times where I’ve missed the bus to work because it didn’t arrive at the scheduled time or it bypassed me completely with no explanation. Those instances make it much harder for me, and I end up having to walk half a mile to complete my commute. I feel like, at the very least, public transit should be able to get you to work. We don’t make enough money at Amazon for me to be able to call a cab or rideshare in moments like these. Buses later on at night around 5 p.m. and after work sometimes are late and take too long between buses, and I just decide to walk a long way instead.

For my life outside of work, sometimes it’s challenging because I can’t constantly see my friends in the suburbs due to transit not reaching those areas. I do get to other places for my hobbies like playing cards, where I need to take the bus once per week. I am happy and fortunate that I can generally walk to the doctor and grocery. In my hometown in Michigan, I would have been screwed without a car, living my life and working, but here in Chicago, transit has been an absolute lifeline for these things.

I feel that many others have similar experiences to me and rely on good public transit. It’s a vital part of the community.



## Brinda Gurumoorthy

Dallas, TX

*Teacher / American Federation of Teachers*

***“Things like dating can be hard because you might have to get there super early, or if there is a scenario where you have to leave an uncomfortable situation but can’t really leave because the bus hasn’t come and you’re still there.”***

**My name is Brinda Gurumoorthy. I am a high school math teacher in Dallas, Texas, public schools.** I teach high school AP precalculus and calculus, helping younger generations learn fundamental skills that will help shape the future. I am also a proud union member with the American Federation of Teachers (AFT). When I moved to Dallas a couple of years ago, I was under the impression that it was like other big cities like New York, where everyone could use public transit to get around where they need to go. However, I realized quickly that this isn’t the case and that we don’t have world-class public transit across the country.

I don’t own a car, so I needed to pick a neighborhood to live where there was close access to the DART bus and rail. I use the bus to get to and from work every day. I’m fortunate to live within walking distance to my main grocery store, but if I need to get to Target and other places, I need to use the bus. Also, after a certain hour of the day, the frequency decreases, so if I have to stay late at work, then I end up waiting much longer to get home. On a demanding teacher’s schedule, with lesson planning and grading to do, more-frequent transit is vital to creating a healthier and more sustainable work/life balance.

On the weekend, frequency slows down as well. There have been instances where I’ve had to pay significantly more for a ride when I’ve missed a bus or wanted to go somewhere that service didn’t operate. For others in even worse financial positions than me, I can see it being an extremely difficult and stressful situation.

For socializing and activities outside of work, I’ll often also use transit but will sometimes need to catch a ride with a friend. Sometimes it’s hard because you really have to plan ahead to budget for time and stuff to get around to certain places, including to hang out with friends and have fun. Things like dating can be hard because you might have to get there super early, or if there is a scenario where you have to leave an uncomfortable situation but can’t really leave because the bus hasn’t come and you’re still there.

***“One of the biggest ways that better transit would improve our community is by improving traffic.”***

**In Dallas, there are some neighborhoods where transit is stronger than others, especially the lack of service in the southern half of Dallas, where more low-income and Black and brown communities are.** Depending on where you are and where you want to go, it may take significantly longer, to the point where sometimes you just need to catch a ride instead.

One of the biggest ways that better transit would improve our community is by improving traffic. Traffic congestion is a huge complaint that I hear from everyone I know here, so better transit would mean fewer cars clogging up highways, which also leads to less tailpipe emissions, which would lead to better air quality. Dallas and Tarrant County air quality is often poor, And we also have lots of accidents and pedestrian deaths. Cutting down on traffic, emissions, and ozone would be better for people, mobility, and public and environmental health.

I've also been worried about climate change since I was little, and it seems like it's only getting hotter now. We owe it to people in our communities, to my students and their futures, but also to people all over the world and in the Global South to reduce our emissions. Transit is a core solution.

If Congress made more federal funds available for transit service, more frequency across the board, even after peak hours, would very much improve my daily life. Also, more crosstown route options, where we have very little right now, would be a huge benefit for me and others here. I'd also want to see more transit for neighborhoods that would benefit the most but don't have it, plus beefed up paratransit service for our neighbors with disabilities. It would be excellent to have consistent federal funding, because it's very stressful to have funding and service under attack by the state government here in Texas. Even now, as we speak, state representatives from surrounding suburbs are threatening to pass legislation that would cut an essential funding stream to DART by 25%. Federal funding would help ensure a stable and consistent service for me and my community members.





## Connor Chapman

**Pittsburgh, PA**

*University of Pittsburgh Graduate Student /  
Pitt Graduate Workers*

***“Having a reliable and frequent transit service that gets me to where I need to go would free up a tremendous amount of mental energy I spend worrying if I will arrive to the class I’m teaching on time.”***

**My name is Connor Chapman, and I’m a graduate student at the University of Pittsburgh, working on my doctorate in sociology.**

Graduate students do essential work for the university. We are the nearly 2,100 teaching and research assistants that make the university work. As academics beginning our careers, we are at the bottom of the academic ladder. We work long and inconsistent hours for poverty wages. For these reasons, among many others, graduate workers at the University of Pittsburgh won a landslide election to join the United Steelworkers, a strong union headquartered in Pittsburgh that represents the rest of the faculty and staff here at the University of Pittsburgh.

In my experience as a graduate worker and a union organizer, I learned that public transportation is critical for graduate workers to do our jobs. My coworkers and I are lucky that the university provides us with free bus fare through our university IDs. Now, we don’t have to be lucky. We can secure our right to public transportation through a collective bargaining agreement. Guaranteeing access to free transit enables my coworkers to safely access Pittsburgh by connecting us to jobs, grocery stores, hospitals, and child care. These passes have an impact on our communities as well. As one of the largest employers in Allegheny County, the University of Pittsburgh buys passes in bulk, providing critical revenue to our county transit agency, Pittsburgh Regional Transit.

Rising rents and stagnant wages have pushed my coworkers and me farther and farther from the university, year over year. This places graduate workers in a double bind. We are increasingly living in areas underserved by public transit, and we generally struggle to access cars. Many of my coworkers cannot afford the upfront and recurring costs of owning a car. Many others are international students, coming from all across the world to live and work in Pittsburgh, but they don’t have access to a driver’s license. For my coworkers and me, public transportation is the lifeline we need to access work, essential services, and be active members of our communities.

***“By paying our operators a family wage, we stabilize our transit workforce, which is a critical component in expanding service, increasing frequency and expanding routes.”***

**Improving the frequency, reliability, and scope of Pittsburgh’s public transit system would go a long way to help us become better instructors and researchers.** Having a reliable and frequent transit service that gets me to where I need to go would free up a tremendous amount of mental energy I spend worrying if I will arrive to the class I’m teaching on time. Some of my colleagues stay as late as 3 a.m. performing necessary lab work and experiments; they’ve told me that having access to a bus at that hour would be a tremendous relief. Over decades, Pittsburghers have seen their public transit service decline year over year. As service declines, so does ridership. My coworkers want to take the bus, but infrequent and unreliable service is a significant barrier. Instead of thinking about service cuts, we should be thinking about restoring service, so that my coworkers and I can continue to perform the quality instruction and groundbreaking research that the University of Pittsburgh is known for.

After talking to hundreds of my coworkers, one thing is clear: We need to invest in our public transit. As anchor institutions, it is vital that our colleges and universities pay their fare share into our transit system. Through collective bargaining, my coworkers and I can guarantee our access to public transportation while also ensuring that the University of Pittsburgh continues to pay into the county’s public transit system. In addition to local institutions, state and federal funding for public transit is also essential to expanding service. With local, state, and federal support, and the ability to use these funds to expand operations, we can pay our transit workers a family wage. By paying our operators a family wage, we stabilize our transit workforce, which is a critical component in expanding service, increasing frequency and expanding routes. Graduate workers play key roles in keeping our local higher-education institutions running, and we rely on public transit every day to connect us to work, health care, child care, and our community. Investing in public transportation does not just benefit the health and well-being of my coworkers but for working families, employers, and our communities more broadly.

Transit keeps our communities connected, enabling us to live and to thrive.

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## Vanessa Alvarez

Kissimmee, FL

Convenience Store Worker

***“When a bus doesn’t show up, I wait at a bus stop with no shelter and not even a bench to sit on.”***

**I moved to Kissimmee, Florida, about 15 years ago and have been active in the community with Vamos Puerto Rico and helping our community recover from the destruction of Hurricane Maria.** My husband is a Kissimmee commissioner and is serving as mayor pro tem, but we look like everybody else and live like everybody else.

I work at a convenience store and take the bus to and from work every day. I have to be at work at 7 a.m. most days, so I get up at 5:30 a.m. to take the 6:30 a.m. bus. The ride is only 10-12 minutes if the bus comes on time. When the bus doesn’t come, which happens often, I have to wait 45 minutes to an hour for the next bus, and then I am late to work. I have to call to let them know and then provide proof that the bus was late. The bosses don’t understand and don’t like it.

My daughter, Nina, also relies on the bus to get to work for her job as a medical assistant at Advent Medical Group, near the hospital. She has to walk over a mile each way because there is no bus service from our area, even though it is a major employer with people working there around the clock.

My sister-in-law, Belinda, who lives next door, also relies on the bus to get to work at Walgreens. The bus trip kills about two hours of her day, when a car ride would be 10 minutes each way. That is time she could be helping her 10-year-old daughter with homework.

She works until 8 p.m., so she relies on the app to find out when the bus will be at her stop, but too often the bus will go right by without stopping. Then she has a half-hour wait in the dark until the next bus. Sundays are even worse. There is no bus service at all, so when she is put on the schedule to work on Sundays, she has to take a cab. The other day, when she had a doctor’s appointment, she took the bus as close as it would get her and then still had to pay \$7 for a cab the rest of the way and \$16 for a cab ride to get back home.

***“There are too many places like hospitals and Disney in Orlando that need people to work all night. We need bus service 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.”***

A lot of workers I know rely on the bus to get to work. And many people I know work an overnight shift and are often stuck. There are too many places like hospitals and Disney in Orlando that need people to work all night. We need bus service 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. At the convenience store, they are cutting workers' hours. Workers are stressed about how they will pay their bills on top of worrying about being fired for being late when the bus doesn't show up. And for me, when a bus doesn't show up, I wait at a bus stop with no shelter and not even a bench to sit on.

We need more investment in transit so buses run more often, are available around the clock, and workers have a comfortable place to sit down after working all day.



## Zaria Rodríguez

Minneapolis, Minnesota

SEIU Local 26

***“The lack of public transportation also limits my ability to find other work.”***

**My name is Zaira Rodríguez, and I am a retail janitor at the Mall of America in the Twin Cities of Minnesota.** I help keep our mall clean by vacuuming, cleaning the bathrooms, and washing the floors, which is especially important during the rainy and snowy seasons here. I am also a proud member of my union, SEIU Local 26. When many people think of the twin cities, they often think of the bustling downtown areas of Minneapolis and St. Paul. I live on the outskirts of the city in the suburbs, which means going to and coming home from work can be a bit of a challenge, especially since I don't own a car or have a driver's license.

I have to get to work by 5 a.m. When I use public transit to get there, it takes two buses and an hour and 20 minutes of ride time. But the buses start running at 4:35 a.m., so there's no way for me to take the bus to get to work in the mornings. Most days, my partner drives me, but on the days he can't, I have to call my boss and say I can't get to work before 6 a.m., or I have to pay for an Uber. I'm able to take the bus home, but it takes an hour and 20 minutes. By car, it only takes 20 minutes.

I run into similar problems when I have to pick up my check every two weeks. The bus doesn't have a stop near the office where I need to go, so I have to walk 45 minutes. When it's really cold or snowy, I usually take an Uber for about \$25, which is almost two hours' worth of work for me as someone who only gets paid \$16 an hour. It would be easier if I could afford to live closer to where I work, but many of us who work at Mall of America live in the suburbs. The lack of public transportation also limits my ability to find other work. My boss offered me the opportunity to transfer to a Target or Cabela's closer to where I live, but unfortunately, the buses don't run there. So, while my partner could drop me off in the mornings, I'd have no way to get home in the early afternoon while he's at work.

Without a car, it's difficult to even do some of the basic parts of life. For example, getting to the grocery store by public transportation isn't really an option. I have to either wait for my partner to come home and go late at night, or I don't get to go at all because there aren't any stops nearby.



***“Without a car, it’s difficult to even do some of the basic parts of life.”***

That said, I feel safe on the bus and I like being able to use public transportation. My son takes the bus to school and we’re able to use public transportation to get to his extracurriculars or to the doctor, but if it were more accessible, I would use it a lot more often. If more investments were made into public transit, maybe we could afford more bus drivers to fill the gaps in the nighttime when they aren’t running. We also might be able to have more stops available near the places we need to go. Funding could also help pay for heating at the bus stops. Only the downtown stops have heat, and in the winter, it’s difficult to wait at my stops in the cold.

Having more accessible public transportation would also help reduce air pollution from people depending on cars. It’s important because changes to the climate might mean harsher winters here and the snow already gets in the way of my daily life. Having more accessible and efficient public transportation would definitely make it easier for me and my community to get to work and make better use of our time and paychecks.



## Ian Buck

Minneapolis, Minnesota

*Minneapolis Federation of Teachers*

***“For me, transit is what I depend on when my bicycle doesn’t cut it. I often use transit in conjunction with my bike to get the best of both. The combination is a sum greater than the parts.”***

**My name is Ian Buck, and I teach computer science, cybersecurity, and media production, for 10th - 12th graders in Career and Technical Education programs.** I teach district-wide across Minneapolis Public Schools and have students at all of the district high schools, which requires me to get around town as efficiently as I can. I am also a member of the Minneapolis Federation of Teachers (MFT).

For me, transit is what I depend on when my bicycle doesn’t cut it. I often use transit in conjunction with my bike to get the best of both. The combination is a sum greater than the parts. I chose my neighborhood in Minneapolis so that I could get to work easily on my bike using off-street trails. The only thing is that Minneapolis gets cold, like very cold, so having a reliable bus that can take me to work is an absolute lifesaver. I teach students at all different high schools, so I might be asked to go somewhere by a student or have to give a cohort more attention, so transit is essential to get me from place to place while also being able to check my emails and do assignment grading on the bus.

The union and district have also ensured that most high schools now give everyone an unlimited bus card, so we actually have students who are getting to school via public transit, which gives us an impetus for ensuring our transit system is usable by everyone. Public transit is also necessary for my teaching and student learning because, as a teacher of students in all the different high schools, the district doesn’t have the resources to send shuttle buses to every school to pick students up for field trips. But with transit accessibility, I can just tell all students we’re going to meet at a specific location and to show up at a certain time, I send them a screenshot of a bus route to take from their particular school, and then they use their district transit card to get there! It’s great, and I often get to ride the bus with some students on the way back, too.

When I was looking to move to Minneapolis from Saint Paul, I wanted to live closer to friends in a certain area and was specifically job hunting for teaching gigs that were either entirely remote or were in Minneapolis proper.

***“People shouldn’t be forced to choose between accessing a job and seeing friends and family, yet the lack of transit connections outside the urban core limits job prospects and social connections today.”***

If I wanted to work in any suburban school district for an in-person position, then it would have been totally infeasible. People shouldn’t be forced to choose between accessing a job and seeing friends and family, yet the lack of transit connections outside the urban core limits job prospects and social connections today.

Further, I believe it’s essential that the Metro Transit workforce is all union public employees. It better upholds the integrity and reliability of the transit service they provide the community. Relying on private staffing contractors proved to be unstable during the pandemic. Those workers are the ones who lost their jobs first and whose employers staffed back up last, with service suffering as a result. Having a workforce made up of union public employees provides consistency for workers and riders.

For improvements, given that the coverage of what routes we have is pretty good, I’d say increasing frequency on all routes is where that funding would best be served and make the most impact on peoples’ lives. Investments in dedicated bus lines that don’t slow in traffic and more well-paid union bus operators so we don’t have ghost buses would make a big difference. Federal funding seems like it’s usually tied with strings to big, flashy projects. I feel that they shouldn’t dictate what the transit agencies should do with that funding. If I lived in a city where there wasn’t good coverage, then I’d be more specific about wanting transit access to XYZ neighborhoods, and we could always use more coverage in the suburbs, for example, but I live in the core of the Twin Cities.

Regarding stopping climate catastrophe, this is one of the most important things in the world to me. It’s the biggest challenge our species has ever faced and we need to be trying to solve it collectively. We need to build systems that are going to allow large groups of people to make everyday decisions that protect our climate. Individual action alone won’t make the kind of change we need. But a world-class transit system in every city will give us the opportunity to make collective change with our daily choices and build a society that serves everyone and the planet.



# RECOMMENDATIONS

**We urge leaders to advance the following policy recommendations to expand the benefits of public transit for working families and address the cost of living.**

## **Local policy recommendations**

Relevant to transit agencies, city, and metro region governments

- Expand service frequency and service span in response to changing residential and employment patterns. Increase the current workforce to levels needed to expand transit service by supporting the creation of permanent jobs with strong wages and benefits for new and existing transit workers.
- Enact new sources of transit funding for fixed route bus, rail, and ADA paratransit services that stabilize operating budgets and minimize revenue volatility.
- Pursue land use policies that encourage equitable transit-oriented-development without displacement near existing and planned transit routes.
- Improve pedestrian and bicycle connections to transit stops and stations, and add shelters and other amenities at bus stops.
- Add station elevators, improve information access, and take further steps to make existing and new transit infrastructure universally accessible.
- Invest in plexiglass, driver-side exits, and other operator safety protections.
- Enable riders to bypass traffic congestion by implementing comprehensive networks of bus-only lanes on major routes.
- Structure fares to make transit affordable for everyone, including people with low incomes, people with disabilities, seniors, students, and kids.
- Increase the presence of transit riders, women, Black and brown people, people with disabilities, and other underrepresented groups on agency governing boards.
- When major transit capacity expansion projects are built in your community, implement them in places where the most people will benefit, particularly low-income communities and communities of color.



### State policy recommendations

- Implement frameworks for the distribution of state transportation funds based on objective criteria aimed at increasing accessibility and affordability, reducing congestion, improving air quality, and reducing fatalities and serious injuries on our roadways. Establish performance metrics for those criteria; track and report outcomes.
- Shift flexible federal funding to the maximum extent possible to support public transit.
- Pursue land use policies that encourage equitable transit-oriented development without displacement near existing and planned transit routes.
- Ramp up investment in pedestrian safety along major transit routes on state roads.
- Eliminate red tape for converting right-of-way on state roads to transit-only lanes.
- Give rural mobility providers multiyear funding estimates to enable them to conduct strategic service planning.

### Federal policy recommendations

- Launch a major new initiative to fund the expansion operations of fixed-route bus, rail, and ADA paratransit services in urban and rural areas.
- Achieve funding parity between the highway program and the transit program.
- Refocus the federal highway program to prioritize road maintenance over expansion and induce state DOTs to improve pedestrian and bike connections to transit.
- Significantly enlarge transit capital grant programs that prioritize maintenance and accessibility, as well as upgrades and expansions that benefit the most riders.
- Make it easier for small towns and rural areas to use federal transit funding by reducing the required local match for operations funding to 20 percent (from 50 percent).
- Streamline federal funding to small towns and rural areas by removing barriers that prevent pooling multiple funding sources to provide more-efficient transit service.
- Either expand and promote the joint procurement clearinghouse created by the FAST Act or authorize the General Services Administration to start a transit schedule so all transit agencies can procure directly from GSA.





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- **Pineros y Campesinos Unidos del Noroeste (PCUN)**
- **Minneapolis Federation of Teachers**
- **SEIU Local 26**
- **Pitt Graduate Workers**

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## **ABOUT ALLIANCE FOR A JUST SOCIETY**

Alliance for a Just Society (AJS) is a national center for innovative organizing and strategy based in Seattle, Washington. We build powerful organizations and communities. We fight for racial, social, and economic justice.

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