

National Campaign for Transit Justice

A project of Alliance for a Just Society

2026 Transit Equity Day: Transit Moves Democracy

On Rosa Parks's Birthday, A Bench to Sit On

Goals

- Mobilize volunteers to highlight the lack of seating/facilities for transit users
- Connect bench building volunteers to your organization's campaigns, priorities, and larger movement work
- Leverage this opportunity to build business relationships (sponsor a bench)

Background

Public transit is essential to communities and our democracy. And to strengthen both, we're kicking off an initiative to involve communities and businesses in building out vital transit infrastructure.

Public transportation in communities, small and large, is an integral part of participating in our democracy. It gets us to the polls, but as importantly, it connects us to civic organizations, public events, lectures, schools, and libraries. These connections are critical to being a fully engaged citizen. But in too many places, basic transit infrastructure, like benches at bus stops, simply does not exist.

Why build benches on Transit Equity Day?

Because it is the following riders who are most often left without a bench or a shelter:

- **Communities of color:** Decades of racist transit and urban planning have left many communities of color with underfunded bus systems and fewer amenities. Highways were often routed through minority neighborhoods, while bus routes and amenities in wealthier, predominantly white neighborhoods were prioritized.
- **Low-income riders:** Bus stops in low-income neighborhoods are less likely to have seating or shelters. Riders from low-income neighborhoods depend on the bus while at the same time experiencing longer wait times and less reliable service.
- **People with disabilities:** People with limited mobility disproportionately have difficulty standing for long periods, making the transit system less accessible.
- **Riders in rural areas:** Low density means few riders and limited resources. As a result, bus stops are often at the side of a road with no sidewalks, benches or shelter. How to build a bench for your bus stop

Process

1. **Identify stop(s)** and decide how many benches you want to build. Even just one is enough to get the conversation going!
2. **Build engagement:**
 - **Volunteers:** Put out a call for volunteers to build (and/or fundraise) for the benches.
 - This is a great way to get people engaged in a hands-on activity and conversation, which you can then **leverage into an ask to support your organization's work** by engaging in your campaigns, testifying at public meetings and hearings, sharing their transit story, etc.
 - Don't have a volunteer base build up? Reach out to community and organizational partners and use this as an opportunity to strengthen and engage those relationships. Consider partnering with:
 - Neighborhood and civic groups
 - Staff of supportive local businesses
 - High school and university students
 - **Donors:** Some donors love to see people making a material difference in their community. Ask individual donors to sponsor a bench and your policy and organizing work.
 - **Artists:** Ask local artists, art students, or volunteers to paint or otherwise decorate your bench to make it pleasant and joyful.
 - **Candidates and elected officials:** If you're doing electoral work, invite candidates and elected officials out to the reveal and engage them in conversation about the need for better policy and more funding that prioritized transit.
 - **Local press:** reach out to local outlets and let them know you're doing this. Build up hype around the issue and invite them to the bench building process and/or final reveal.
 - Highlight the other campaigns that your organization is working on and tie this into your other work. **Make the connection explicit!** Talk about:
 - The need for more transit funding, infrastructure, and prioritization
 - The impact of policy on local communities and interest groups
 - The impact of transit on other issues such as affordability, accessibility, housing, labor, the economy, climate, etc.
 - The need for elected officials who care about transit
 - See recent press examples in [Berkeley](#), [Nashville](#), and [Chattanooga](#)

3. **Build small business support:**
 - **Use this as an opportunity to talk to local business owners about transit.**
Ask local businesses near bus stops for their permission to build a bench in front of their business for bus riders. Talk to them about the importance of transit infrastructure and its impact on workers and the local economy.
 - If they say yes, **ask if they would be willing to sponsor the materials for the bench itself.**
 - **Exchange contact information and stay engaged** with that business and continue to build out the relationship. Small business owners are often a powerful voice against improvements to infrastructure, but building these relationships can help you counter that message.
4. **Build the bench:** You can choose to build the bench(es) ahead of time, especially if you are building many of them at once or if you want artists, community members, or students to adorn them with artwork.
 - The Public Bench Project suggests you can build [a bench for \\$30](#), and here is the [description of how to](#) and the [Link to the Plans](#).
 - [Guide for ADA Compliance for Bus Shelters](#).
 - **DOCUMENT THE PROCESS.** Take photos or videos of the various stages of the process to use on social media.
 - Ask volunteers to speak on video about why benches are important.
 - Ask business owners to provide a video or quote about why they want a bench in front of their business.
 - Ask riders how their life would be improved by more seating and bus shelters.
 - Document the joy of the process and encourage others to stay engaged
5. **Bench reveal:** On or around Transit Equity Day, make a big splash. Install the benches, invite community members, leaders, and local business owners. Do a press event or big social media push. Talk to transit riders and passers-by about the new bench and get their reactions. Leverage this momentum to build support for your organization and the issue of transit.
6. **If at any point in this process you have questions, want feedback, or need support, please reach out to NCTJ staff and we can help!**

Alternative Option: Bring Your Own Seating

If your team doesn't have the time or resources for bench building or you're simply low on bandwidth, consider bringing existing seating to a stop to highlight the issues.

1. **Identify stop(s)** for the Transit Equity Day demonstration.
2. **Identify the seating** that you'll bring, whether it's fold-out chairs, kitchen chairs from a local thrift store, a garden bench, etc
3. **Plan to tie this action into one of your larger campaigns.** Whether it's the need for more transit funding, accessibility, frequency, or something else, be prepared with messaging to leverage this action to discuss your existing campaigns and funnel people into your organization.
4. **Contact press and local partners, elected officials, etc,** to invite them to these demonstrations
5. **On February 4th,** volunteers and advocates will bring chairs and other seatings to bus stops and speak with riders about the lack of seating options for riders.
 - a. Document the process
 - b. Post on social media leading up to, during, and after the event
 - c. Tie the this action into your campaign messaging
6. **If at any point in this process you have questions, want feedback, or need support, please reach out to NCTJ staff and we can help!**