



TESTIMONY OF THE
**AMALGAMATED
TRANSIT UNION**

BEFORE THE UNITED STATES SENATE BANKING,
HOUSING AND URBAN AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

“PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION: PRIORITIES AND
CHALLENGES FOR REAUTHORIZATION”

May 19, 2011

Amalgamated Transit Union

AFL-CIO/CLC

5025 Wisconsin Avenue, NW

Washington, DC 20016

202.537.1645

www.atu.org

Summary of ATU Recommendations

ATU SUPPORTS:

- INCREASING TRANSIT FUNDING & ALLOWING LOCAL CONTROL OF FTA FUNDS
 - Passing a robust surface transportation bill that meets the needs of transit dependent individuals;
 - Funding public transportation at \$119 billion over the next six years (a 128% increase above current levels), as called for in President Obama’s surface transportation reauthorization proposal;
 - Providing all transit systems – regardless of urban area population – with flexibility to use their federal funds for operating costs to maintain critical service that keeps people connected to their communities.

- ENHANCING THE SAFETY OF TRANSIT WORKERS AND PASSENGERS
 - Providing FTA the authority to establish and enforce minimum federal safety standards for transit systems, as long as transit labor has a significant role in the creation and adoption of such standards at the local and national level.

- CREATING TRANSIT WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS
 - The *Transportation Job Corps Act of 2011*, which would create a career ladder grant program within the FTA to help existing workers retain jobs while also recruiting and preparing young adults across the nation for jobs in the transit sector.

Introduction

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on behalf of the Amalgamated Transit Union. ATU is the largest labor organization representing public transportation, paratransit, over-the-road, and school bus workers in the United States and Canada, with about 190,000 members in more than 270 locals throughout 46 states and nine provinces.

We are pleased to offer our views on priorities and challenges for the reauthorization of the nation's public transportation programs. My name is Larry Hanley. I am the new International President of the ATU, elected in the fall. I have been involved in the public transportation industry for more than 30 years. Never during that entire time span have I ever witnessed anything close to the challenges that we are facing today.

In 2009, ATU presented to Congress a comprehensive proposal for the reauthorization of *The Safe, Accountable, Flexible, and Efficient Transportation Equity Act - A Legacy for Users* (SAFETEA-LU). It is a ten-point plan designed to ensure that public transportation agencies are equipped to provide Americans with the travel choices they need and to help us reduce our dependence on foreign oil.

Much has changed in our industry since that proposal was released. Therefore, today, I would like to focus on just three issues that are key to the survival of the transit industry and the safety of the riding public.

Transit Crisis

No Ride = No Job

Due to shortages in state and local revenues, U.S. public transit systems are carrying out some of the steepest fare increases and deepest service cuts in recent history. Since the beginning of 2009, approximately 85% of public transit systems have raised fares or cut service, and thousands of workers in the transit industry – a significant percentage of a “green” workforce – have been laid off. Fifty-six percent of transit systems have cut rush hour service, 62% have slashed off-peak service, and 40% report reductions in geographic coverage.

The Chicago Transit Authority has cut 18% of bus service and 9% of rail service while laying off 1,100 people whose lives have been in a free fall ever since. Massive cuts in Atlanta, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Detroit, Pittsburgh and throughout the State of California have been breathtaking. New York City, home to the largest transit network in North

America, has cut routes that have been in existence since the days of the horse and buggy.

In Utah, bus routes in Salt Lake, south Davis, and Tooele counties will be cut or realigned effective August 7th. The Minnesota State Legislature last week slashed \$109 million from Twin Cities bus and rail funding, and the Met Council warns it might eliminate weekend service. Thirty-five percent cuts are pending in Tacoma, while Birmingham and Long Island are operating with patchwork budgets that allow them to function only on a month-to-month basis.

The incredible mass of unemployed Americans includes a substantial number of transit-dependent individuals who can simply no longer get to work because their ride is gone. Generally, when routes get cut, transit systems tend to look toward those with low ridership -- early morning, late night, and weekend service. People who work non-traditional hours, typically minorities who have no other means of transportation, are disproportionately affected.

The single mom who now gets her kids up at 4:30 a.m. to catch two buses in time to get her children to daycare and then herself to work cannot be expected to wait an additional hour for that transfer bus to arrive, standing in the freezing cold with two kids. **The person who cleans offices downtown in the wee hours of the morning should not have to sleep on the cold hard floor in the lobby of the building after finishing her work until the buses start running the next day.** But that is exactly what is happening out there. ATU members nationwide have seen it firsthand.

Some places have totally shut down their transit system, leaving elderly and disabled people scrambling for a way to buy food and get to the doctor. For example, the transit system in Clayton County, Georgia shut down in 2010, stranding 8,500 people, 81% of whom earn less than \$35,000 a year and 65% of whom have no car. **This is a mobility crisis like we have never seen before.**

As Congress debates changes to our nation's surface transportation laws and considers appropriate funding levels to meet the needs of our highway and transit network, it is critical that lawmakers understand the incredible mobility challenges that their constituents are facing every day. However, the voices of poor people – young or old, disabled or able bodied – are traditionally drowned out in this country. While an elderly lady who is out buying groceries in New Jersey may have never met a middle-aged cafeteria worker in Colorado who is desperately trying to get to work, it turns out that these people have at least one common trait: they both rely on the bus to survive. **Throughout America, people are pleading with their elected officials to stop the transit cuts and fare increases.** Attached to our testimony is a document entitled

“Stranded Voices,” a compilation of poignant quotes from transit-dependent individuals all across the country who have lost their ability to get around town due to transit cuts.

People First

Under current law, the majority of transit systems in the U.S. may not use their federal transit funds to keep service on the street. Only systems located in urbanized areas less than 200,000 in population may use their federal transit funds for operating assistance. All other areas may use their funds only for capital projects. With state and local funds scarce or nonexistent, many systems are in the odd situation of having **many brand-new buses purchased with federal funds, but no resources to place those vehicles into service.** Some communities are using their federal transit funds to build rail systems that will not be completed for many years while slashing vital bus service at the same time.

Where are our priorities? Certainly this cannot be part of our nation’s transportation agenda! Before we commit resources to whisk people from city to city on slick high speed rail trains, we need to first get them back to work downtown and in suburban and rural locations via bus, subway, or light rail.

Operating Assistance is Needed

The federal government has a role to play in ensuring that all individuals – irrespective of income level – have access to safe, affordable, convenient and accessible public transportation, regardless of the day of the week or what time they ride the bus. During the 111th Congress, Senator Sherrod Brown introduced legislation (S. 3189) that would provide for increased flexibility in the use of federal transit funds by allowing transit systems of all sizes to use a percentage of their formula funds to maintain critical service. That bill also included a sensible provision which would allow transit systems in areas above 200,000 in population to use their federal transit formula funds for operations if they are operating less than 100 buses during peak service hours.

President’s Transit Proposal Would Put Americans Back to Work

President Obama’s Budget – which calls for nearly doubling the size of the federal transit program in FY 2012 – as well as the Administration’s proposal for the reauthorization of the federal surface transportation bill call for “targeted and temporary” transit operating assistance. The President recognizes that we can bring our cities back to life by substantially increasing transit funding and giving transit systems the flexibility to use their scarce funds as they see fit. We commend President Obama for his leadership in getting critical service back on the street, recognizing the role that transit can play in **reducing our dependence on foreign oil, and putting our nation on a path to economic security.**

In addition to a slight variation on the Administration's temporary operating assistance proposal which is tied to the unemployment rate, **ATU supports legislation that would "trigger" the ability to use Section 5307 funds for operating based on the cost of fuel.** If the price at the pump spikes (as we are seeing today), transit systems which feel the pinch at least as much as the owners of private automobiles should have the flexibility to put more buses on the street rather than slashing service and turning away customers who are desperate to avoid spending their entire paychecks on fuel.

Five dollars per gallon gas is coming, whether it is this summer or some time in the near future. Just weeks after the leader of the world's most feared terrorist network was finally brought to justice, it has never been more apparent that dealing with our nation's so-called oil addiction is critical to our national defense. **If we are serious about reducing our dependence on foreign oil from terrorist-sponsoring states, public transportation systems must play a central role.** They cannot do so without more flexibility.

Bipartisan Issue

It is important to note that this is not an issue that pits rural areas against the urban centers. Last summer, the U.S. Census Bureau published its proposed criteria for defining urban areas based on the results of the 2010 Decennial Census. This document included a list of small urbanized areas that are forecast to become parts of adjoining or new large urbanized areas (see appendix). If the current rules are not changed, **transit systems in these areas will soon lose their ability to use Federal Transit Administration (FTA) funds for operating assistance** because their population will be considered to be greater than 200,000. Like the areas mentioned above, **service cuts and fare increases will soon follow.**

ATU Supports:

- Passing a robust surface transportation bill that meets the needs of transit dependent individuals;
- Funding public transportation at \$119 billion over the next six years (a 128% increase above current levels), as called for in President Obama's surface transportation reauthorization proposal;
- Providing all transit systems – regardless of urban area population – with flexibility to use their federal funds for operating costs to maintain critical service that keeps people connected to their communities.

Public Transit Safety

Millions of times each day, someone's spouse, child, grandparent or friend gets on a bus or train and arrives at their destination safely due to the dedication and professionalism of the hundreds of thousands of transit workers in this country. While more than 30,000 people are killed on America's highways each year, the number of annual customer fatalities on public transportation can usually be counted on one hand. Even under the most stressful circumstances, the majority of our members perform their jobs in a safe, efficient manner, compiling a safety record that we are quite proud of.

Recently, however, we have started to see some cracks in the system, and the federal government has taken notice. In June of 2009, a Washington Metro crash killed nine people and injured 80 others when two trains collided. Metro officials later called train driver Jeanice McMillan (Local 689) a hero. McMillan was killed when the train she was driving struck one that was standing still. She saved lives by hitting the emergency brake and slowing the train before the fatal crash. In 2007, two track workers in New York City tragically died in separate incidents. And hundreds of soot-covered Blue Line riders escaped through a smoke-filled subway tunnel in 2006 after a packed Chicago Transit Authority rush-hour train derailed, sparking a fire near a busy downtown stop.

Following this string of serious accidents across the United States, the Obama Administration wisely proposed to allow FTA to impose broad safety standards for transit systems. Secretary LaHood called on Congress to pass the Administration's *Public Transportation Safety Program Act* to ensure a high and standard level of safety across all rail transit systems. Since 1965, the federal government has been prohibited from imposing broad safety standards in rail. The states have been responsible for oversight of rail safety, and in almost every case, their programs are underfunded, understaffed, and ineffective. In fact, transit systems are not even required to implement recommendations made by state safety oversight panels.

Former Chairman Dodd introduced legislation last year (S. 3638) which built off of the Administration's proposal. That bill directs the Secretary to create a national public transportation safety plan to improve the safety of all public transportation systems that receive federal assistance. It also requires the Secretary to establish a public transportation safety certification training program for federal and state employees, or other designated personnel, who conduct safety audits and examinations of public transportation systems, as well as employees of public transportation agencies responsible for safety oversight. In addition, the bill requires each state or local government, or other public transportation system operator that receives federal assistance to certify that it has established an agency safety plan meeting certain minimum criteria.

Public transportation safety plans would be approved by the agency's board of directors, and reviewed and updated annually. ATU supports this important provision **as long as such safety plans are required to be developed in a partnership with organized labor**. Transit workers can provide invaluable information on day to day operations. They know better than anyone the details of routes, schedules, technology, etc. For example, following the horrible crash in Washington, D.C., Metro immediately adopted ATU Local 689's recommendation to move certain rail cars that were not "crash-worthy" to the middle of the train. In fact, over the years, ATU has been the leader on transit safety issues, from requiring closed vestibules for streetcars in the 1890's to the campaign for exact fare in the sixties, to the present.

Only One Piece of the Puzzle

While regulation is important, without increased funding to modernize transit equipment, new laws will have little impact. Due to inadequate funding, the systems are rapidly aging. Tracks break down and computerized signals wear out, putting the safety of workers and riders in jeopardy.

Moreover, in order to increase safety, there is a dire need to address issues related to worker training and retention. Evidence suggests that some recent accidents could have been prevented if transit systems had programs in place to enhance communications between experienced, senior level workers in safety-sensitive positions (who are getting ready to retire) and new hires. More than 40% of transit technicians are eligible to retire within the next 5-10 years (see below). In addition, split shifts and forced overtime can cause fatigue, a serious, growing problem throughout the U.S. transit industry, especially in light of the recent wave of layoffs.

ATU Supports:

- Providing FTA the authority to establish and enforce minimum federal safety standards for transit systems, as long as transit labor has a significant role in the creation and adoption of such standards at the local and national level.

Transit Workforce Development

The public transportation industry, like many service-based sectors in the United States, will be faced with major challenges in the near future. A large percentage of the transit workforce – both blue and white collar – will be retiring within the next few years. There is no pipeline of replacements on the horizon because the industry has a negative public image that hampers its ability to attract, recruit, and retain quality employees. And, for the existing workforce, new technology is rapidly changing the way transit agencies function, affecting every executive director, mid-level manager, bus driver and mechanic alike. Yet, relatively few programs exist to provide training to workers so that they can perform their jobs adequately, move up the career ladder, and help the nation's transit agencies operate at maximum efficiency.

Public Transportation Industry Challenges

The transit agency workforce has several unique characteristics which impact workforce development:

- A rapidly aging workforce – the majority of present day transit systems went public in the 1960s and 1970s as a result of the establishment of the federal transit program. Many workers who began their careers more than 30 years ago are retiring.
- It is in constant contact with the public, and about 75% of employees – operators and maintenance staff – are responsible for high standards of efficiency and public safety.
- Approximately 90% of the workforce is unionized.
- Opportunities for advancement are generally limited.
- The industry has suffered from a poor or uncomplimentary image in the past, which hampers recruiting efforts.
- Transit agencies provide a schedule-driven customer service. As a result, the majority of the transit workforce – transit equipment operators – functions in a rule-bound, seniority-based environment with little flexibility. This type of workplace has its drawbacks for recruiting younger employees.
- At the highest levels, the transit industry has issues with diversity.

- The industry has institutional barriers to workforce competitiveness and innovation, i.e., noncompetitive compensation practices, inadequate career development and succession planning, lack of workplace flexibility, and failure to systematically integrate human resources considerations into overall business planning.

According to an industry survey, driver recruitment and retention continues to be the greatest challenge for 63% of transit systems. Finding experienced labor trails only funding costs and concerns as transit agencies' top concern.¹

The Impact of New Technology and Need for Training

New technology is having a dramatic impact on every aspect of the industry, from electronic fare collection, to alternative fuel vehicles, to new communications devices that will forever alter the way people travel. Much of the new technology has been spurred by record funding from the federal government. Since the enactment of TEA 21 in 1998, transit systems have been fortunate to participate in many ribbon cutting ceremonies celebrating the opening of new bus depots and rail lines. Without question, the industry has an excellent record investing in rolling stock.

Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of our ability to invest in so-called “human capital” – the people who serve as the backbone of any successful transit system. Bus and train operators serve as the public face of the organization on the street. In this post-9/11 world, they also protect passengers and other community members with their eyes and ears. Maintenance workers and others working behind the scenes – both blue and white collar employees – ensure that the system continues to operate in a cost effective, time efficient manner. Yet, funding for training and career ladder programs within the transit industry is virtually nonexistent.

With the imminent retirement of a huge percentage of the workforce, the need for training is even greater in order to avoid the loss of institutional knowledge.

Current Law Ignored

Under 49 USC § 5322(a), the Secretary is authorized to make grants for programs that address human resource needs as they apply to public transportation activities. A program may include an employment training program; an outreach program to increase minority and female employment in public transportation activities; research on public transportation personnel and training needs; and training and assistance for minority

¹*Metro Magazine* 2008 Fact Book, November 2007.

business opportunities. This long-standing provision of federal law has been ignored by the industry and the FTA.

Moreover, under Section 5322 (b), FTA is authorized to make grants to states, local governmental authorities, and operators of public transportation systems to provide fellowships to train personnel employed in managerial, technical, and professional positions in the public transportation field. Remarkably, this program has been funded at **\$0 throughout the life of SAFETEA-LU, and no program of significance came about as a result of this section under TEA 21.**

The Transportation Job Corps Act

The ATU supports the *Transportation Job Corps Act of 2011* (H.R. 929, Nadler) groundbreaking legislation that would finally address the training needs of the public transportation industry and serve to provide disconnected youth outside the industry with an incentive to pursue careers in transit.

The bill – which is also **endorsed by the American Public Transportation Association** – would rewrite Section 5322 and authorize the creation of ten new regional Joint Workforce Development Councils – one for each FTA region. The councils, made up of equal numbers of labor and management representatives, would be responsible for setting up a process to offer workforce development programs to transit agencies in each of the FTA zones.

The primary purpose of this program would be to identify skills gaps in transit agency maintenance departments and to develop programs to train maintenance employees on a regional basis, rather than one agency at a time. The councils would also develop programs – outside of the traditional collective bargaining environment – to address the recruitment and retention of white and blue collar workers as well as programs to deal with *Family Medical Leave Act* (FMLA) issues, including absenteeism, ergonomics, “well care” programs, child care and other employment-linked services, and other matters.

Furthermore, the bill would create new programs aimed at enhancing the transit workforce by initiating and maintaining transit worker retention programs, including grants for career ladder programs, workforce diversity grants, and “Transit Youth Opportunity Grants.”

ATU Supports:

- The *Transportation Job Corps Act of 2011*, which would create a career ladder grant program within the FTA to help existing workers retain jobs while also recruiting and preparing young adults across the nation for jobs in the transit sector.

Conclusion

ATU's recommendations for improving and reforming the nation's surface transportation programs may be summed up in just one word: **people**.

Congress should recognize that we cannot get our economy back on track if millions of people do not have a ride to work. Federal assistance is needed to help our nation's transit systems provide for the mobility needs of the 15 million daily U.S. transit riders. **We can no longer leave anyone behind.**

Similarly, protecting the lives of our citizens when they rely on the bus or train to visit family, friends, and other destinations is a central function of our federal government.

Finally, while providing funding for major transit capital investments is critical, we must also deal with the major "human capital" issues which threaten to paralyze public transportation systems throughout the United States.

ATU looks forward to working with this committee on these critical issues during the surface transportation bill reauthorization process.

Thank you for your consideration of our views.

ATTACHMENTS

DISAPPEARING SMALL-URBANIZED AREAS FORECAST TO BECOME PARTS OF ADJOINING OR NEW LARGE- URBANIZED AREAS

**(Will lose ability to use FTA funds for operating assistance because
population going above 200,000)**

AZ	Avondale	NC	Concord
CA	Camarillo		Gastonia
	Fairfield		High Point
	Hemet	NH	Dover-Rochester
	Livermore		Manchester
	Lodi		Nashua
	Manteca		Portsmouth
	Petaluma	NJ	Highstown
	Salinas		Vineland
	Santa Barbara		Wildwood-North
	Santa Clarita		Wildwood-Cape May
	Santa Cruz	OH	Lorian-Elyria
	Simi Valley		Middletown
	Turlock		Springfield
	Vacaville	OK	Norman
	Vallejo	PA	Lebanon
	Watsonville		Monessen
CO	Boulder		Pottstown
	Lafayette		Union-Connellsville
	Louisville		York
CT	Danbury	PR	Arecibo
	Norwich-New London		Fajardo
	Waterbury		Barceloneta-Bajadero
FL	Brookville		Guayama
	Fort Walton Beach		Juana-Diaz
	Kissimmee		Mayaguez
	Lady Lake		Ponce
	Lakeland		San German
	Leesburg-Eustis		Sabana Grande
	North Punta Gorda		Yauco
	Ocala	SC	Mauldin-Simpsonville
	Titusville		Rock Hill
	Vero Beach		Spartanburg
	Sebastian	TN	Johnson City

	Winter Haven		Kingsport
GA	Gainesville		Murfreesboro
	Macon	TX	Beaumont
	Warner Robins		Galveston
HI	Kailua		Harlingen
ID	Coeur d' Alene		McKinney
	Nampa		Port Arthur
	Alton		Texas City
IN	Anderson		The Woodlands
	Elkhart	WA	Bremerton
MA	Leominster-Fitchburg		Marysville
	New Bedford	WI	Appleton
MD	Aberdeen		Beloit
	St Charles		Kenosha
MI	Port Huron		Oshkosh
	South Lyon-Howell-Brighton		Racine
MO	Lee's Summit	WV	Charleston
			Huntington



STRANDED VOICES

TRANSIT RIDERS SPEAK OUT ABOUT
AMERICA'S MOBILITY CRISIS



Executive Summary

Due to shortages in state and local revenues, U.S. public transit systems are carrying out some of the steepest fare increases and deepest service cuts in recent history. Since the beginning of 2009, approximately 85% of public transit systems have raised fares or cut service, and thousands of workers in the transit industry – a significant percentage of a “green” workforce – have been laid off. Fifty-six percent of transit systems have cut rush hour service, 62% have slashed off-peak service, and 40% report reductions in geographic coverage.¹

The Chicago Transit Authority has cut 18% of bus service and 9% of rail service while laying off 1,100 people whose lives have been in a free fall ever since. Massive cuts in Atlanta, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Detroit, and throughout the State of California have been breathtaking. New York City, home to the largest transit network in North America, has cut routes that have been in existence since the days of the horse and buggy. Thirty-five percent cuts are pending in Pittsburgh and Tacoma, while Birmingham is on the verge of cutting bus service in half.

But *Stranded Voices* is not about percentages or even buses or trains. It’s about people. The incredible mass of unemployed Americans includes a substantial number of transit-dependent individuals who simply can no longer get to work because their ride is gone. Generally, when routes get cut, transit systems tend to look towards those with low ridership -- early morning, late night, and weekend service. People who work non-traditional hours, typically minorities who have no other means of transportation, are disproportionately affected. The single mom who now gets her kids up at 4:30 a.m. to catch two buses in time to get her children to daycare and then herself to work cannot be expected to wait an additional hour for that transfer bus to arrive, standing in the freezing cold with two kids. **The person who cleans offices downtown in the wee hours of the morning should not have to sleep on the cold hard floor in the lobby of the building after finishing her work until the buses start running the next day.** But that is exactly what is happening out there. Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) members nationwide have seen it firsthand. Some places have totally shut down their transit system, leaving elderly and disabled people scrambling for a way to buy food and get to the doctor. This is a mobility crisis.

¹ *Impacts of the Recession on Public Transportation Agencies*. Survey Results, March 2010. (American Public Transportation Association).

As Congress debates changes to our nation’s surface transportation laws and considers appropriate funding levels to meet the needs of our highway and transit network, it is critical that lawmakers understand the incredible mobility challenges that their constituents are facing every day. However, the voices of poor people – young or old, disabled or able bodied – are traditionally drowned out in this country. While an elderly lady who is out buying groceries in New Jersey may have never met a cafeteria worker in Colorado who is desperately trying to get to work, it turns out that these people have at least one common trait: they both rely on the bus to survive. All across America, people are pleading with their elected officials to stop the transit cuts and fare increases. Some are actually calling on a higher authority. **However, their prayers are unfortunately falling on deaf ears. ATU is proud to provide these individuals with a voice so that they can speak as one.**

“To the Marysville City Council: Please do not take our bus service away from us. I am very disturbed by this. I am mobility-impaired and must use either my electric scooter or my four-wheel walker. I am unable to put either in my car. I am on oxygen 24 hours a day, seven days a week. I have many doctor appointments and I need the bus...My daughter lives with me, but she does not drive. She works at Goodwill Industries on 26th Street in Port Huron Township, and she could not get there without the bus. She has been unable to find a job that pays at least minimum wage for the past three years. She gets paid piecework and only averages about \$8 to \$10 per day, so she can’t afford cab fare. She does my grocery shopping by taking the bus.”

– Gloria Rottiers, Marysville, MI²

When the Marysville City Council starts budget talks in March, the Blue Water Area Transit system’s Dial-a-Ride program is expected to be on the chopping block. About \$150,000 a year is dedicated to the program, and some council members are questioning how long the general fund can sustain the cost. As fixed route buses don’t run in Marysville, Dial-a-Ride is the only public transportation option for city residents who do not drive.

² *Marysville City Council cannot end bus service*. Times Herald, January 16, 2011.

"I am a teenager with autism. I use CARTA to go to places like the Children's Museum, the library, the grocery store, etc. Because of my autism, I have a pass which allows me to travel at a reduced rate. Recently, CARTA increased fares, cut some routes and discontinued service after 8 p.m. Now there are places I cannot go. I understand that cuts had to be made for financial reasons. How come there are free trolley rides for tourists and downtown shoppers when there is a shortage of money? They have other ways of getting around the city, but I don't. Are tourists and shoppers just more important than me?"

– Jennifer Cook, Charleston, SC ³

In the fall of 2010, the Charleston Area Regional Transportation Authority eliminated its CARTA@Night service, ending the ability of transit dependent people to get to overnight shifts. Service on 20 routes was reduced and fares were raised 16 percent.

"I need to get to work early. I could lose my job."

– Micki Duffy, Chandler, AZ

With no car and a complex itinerary of bus transfers, Duffy is worried that cuts to early-morning service could make it impossible for her to get to work by 7:30 a.m. She negotiated the start time with her boss because of the bus schedules. The state took all cities' Local Transportation Assistance Funds that had been contributing about \$1 million a year to Chandler's mass-transit system.⁴

"I walk 'cause I need a job."

– Orinda Maten, Baton Rouge, LA

Sometimes Maten is lucky and draws a shift at the Walmart store that ends early enough to allow her to catch a bus home at night. On those nights when she works late, though, she often ends her workday with a two-mile walk back home.⁵ Current recommendations in Baton Rouge include ending weekend and holiday bus service and eliminating two routes. Regular bus fares would be raised from \$1.75 to \$2, while discount fares for students, seniors and disabled residents who do not require door-to-door service would be raised from 35 cents to \$1. Disabled transit users who currently pay \$1.75 for door-to-door, on-demand transit services would see rates more than double, to \$4 per trip.



"I am a regular bus rider. With the cut in buses, I will not be able to go to church on Sunday or work on the weekends. It seems like the Port Authority is going to be a weekday bus company. It is being very inconsiderate of those who need to use it on the weekend. Maybe those of us who need to use the bus on the weekend should start our own bus company."⁶

– Fred Vella, Baldwin Borough, PA

The federal rejection of Pennsylvania's plan to toll I-80 translated into a \$27 million cut to the Port Authority for the current year. On January 12, the Port Authority of Allegheny County board voted to reduce bus service by 15 percent on March 27, 2011. Twenty-nine routes will be eliminated, and there will be weekday cuts on 47 other routes, while 180 employees will be laid off and 270 positions will be eliminated. The Harmar bus garage will close. It will mean more crowded buses and more commuters driving their own cars on already crowded roads. Much larger cuts loom if the legislature does not act soon.

³ *Bus Cuts.* The Post and Courier, November 28, 2010.

⁴ *Bus riders plead for fewer service cuts.* The Arizona Republic, May 5, 2010.

⁵ *City bus riders' pleas heard.* The Advocate, November 22, 2009.

⁶ *The Port Authority is Moving us Backward.* Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, August 23, 2010.

"That's hard on people who have to go to work."

– Frances Pulichino, Paterson, NJ

Pulichino, 92 years old and a lifelong resident of the city says New Jersey Transit buses she takes to doctor's appointments and to do her shopping don't arrive as frequently as they once did, and she worries how cuts to local bus service will affect the city.⁷ In May of 2010, New Jersey Transit instituted fare hikes of 25 percent for train and interstate bus riders and 10 percent for light rail and local bus riders, and took 31 trains out of service. Discounts for round trips outside of peak riding hours also were eliminated, leading to increases of up to 64 percent for some rail commuters.

"I do not have the money for cabs. It would cost me \$20 to go from Mariners Harbor to the ferry. Want to send me a limo?"

– Eleanor Abrams, wheelchair user, Staten Island, NY



"Waiting for the bus on a Sunday? Bundle up, it's going to be a while. Weekend service has been slashed nationwide."

⁷ *Patersonians rate city's quality of life.* Herald News, May 6, 2010.

"I take this as an attack on my family. If the S42 is taken away, I'm going to have to walk off the hill, leave earlier or fight for space on the bus. It's crowded enough during rush hour. I don't think they get that. Imagine an already-packed bus and sticking 200 more people on, the kind of mayhem that's going to cause. That's going to turn ugly quickly."

– Chris Waymer, Staten Island

"The X1's so crowded, the bus driver stands!"

– Anonymous rider.⁸

In June of 2010, the New York Metropolitan Transportation Authority put in place the most drastic transit cuts to hit the city in more than 30 years. Staten Islanders reliant on already sparse public transportation now have even fewer buses running on some routes - if those routes are even being served. Both local and express bus riders were hit hard by the service cuts. Some communities are no longer served on weekends or at night, leaving riders waiting longer to file onto even more-crowded buses.

"I don't care who's at fault. They shouldn't cut the buses. "I'm already getting up two hours early to be somewhere that's 15 minutes away by car."

– Cherise Hinton, Long Island, NY.

⁸ *Island to MTA: No more cuts!* Staten Island Advance, March 3, 2010.

"I think they should get out there and try it and see how it feels, especially when it's cold outside."⁹

– Mary Walker, Long Island, NY.

Mary Walker can't drive because she has glaucoma and rides on several bus lines each week to get to her home-health-aide work sites.

New York Metropolitan Transportation Authority officials said that they may have to drastically reduce LI Bus service this spring unless Nassau County fulfills its obligation to adequately fund its bus system. The MTA board says bus service may be cut by more than half.



"They took the line out of the middle of the bus. Now they've eliminated the bus."

– The Rev. Lawton Higgs Sr.,
Birmingham, AL

The Reverend was speaking at a rally to coincide with the 55th anniversary of Rosa Park's arrest in Montgomery, an act that spurred the Montgomery Bus Boycott, a pivotal event in the civil rights movement. He pastors to a very large congregation of homeless people who **"want to contribute to a healthy Birmingham but can't get a ride to do it."**

⁹ *LI Bus riders feel left behind; Say they are not interested in agency's fiscal woes; Drastic service cuts should be last resort, many say.* Newsday, February 19, 2011.

"Please let us keep our transit!" Let's get rid of the old stumbling blocks and put people up there who are real."¹⁰

– Linda Williams, Birmingham, AL

Linda relies on the MAX buses, while her son takes the MAX paratransit service for the disabled.

Last year, the Birmingham-Jefferson County Transit Authority told city officials it needed more than \$10 million, or about \$900,000 a month, from the city to continue bus and paratransit services. But the city budgeted only about half that amount, and transit officials say they will have to cut half the bus routes in the city of Birmingham and lay off bus drivers. Funding runs out in March.

"I really don't want to quit this job. It's the only thing helping me right now... I've been taking a taxicab, but that costs me an arm and a leg. I don't want to be out on the streets. My life is depending on transportation."¹¹

– Robert Sigala, Colorado Springs, CO

Sigala doesn't drive and has trouble walking. He got to his job through Metro Mobility, the para-transit service of Mountain Metropolitan Transit, but service has been cut. Now, he fears ending up on the streets. His income at a cafeteria barely covers his rent and phone bill, and whatever extra he has is going to a taxi.

"I'm not healthy enough. I can't." That'd kill me."

– Nancy Eastman, Spokane, WA

Eastman is 62 and walks with a cane. She commutes between Cheney and Spokane and gets on the bus a little after 7 a.m. at a stop that is slated for elimination. She says she cannot walk to another stop if the service was cut off.¹²

¹⁰ *Bus riders and activists plead: 'Please let us keep our transit' Long-term bus funding sought.* Birmingham News, December 2, 2010.

¹¹ *Workers who take bus struggle to keep jobs.* The Gazette, January 6, 2010.

¹² *Proposed STA changes have Cheney riders concerned.* Cheney Free Press, March 18, 2010.



Eight Spokane-area bus routes would be cut along with 18 driver positions under the latest version of a money-saving proposal by the Spokane Transit Authority. The proposed cuts amount to 7 percent of the agency's operating costs and would go into effect in September 2011. The proposal follows a smaller 3 percent cut last September. Another 7 percent cut is expected in 2012.

"Our bus service is unfortunately being cut back, which is a shame, as the church benefits from elders' stories and experiences. Seniors have a lot to offer."

– Alice Litton, 80, Bellingham, WA¹³

Unfortunately, older church members who are isolated or no longer drive have been left without transportation options since the cuts in Bellingham.

"Those in our community, including me, who use or need transit can't come and go when we want. I will no longer be able to travel to my shopping mall on the weekend because both bus lines servicing the mall are being cut. I will have to limit my entertainment and community meetings not to go past 8 p.m. because there will be no bus or light-rail service after 9 p.m."

– Barbara Stanton, Sacramento, CA¹⁴

¹³ *Bellingham woman enjoys community, search for faith, at Unitarian Fellowship.* The Bellingham Herald, November 22, 2010.

¹⁴ *Transit crunch also a livability crisis.* Sacramento Bee, June 1, 2010.

Sacramento Regional Transit has lost one-third of its funding since 2007 - \$50 million - and in 2010 cut 28 weekday routes and 13 weekend routes. Paratransit is facing a 30 percent cut to its services for riders with disabilities.

"People need these buses... we deserve these buses!"

– Vince Miller, Accomack, MD

Miller, a stroke victim told the local Board of Supervisors they "did the wrong thing" by allowing bus service to the northern end of the county to stop. He has missed eight months of school and seven months attending a program for people with brain injuries because of the cessation of the bus route.¹⁵

"I'm just going to have to ride my bike everywhere."¹⁶

– Larry Wilber, Castle Rock.

"It's horrible. I use it for work. I use it for everything I do. It's my only form of transportation."

– Juliet Hudson, Castle Rock, CO

Budget cuts have eliminated The Clean Air Transit Company leaving Hudson and others searching for alternative ways to get around town. Service was cancelled at the end of 2010. Now Castle Rock is sponsoring a service through a local taxi company for those who are transit-dependent, paying a maximum of \$10 per trip for those who qualify. But with a limited budget, the town can pay for only 36 trips a week, so if you are number 37 in line, you are out of luck.

¹⁵ *County urged to resume transit service.* Daily Times, December 30, 2010.

¹⁶ *Castle Rock parks shuttle rides.* The Denver Post, December 30, 2010.

“I may stay with friends in Midtown. I have to move because I have to keep my job. I work in Buckhead in a law office and I take the bus from Clayton to the MARTA train to get there. It’s not like I have a choice.”

– Inya-Agha, Clayton County, GA¹⁷

*The transit system in Clayton County **shut down in 2010**, stranding 8,500 people, 81% of whom earn less than \$35,000 a year and 65% of whom have no car. Clayton is now the only core metro Atlanta county without public transportation.*



Rows of buses and vans in Cincinnati bought with federal dollars sit idle as SORTA gets set to slash service for the second time since 2009, when the agency had its first ever layoffs.

People First

Under current law, the majority of transit systems in the U.S. may not use their federal transit funds to keep service on the street. They may only use their money to buy buses, trains, and other equipment. With state and local funds scarce or nonexistent, many systems are in the odd situation of having many brand new buses purchased with federal funds, but no resources to place those vehicles into service. Other communities are using

¹⁷ *Wheels in motion to drop C-Tran; Clayton County could save \$8 million without buses, but strand 8,500.* The Atlanta Journal-Constitution, March 13, 2010.

their federal transit funds to build rail systems that will not be completed for many years while slashing vital bus service at the same time.

Where are our priorities? Certainly this cannot be part of our nation’s transportation agenda! Before we commit resources to whisk people from city to city on slick high speed rail trains, we need to first get them back to work downtown and in suburban and rural locations via bus, subway, or light rail.

The federal government has a role to play in ensuring that all individuals – regardless of income level – have



The CDTA in Albany, NY purchased 20 buses through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act in July 2010. The buses have been sitting in the garage since delivery. ATU members drive them up and down the highways daily to keep the fluids running for warranty reasons.

access to safe, affordable, convenient and accessible public transportation, no matter what time of day they ride the bus. Representative Russ Carnahan (D-MO) and Senator Sherrod Brown (D-OH) have introduced sensible legislation that would provide for increased flexibility in the use of federal transit funds by allowing transit systems of all sizes to use a percentage of their formula funds to maintain critical service. Similarly, President Obama's Fiscal Year 2012 Budget as well as the Administration's proposal for the reauthorization of the federal surface transportation bill call for "targeted and temporary" transit operating assistance.

ATU echoes the nation's *Stranded Voices* in calling on Congress to pass legislation that would allow transit systems to keep buses rolling during these extremely difficult economic times so that people may continue to live their lives and contribute to society in a meaningful way.

On behalf of the nation's *Stranded Voices*, ATU calls on Congress to lead the effort to address the national mobility crisis by:

- Passing a robust surface transportation bill that meets the needs of transit- dependent individuals;
- Funding public transportation at \$119 billion over the next six years (a 128% increase above current levels), as called for in President Obama's surface transportation reauthorization proposal;
- Providing all transit systems – regardless of urban area population – with flexibility to use their federal funds for operating costs to maintain critical service that keeps people connected to their communities.



For more information, contact Jeff Rosenberg in the ATU Government Affairs Department at (202) 537-1645 or jrosenberg@atu.org