

## Defend & Expand Public Services

The Bus Riders Union believes that public transit is essential for working class women to participate in the social, economic, and political life of the region. The Universal Declaration of

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*Today we still struggle to defend and expand public services as a part of our larger struggle against capitalism and for the rights of our communities and the entire working class.*

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Human Rights guarantees our right to “equal access to public services” in order to fully participate in our societies (United Nations). Without public transit, women do not have equal access to the basic means of survival such as work, healthcare, education, and family contact. The experiences shared by women in the Women in Transit Project demonstrate the importance of public transit in women’s lives. Women’s experiences also expose the devastating effects of privatization on the public transit system. To ensure women the right to be healthy, independent, and active members of society, we need an expanded women-centred public transit system.

### Transit is a Public Service

#### The Emergence of Public Services

Public services were won through an upsurge in working class militancy after the Second World

War. Demands on the state made by working class people for a certain minimal standard of living were part of a larger struggle to resist the advances of capitalism and sustain workers, their families, and their communities. Workers demanded from the state the provision of a social wage. Public services like healthcare, education and transit constitute this social wage that helps working class people attain a basic standard of living. By ensuring some degree of access to services that we would be unable to afford through wages alone (Nasser), public services redistribute wealth to working class communities. In the context of a rapidly growing gap between the rich and the poor, public services are an essential resource for our working class communities.

Despite the history of struggle, public services are also responsive to the needs of private business. Pressure for public services also came from private business for the state to provide services in sectors where profits could not be made but the services were nevertheless crucial to developing industry and trade (Petras & Veltmeyer). Public services subsidize private business by supplementing inadequate wages and providing and maintaining the urban infrastructure necessary for production (Petras & Veltmeyer).

State-run services are necessary to sustain a healthy and productive workforce and also constitute an essential component of building and sustaining the private sector. Public services create a small degree of social equality not achievable through the market. Yet overall public services are



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largely unsuccessful in re-distributing wealth between the rich and the working poor. Public services for the most part are not designed to address the roots of economic and social inequalities; as is evident in the massive disparities along class, race, and gender lines in Canada. However, advances in the provision of a social wage due to pressure from working class struggles did provide some degree of protection to working people from the worst effects of capitalism (Nasser). Today we still struggle to defend and expand public services as a part of our larger struggle against capitalism and for the rights of our communities and the entire working class.

## The Re-Emergence of Privatization

Under neoliberalism, multinational corporations in search of new markets and new opportunities for profit are once again taking over essential services like transit, education and healthcare.

Privatization shifts the production of goods and the provision of services to the private sector. Privatization can either be 'complete', the sale of state owned and operated enterprises, firms and services to private business; or 'partial' such as voucher systems, the implementation of user fees, and public private partnerships (PPP) (Nasser). PPP is an especially profitable method of privatization, as the state funds the infrastructure and guarantees returns, while private corporations collect the profits from an audience of 'captive' consumers. Working class communities have no choice but to 'purchase' services like utilities, health care, and transportation from corporations, yet these very same communities have no control over the provision of services and no say in the costs associated. The profit motivation of private corporations is irreconcilable with the provision of services based on public need.

The privatization of public services began in the Third World in the 1970s and acceler-

## Public Private Partnerships (PPPs)



PPP is a particular kind of privatization that involves the private sector completely taking over construction and/or operation of public utilities, infrastructure and services (CCPA) while the state continues to fund infrastructure costs through direct subsidy or other means.

The justification for PPP is that they are more cost-effective and efficient than publicly run projects and services (CCPA). In reality private sector provision of public services through PPP is more expensive than publicly run projects and services because of the imperative for private companies to accumulate profit (Redlin). The quality of service deteriorates and public health is compromised as corporations seek to reduce production and operating costs, cutting corners to their profit margins (CCPA). PPP involves hiring non-union labour either in part or completely in order to minimize labour costs. Not only do people pay more to use services operated privately, but also if companies don't make a profit, the state has the 'obligation' to subsidize corporate earnings (CCPA). We can see the disaster PPP can cause in the construction of schools in Nova Scotia where low-quality materials were used and students and teachers had to drink bottled water after arsenic was found in the water (CCPA). While service decreases, high user fees make services inaccessible to a large majority of working class people.



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ated through the 1980s and 90s at the hands of imperialist nations, the IMF and the World Bank. Privatization has been forcibly implemented through Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) and international financial institutions like the World Bank and the IMF. In the First World, privatization has been incremental through partial privatization (contracting out and voucher systems) and PPP. Privatization dissolves the social safety net provided by the former welfare state, rejecting state responsibility for the health and well being of the public (Nasser); privatization in the First World mirrors what has been accomplished in the Third World. Privatization eliminates democratic

process by undermining democratically elected governments and divesting people of their basic rights to food, clean water, health care, education and transit.

Neoliberal governments consistently allow what remains of public services to deteriorate. Generating financial 'crises' in the public sector allows governments to steadily increase user fees, and justifies privatization in the name of 'salvaging the system' (Petras & Veltmeyer). Where services have been under-funded and deteriorated, the state sells parts of these sectors to the private business at subsidized rates. In instances where services are partially privatized through contract-

## Richmond-Airport-Vancouver (RAV) Line



The Richmond-Airport-Vancouver (RAV) rapid transit line will connect the Airport to Vancouver's downtown core. Vancouver's big business lobby is pushing RAV, including the Vancouver Board of Trade and the Vancouver Airport Authority, the pro-Olympics lobby and the BC provincial government. It will be constructed and operated as a PPP project, which means that a private company will be paid with public money to design, build, and operate the line. The proposed length of the contract is 35 years for which they are guaranteed profits based on estimated ridership of 100 000 riders per day (Society Promoting Environmental Conservation).

The RAV project is exorbitantly expensive and will funnel approximately \$1.35 billion of public money into initial capital investment costs. While the current annual cost per seat on a bus is \$6000, the average annual cost of a seat on Skytrain is \$36,000.00 (Society Promoting Environmental Conservation). These figures are expected to skyrocket with RAV. Transit dependent bus riders will bear the brunt of the costs of the RAV line. Bus riders will pay for cost overruns generated by underground construction, debt-servicing costs, and low ridership through fare increases.

Bus riders will also suffer the consequences of RAV through decreased bus service; TransLink plans to radically cut bus service on all North-South routes including the already overcrowded Fraser, Main, Cambie, Oak, and Granville buses (GVTA). Virtually all public transit dollars are being funneled into RAV while bus riders are being forced to endure countless hardships.

All decisions surrounding the RAV line have been undemocratic, secretive, and lacking in accountability to the public. The PricewaterhouseCoopers study "Report on Financial Feasibility" that outlined the projected costs of RAV to the public has not been made available to the public (Redlin). TransLink voted on the same motion to move to the Best and Final Offer four times until it passed. RAV is a perfect case study of how privatization sacrifices public need and right to democratic process to profit making.



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ing out, vouchers, user-fees, and PPP, the costs of capital investment, debt servicing and risk are still born by the public.

## Public Transit in the Lower Mainland

The tension between state provision of services in response to public need and state responsiveness to the needs of private business has shaped the development of public transit in the Lower Mainland. Between 1889 and 1961 private companies ran transit in Vancouver. The provincial government took over transit in the early 1960s when it became unprofitable as ridership plummeted as upwardly mobile families (mostly white) moved into the suburbs and the automobile became the most common mode of transportation (Coast Mountain). The system was initially funded exclusively through fares, but with the decline in ridership government subsidies were necessary to maintain transit service needed by people who couldn't afford cars or who couldn't drive because of age or disability (Ahad).

In 1999, the province transferred responsibility for transit in the Lower Mainland to the Greater Vancouver Transportation Authority, more popularly known as TransLink (Coast Mountain). Though TransLink has a mandate to provide a public service, TransLink Board and staff have pursued transit planning that prioritizes the interests of private business over those of transit dependent communities and have been moving towards privatizing the transit system.

Driven by the neoliberal imperative, the system is reverting to a user-pay and for-profit model that places private enterprise at the center of transit planning and funding priorities. This

model re-creates bus riders as 'customers' rather than entitled owners of the transit system. Rather than recognize the needs of women and people of colour and ensure their right to mobility, TransLink prioritizes the needs of the 'choice rider'. The 'choice rider' is the transit user who has other transit options available but chooses to ride transit. The 'choice rider' usually has a higher income than

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*76% of transit users ride buses while only 24% use the SkyTrain.*

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the transit dependent and is less likely to be a woman or person of colour.

76% of transit users ride buses while only 24% use the SkyTrain. However, these figures are skewed, as TransLink re-routed buses to Skytrain Stations with the introduction of the Millennium Line, and many SkyTrain riders cannot access the Skytrain without the bus (TransLink, Report). Yet, to attract the 'choice rider', TransLink funds expensive services like SkyTrain at the expense of funding the bus service, the backbone of the transit system. As TransLink Director Barbara Sharp voted in favour of the Richmond-Airport-



*Artwork by Sophie Roberts*



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Vancouver rapid transit line she revealed this motivation when she stated that a different kind of people ride rail and buses and TransLink should attract the right kind of rider. Planning that prioritizes the needs of the male middle class ‘choice rider’ over those of the transit dependent is the antithesis of running transit as a public service. As a result, transit dependent people who are majority women and disproportionately from communities of colour have their right to mobility violated.

## Working Class Women Need Public Transit

*“This is the problem with privatization; it’s an excuse not to care about the public”<sup>1</sup>*

Women carry a double burden of paid work and unpaid reproductive work and as such women have greater need for public services than men do, yet public services were not designed around the undervalued and underpaid nature of women’s work (OECD).

As a public service, transit should be accessible to and meet the needs of the people who

most rely on it. Women are the majority of transit dependent people in the Lower Mainland and are disproportionately women of colour. Women are more likely to live below the poverty line, have low-paying, part-time, flexible paid jobs and to be single parents. As women, we make enormous unpaid contributions to our society. Since public transit is a component of our social wage, transit dependent women are particularly entitled to a transit system that is centred on our needs and ensure that we can meet our basic needs such as employment, healthcare, and childcare.

Despite our significant claim to a social wage, transit service has never guaranteed our right to mobility.

## Reproductive Labour

*“I am a low-income mom living in the DTES [Downtown Eastside]. In order to go out of the neighbourhood to buy groceries, I have to pay \$5.00 each way (\$2.00 for me and \$1.50 for each child). This is ridiculous... I think it is shameful that children have to pay \$1.50 for each ride. That \$10 could buy me 8 litres of milk.”<sup>2</sup>*

Public services help equalize the burdens of reproductive labour such as childcare and elder care; without access to public social services, this work falls primarily on individual women. Despite women’s disproportionate reliance on public services, the design and provision of public transit in the Lower Mainland ignores the unique needs and visions of women and rather prioritizes nine-to-five commuters. It is women and children who suffer the greatest consequences of inaccessible



*Zaila presenting at the BRU meeting to Stop the Fare Hite*



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public transit in our region. Throughout this document, the hardships that women endure due to the burden of ‘women’s work’ are also a call to re-prioritize women at the centre of public transit.

## **Paid Labour**

*“I’ve had to pass up so many job opportunities because I couldn’t get a bus – serving jobs; you know, the ones with tips”<sup>3</sup>*

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights guarantees the right “to a job with just and favorable conditions of work and a living wage” (United Nations). Having affordable and reliable transit is fundamental to securing and maintaining paid work. However, the current public transit system does not serve women’s needs for traveling to and from work. The central function of public transit has always been to efficiently move workers to their job sites and particularly in and out of the downtown core (Ahad). Public transit subsidizes the private sector by absorbing the cost of transporting workers to and from workplaces. This model does not serve the transit needs of the majority of women, particularly women of colour (OECD, 24).

## **The Flexibilization of Women’s Labour**

Women are historically paid less than men and continue to be concentrated in low wage-work, particularly in the service sector. Service sector workers are disproportionately women of colour and are super-exploited as a result of the oppression of women and the pervasive racism in our society.

As a result of neoliberal economics, the flexibilization of labour has further pushed women into insecure jobs, often on contract with low wages and irregular hours. The recent wave of privatization of health care services in BC has pushed women out of secure, well-paid unionized jobs into uncertain low-wage contracts with irregu-

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lar hours. Bus Riders Union organizers have talked to hundreds of health care workers who have lost their jobs. Increasingly, we meet women working on contract in the health care sector being paid less than one half of former unionized rates. As women’s work is increasingly flexibilized, we rely more heavily on public transit to access jobs at all times in all areas of the region.

## **Attacks on the Rights of Working Class Women**

Women in the Lower Mainland face daily attacks on our right to public transit. From inadequate services to rising user-fees, women face daily struggles to negotiate our lives on a failing public transit system.

### **Inadequate service hours**

Women express frustration and anger that a lack of adequate and affordable transportation creates so many barriers to the already difficult task of finding and keeping work:



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*Our livelihood, my income, is dependent on my ability to reach various job sites. As a security guard, I can get called to work at any time to go almost anywhere in the Lower Mainland. When my scheduler calls, the very first thing I have to know before I can accept work is, "Can I get a bus there?"*<sup>4</sup>

Women find that they cannot support their families on their wages, spend countless unpaid hours on the bus to and from work, and struggle to afford the current bus fares.

Transit service hours are organized around the concept of 'peak hours' in which service increases in the morning and again in the late afternoon and early evening. Despite the fact that bus riders work irregular hours and use transit for other needs, bus service is centred on nine-to-five workers. The buses are especially unreliable when the service is reduced, particularly on the weekends and in the afternoons and evenings, when many shift workers are travelling to and from work:

*"I do shift work and I sometimes take the bus after 9:30 am. The buses are not frequent at this time*

*and I have to wait. Most people taking the bus do shift work... There is less service between 9:30 am and 3 p.m. Buses during this time are off schedule"*<sup>5</sup>

*"We need more service on Saturdays and Sundays and in the morning time also. Most people work on Saturdays and Sundays, we pay taxes too. I wait for a long time, then I'm late for work. That causes big problems"*<sup>6</sup>

Bus service begins at 5:30am at the earliest, and ends as early as 6:00pm on some suburban routes and between 12am and 1:30am on inner city routes. In 2001 TransLink cut the heavily used Night Owl service that ran on 16 routes from 1:30 am to 3:30 am. Shortly after the cuts, a worker confirmed:

*"Monday to Friday I take the #8 Fraser from Granville and Nelson to Fraser and 49<sup>th</sup> either at 12:30 am, 1am, or 1:30 am and every night no matter the hour the bus is completely full (every seat is full) for my entire 45 minute ride"*<sup>7</sup>

## Bus Riders Win Return of Night Owl Buses



In March 2004, the Bus Riders Union won our campaign, *Night Owl Buses: End the Curfew Now!* In September 2004, TransLink will return Night Owl service on all 16 routes cut: Vancouver routes #5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 15, 16, 19, 20, 22, 35 and suburban routes #106, 112, 150, 242, 401, 403, 410. Despite this victory, late night and early morning service is still inadequate. Night Owl routes leave large portions of the city completely unserved, particularly in outlying areas of Greater Vancouver. The region is still without buses for over two hours, often a critical time for late night and early morning shift workers. Women need 24-hour transit seven days a week on an expanded number of routes to have guaranteed access to work. Our demand for 24-hour transit is also a demand to end transit racism that further marginalizes women of colour already faced with severe economic and social hardship.



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As a consequence of the lack of late night bus service, many women lost their jobs, have to refuse much-needed shifts, or cannot take new jobs. Night shift workers are disproportionately from immigrant working class communities and suffer the worst consequences of the lack of late night bus service:

*“I use to do night shift and it was hard getting back [after they cut the night owl buses] – I had to switch from night shift to day shift. I was working in a warehouse at Royal Oak – I couldn’t get back. I lost my job altogether”<sup>8</sup>*

*“Denny’s workers get off shift at 4am. Three workers (all women) had to quit because can’t get a bus home and busboy sleeps in the storeroom until bus runs in the morning”<sup>9</sup>*

The lack of early morning service is also a major problem for many shift workers.

*“[I am a] health care worker. [It’s] hard to take the buses early. [I] have to miss shifts that start early because there are no buses.... Soon [I’m] moving to White Rock, where there is only one bus to in the morning to Vancouver Monday to Friday, not on weekends. This means I will be late in the morning getting to work at 41st and Oak. Only evening shifts available to me now”<sup>10</sup>*

Because the service does not run when they need it, many workers spend a high percentage of their income on cab fares. The cabs fares drastically lower take-home wages and in many cases

take money directly out of essentials such as food and rent:

*“I used to work at the Bingo Hall and get off at 1:30am. When I get off I’d have to take a cab. It’s cost me \$18 - when you’re making minimum wage – take a cab five times a week”<sup>11</sup>*

*“I work at the casino at the end of the #8 bus line as a waitress. I work till 4am and even the night service has ended. I take a \$20 cab ride home, a quarter of my tips. I can’t take certain shifts because I can’t afford it”<sup>12</sup>*

*“[I] work in a hotel, [I] work until 2:30am miss the last bus. Have to call my son or call a taxi and pay \$16 – this is more than one hour’s wages. I have to work late; I don’t have a choice”<sup>13</sup>*

The cost of taxi fares is also an indicator of the importance of public transit in facilitating women’s access to work. Without it, many women simply cannot afford mobility, and hence cannot



*Heather organizing on the bus*



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access work:

*“I worked at London Drugs from 5am to 9am. I lived five minutes away, but I moved and had to quit because the taxi would have been too much. I didn’t make enough to pay for a taxi”<sup>14</sup>*

For more information on the effects of the lack of late night bus services, see *Night Owl Buses*:

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*On accessible routes, wheelchair lifts are often broken and women are forced to wait for several buses for a bus with a working lift.*

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*Towards Social Justice in the Vancouver Region, A Report of the Bus Riders Union (2003).*

## Insufficient routes

Bus routes criss-cross the Greater Vancouver region, yet large areas remain un-served or under-served. Within Vancouver there is particularly a shortage of East-West routes. Elderly women and women with disabilities express difficulty walking a long ways to the closest bus stop. One woman who uses the #3 Main bus to get to work expressed concern that she might have to walk to Cambie if the Main bus is cut after the construction of rapid transit:

*“Don’t cut this bus... It hurts my heart. I’m getting old and I can’t walk the five or more blocks to Cambie”<sup>15</sup>*

Insufficient routes in suburban areas are also a major barrier to accessing work:

*“My car is broken and I work in the Surrey Public Library System. I live in Vancouver and it takes me 2.5 to 3 hours to get to work. There*

*are 6 or 7 branches in Surrey. One or two have a bus to get there, but it stops at 6pm. I have to beg for a ride or take a cab, which costs me \$18-25 to get to Surrey Central SkyTrain Station. I turn down sometimes 2 shifts a week. It’s really stressful not having the income. I’m on call, which so many people are, and trying to balance a few different jobs”<sup>16</sup>*

## Unreliable and infrequent service

Women find public transit very unreliable. Buses are slow because the system is overburdened, the aging bus fleet breaks down frequently, connections are badly planned, and buses are infrequent. Transit dependent women concentrated in contract and flexible work are vulnerable to being fired if their bus is late. They compensate by leaving early, but even then are often late:

*“I need to give myself one hour to get to work and it’s supposed to be a 20 minute ride”<sup>17</sup>*

*“I live in the West End. In the morning I take the #6 [Davie]. It’s such a headache in the morning. Just yesterday the bus was full, it just passed me by. I was late for work. I’m a community health worker; I rely on the bus to get from client to client. It negatively affects my clients (if I am late)”<sup>18</sup>*

Bus riders also lose job opportunities because they’re late for interviews:

*“I take the #17 [Oak]. I was late for an interview so I didn’t do the interview.... I wait a long time for the #17, so I leave an extra 20 min-*



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*utes or 30 minutes before I need to, [to] be on time”<sup>19</sup>*

*right back to what my insurance costs were for my car and that’s just for one zone fare!”<sup>21</sup>*

## Inaccessible buses

Despite expressing a commitment to make all routes wheelchair accessible, some of the busiest routes in Vancouver are not accessible, such as the #8 Fraser and #3 Main routes. The trolley buses were supposed to be replaced five years ago with kneeling trolleys, but TransLink cancelled the contract to prioritize the construction of the Millennium SkyTrain line.

On accessible routes, wheelchair lifts are often broken and women are forced to wait for several buses for a bus with a working lift. The result is that women with disabilities do not have the mobility they need in an already difficult struggle to find employment. This pushes them further into poverty and reinforces their marginalization in society:

*“It’s hard for people in wheelchairs to get on the bus. Sometimes I have to wait for the next bus but it is not accessible”<sup>20</sup>*

## High Fares

*“After moving to Vancouver from Vernon for work, I found my biggest expenses pertained to transportation... Rent and food come first, so in my family’s best interests I sold my car and now rely on public transit for commuting, shopping, school, visiting friends, etc. All 3 of us take transit, but I now find buying bus passes puts me*

TransLink is forcing those who most need the service and can least afford to pay to pay increasing user fees. Although women and men pay the same fares, women are disproportionately affected by high fares due to lower incomes and greater need for transit. User fees are a symptom of TransLink’s business mentality that transforms bus riders from entitled members of society with a human right to transit into ‘customers’ who only have access to transit if they can pay. With the drive towards privatization, user fees are a mechanism for the redistribution of wealth from the poor to the rich. TransLink steals money out of the pockets



*Two women struggling to get cart full of groceries on a trolley bus*



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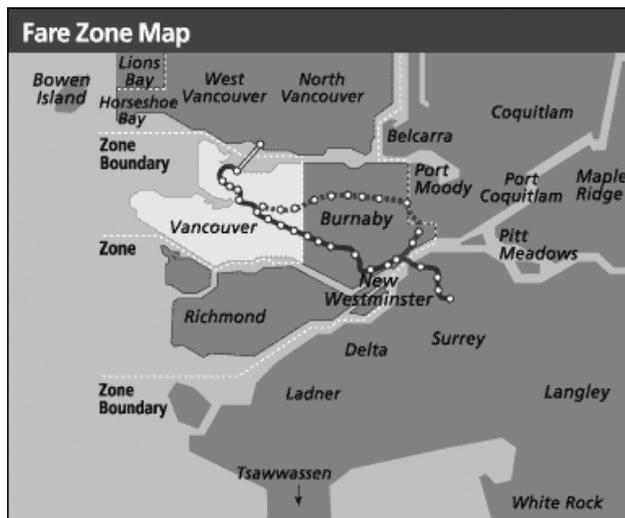
of bus riders and funnels it directly into privatization projects like the RAVline to create profits for the rich while transit dependent communities suffer the consequences. Public transit ceases to be a public service when the people who most need it cannot access it.

With each fare increase, the cost of transit falls more heavily on individual women and families. Women have to choose between transit and other necessities, substantially lowering women's quality of living:

*"I spend \$187 on bus passes every month. I could use this money on food, bills. Things are already tight. Transit is a major expense."*<sup>22</sup>

## Zones

The fare structure through which TransLink collects fares increases the burden on transit dependent women. The zone system imposes an arbitrary cost for women travelling to work, school, social services and social activities. Increasingly, working class people are moving into the outlying



Map of the zone system in the GVRD

suburbs where the housing and cost of living is cheaper than in Vancouver. However, many bus riders find that their transit costs offset any financial savings: a three-zone trip costs \$8 (one hour's wages for many women) and a three-zone monthly bus pass costs \$120. Some women are forced to move because they cannot afford the zones:

*"I am a foreign student from Mexico. The fares are hard for us to afford. I had to move from Vancouver to Burnaby because the two-zone fare was too expensive"*

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The zone system limits where transit dependent women live, work, study, and socialize.

## Monthly passes

Women said the monthly passes are too expensive yet they are forced to buy them because the cash fares are worse. Many women don't have \$63, \$87, or \$120 to buy a monthly pass for themselves and their families at the beginning of the month when rent and other bills are also due. At a Bus Riders Union public meeting on July 24<sup>th</sup>, 2004, one woman shared how she borrowed the money from her brother to buy a bus pass, but later found out that as a result he couldn't afford to eat for two days<sup>24</sup>. Women who cannot afford the pass end up paying far more than \$63/87/120 over the course of the month. A monthly pass is the cost of 31 rides or 15 trips. Transit dependent women who take one one-zone trip a day per month will pay \$126 in cash fares, and most transit dependent women take more than one trip per day. Those with the lowest incomes end up paying the most in user fees and are the worst hit by high fares:



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*“I take the bus a lot. If I don’t buy a bus pass, I’m paying almost \$10/day, hard for someone making minimum wage.... Sometimes I don’t have the \$63 at the beginning of month [for a bus pass] – it’s too much”<sup>25</sup>*

## Transfer times

Due to high fares, women often run all of their errands on one transfer. Women will drop off one kid at school; another at day-care, go grocery shopping and then rush home before her ticket expires. Yet, usually, transfer times are too short for women to accomplish their many tasks. Trip times are even longer when children accompany women. To compensate for short transfer times, women prioritize among essential things they need to get done, always leaving something for the next trip.

Women are also constrained in social activities because they cannot afford to pay for a second or return fare:

*“Bus fares only have a 1 1/2 hour limit, so that limits me from doing outdoor activities with my baby”<sup>26</sup>*

For long one-way trips with multiple connections or covering a long distance, one transfer is not long enough. An already expensive trip crossing zone boundaries becomes more expensive when women have to pay for another ticket:

*“I take the bus to North Vancouver. I have to pay \$1.50 and an extra \$0.50 for zone change. And if I pass my 1.5 hours I need to pay it again. So I’ll have to pay \$6 a day for going out”<sup>27</sup>*

## Women on Welfare

Due to provincial funding cuts, women on welfare in BC have lost much of their previous mobility due to a virtual elimination of free bus passes and tickets. New punitive rules surrounding access to transportation mean that women on welfare can only access free bus tickets for job-related reasons such as job interviews. Women

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*Children’s fares in the Greater Vancouver Region are the highest in Canada even without the cost of the zones (Orsini).*

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no longer can access free public transit for medical appointments or for childcare.

Women who are forced into ‘job clubs’ and ‘training’ in order to collect welfare to survive are finding they are forced to evade bus fares as the cost of public transit far exceeds their ability to pay. Women are increasingly trapped in their communities by punitively high bus fares.

The situation facing single mothers on welfare is dire. After the costs of rent and phone, a single mother on welfare in the Lower Mainland has only \$9.60/day to pay for all necessities including hydro, clothing, food, health care costs, school supplies, birthday presents, and all other expenses (BC Ministry of Human Resources, Rates). When bus fare is \$4.00 for an adult and \$3.00 for a child per each return trip, this cost consumes almost the entire daily budget for a woman on welfare with one child. Yet, in order to be eligible for welfare, women must make multiple trips to the welfare office, to family maintenance workers, and to ‘job training’ programs.



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## Children's fares

Paying the fares for an entire family is very expensive. Children's fares in the Greater Vancouver Region are the highest in Canada even without the cost of the zones (Orsini). Children 5 to 13 years pay concession fares, \$1.50 for one zone, \$2 and \$3 for two and three zones respectively, and \$40 for a monthly pass (TransLink, Fares). The price of the children's fare falls on the family, in particular mothers and hits single mothers hardest:

*"When the fares go up, I have two young children, and that [the fare increase] will be 20 cents extra every time. I cannot leave my kids at home, I have to take them with me everywhere I go to get groceries etc. It's also not good for my kids if I tell my daughters that they can't go anywhere because I can't afford the bus fare"*<sup>28</sup>

*"I have a family of 4. It costs 7\$ one way to use transit. Its expensive as it is to go out as a family (e.g. visit to Stanley Park). It's a barrier to go shopping as well. So with the fare increase it will cost even more to go to the mall and back home. For a low-income family it's really expensive"*<sup>29</sup>

## Youth and Students

### High School Students

High school students need transit to get to and from school, visit friends and family, and to have independence from parents. For most youth, while their families pay for their passes or tickets

they often share the cost. Even with the concession fare, youth and their families find the fares too expensive.

Youth 14 to 19 years old are eligible for a concession fare if they are enrolled in secondary school and have a GoCard card issued by their schools. Making concession fares for students contingent on the GoCard criminalizes youth. Youth have to prove that they are students; TransLink assumes that they are trying to cheat the system. SkyTrain cops target youth for 'fare evasion' and give out excessive fines that neither they nor their families can afford.

At the focus group at Vancouver Technical Secondary School, a young woman recounted how SkyTrain Police harassed her and her friends for not having their GoCards, even though they were carrying textbooks with them:

*"I was going out with four friends. Three out of four of us didn't have our GoCards. One because [she] didn't receive it. They [the SkyTrain police] gave us tickets [fines]"*<sup>30</sup>

Immigrant youth and youth of colour are especially targeted and criminalized by SkyTrain police and subject to racial profiling as part of a greater process of criminalization.

### College and University Students

In 2003, Simon Fraser University and the University of British Columbia implemented the U-Pass, a mandatory three-zone pass that all part-time and full-time students have to buy into. Students are required to pay for the pass through student fees at the beginning of each semester, averaging at \$23 (SFU) and \$20 (UBC) per month



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respectively. TransLink anticipated the pass to be 'revenue neutral' or equal to what students previously paid in monthly passes. In 2003 TransLink received \$300 000 from VanCity as the corporate sponsor and \$8 per student per term from Simon Fraser University (Hui).

The U-Pass is meant to attract students to public transit as 'choice riders', although it also provides transit dependent students with a cheaper pass. The pass has successfully attracted new riders as transit use rose over 40% at SFU (SFU). The cheaper pass is also very popular with transit dependent students; it is an indicator of how a cheaper pass and no zones could serve the needs of the transit dependent.

Other post-secondary institutions in the region do not have access to the U-pass. These institutions usually have cheaper tuition and a higher percentage of working class students who are more likely to be working their way through school. Full-time students receive a "fast trax" sticker with which they can travel through all zones on an adult one-zone monthly Fare Card (TransLink, Fares). College students currently pay three times what SFU and UBC students pay for transit, adding onto to student debt and increasing the need for additional employment on top of studies. Rather than based on need, TransLink negotiates who has access to the U-Pass based on cost and profitability and attracting the 'choice rider'.

Students at private schools do not receive a fast trax sticker that would allow them to travel through all three zones on a one-zone pass. These students are far more likely to be foreign students and immigrants and experience compounded

hardship:

*"I go to private school in Burnaby, but I live in Vancouver. I have to pay two zones and I don't get a sticker for the zones because it's a private school. We are all students but only the public school students get the sticker. Why do we have pay extra?"<sup>31</sup>*

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*The fight against 'fare evasion' allows TransLink to blame bus riders for funding shortfalls and fare increases and to justify fare enforcement and criminalization.*

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## Seniors and people with disabilities

A provincial program provides a \$45 pass for low-income seniors and people with disabilities (BC Ministry of Human Resources, Special). The



*Yuly talking with a bus rider*



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importance of the senior's pass was exposed in 2002 when the provincial government proposed cutting the pass and the protest was so great that the provincial government backed down.

Low-income seniors and people with disabilities cannot afford the \$40 monthly concession pass or the regular adult pass. Senior working class women are low-income because they've spent their lives working for low wages and carrying the burden of unpaid reproductive labour. Women with disabilities are disproportionately poor and marginalized due to the pervasive inaccessibility of our society and the

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*Criminalization is based on ability to pay and not on need or commitment to ensure universal human rights.*

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systemic exclusion of people with disabilities. When applying for the means-tested provincial pass, these women are subjected to a humiliating process of proving that they are low-income. Means testing undermines our entitlement to public services and violates our human right to transit; means testing makes us feel like charity cases.

Means testing also legitimizes user fees for public services by creating an arbitrary definition of 'low-income'. We know from discussions with bus riders that most cannot afford the fare and many have been denied use of the service as a result.

TransLink further humiliates and violates the privacy of senior women and women with disabilities by making the pass easily identifiable

and printing the bus rider's age in large numbers on the front of the pass:

*"I have a seniors bus pass and I think it's outrageous that they put my birth year in such big numbers for everyone to see. In my generation, you don't ask a woman her age"<sup>32</sup>*

Women are forced to put the pass in the electronic fare boxes despite the fact that many seniors and people with disabilities carry the passes around their necks to avoid losing them and find it physically difficult to take the pass out and put it in the box. Women using a can or a walker are at risk of falling and seriously injuring themselves when standing on a moving bus. The same woman continued:

*"They try to make me put my card in the box. I take it out and tell them I can't see and they have to put it in for me. Usually they [the drivers] apologize"<sup>33</sup>*

## Bus Drivers

Bus riders' experiences of paying high fares often manifest through conflict with drivers. Bus drivers are required simply to inform bus riders of the fare, not to enforce them. However, many drivers do not consider transit as a public service to which everyone is entitled regardless of their ability to pay and hence believe it is their responsibility to collect fares. For many transit dependent women, drivers refuse to let them on if they cannot pay; often women experience a condescending attitude from bus drivers who do let them on without paying.



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## Criminalizing Bus Riders

While women are expected to cope with increasing fares and less bus service, they face increasing humiliation and criminalization in the transit system. Women are criminalized for not being able to afford high fares, which is especially problematic for women having to pay for children and having difficulties getting strollers, wheelchairs and groceries on and off the bus. Instead of being treated as entitled owners of the transit system, women are treated as undeserving customers. Criminalization created through mechanisms like fare increases and increased transit ‘security’ is based on the idea that entitlement to transit service is based on ability to pay and not on need or commitment to ensure universal human rights.

TransLink criminalizes transit dependent women through high fares and fare enforcement. The fight against ‘fare evasion’ allows TransLink to blame bus riders for funding shortfalls and fare increases and to justify fare enforcement and criminalization. In 2002, TransLink spent \$30 million on new electronic fare boxes to monitor fare payment. In an interview with the Vancouver Courier, TransLink spokesman Ken Hardie reported that on SkyTrain 100,000 riders a week are checked for fares. In 2002, TransLink issued over 41,000 violation tickets of \$46 each for non-payment of fares (Howell). TransLink has applied to the Provincial Ministry of Transportation to raise the fine to \$150 and a mechanism to force riders to pay their tickets. Money that goes into security and monitoring bus riders comes out of the bus system:

*“I think they should spend less money on security and more on buses. What do they think we’re all criminals? They did a test and 0.01% don’t have tickets. Where’s the evidence?”<sup>34</sup>*

In addition to raising fares, TransLink has also created a ‘war on crime’ on the SkyTrain in which every bus rider becomes a potential criminal (in addition to a fare evader). In April 2004, the Solicitor General Rich Colman announced that SkyTrain constables will be given new powers to enforce drug laws, execute outstanding warrants and arrest people who have committed crimes outside of a SkyTrain station. The unit of 77 officers will also undergo review of their equipment policy, which might allow them to carry handguns. The increased security creates an unsafe and fearful climate in which bus riders’ fear TransLink security:

*“I take the SkyTrain to and from Joyce and Granville station. On several occasions I have stepped off the train at Joyce to see/hear the security guards dealing with people. I am not impressed with their attitude, tone (very aggressive), body language (very aggressive) and language choice (very very aggressive). ...I do not feel safe when I get off the train to hear SkyTrain guards yelling and swearing. I saw many older immigrants get away from there as fast as they could”<sup>35</sup>*



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## TransLink's Unaccountable and Undemocratic Process

TransLink consistently makes decisions that are not in the best interests of transit dependent communities. The TransLink board does not represent transit dependent communities and is in no way directly accountable to bus riders. Undemocratic structures exclude transit dependent women

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*For bus riders, attending a TransLink meeting can mean leaving home at 7 am, transferring several times, paying a two or three zone fare, and committing to several hours of travel time.*

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from meaningful decision-making. Women's experiences are tokenized or derided in sham public consultations. Women are not provided with information necessary to develop educated opinions on transit planning.

## Appointed not Elected

The TransLink board is comprised of twelve mayors and councillors from the municipalities that make up the Lower Mainland.



*Kirat presenting on behalf of WIT at the TransLink Board meeting at Burnaby City Hall*

Board members are appointed to TransLink, unlike the directly elected Vancouver School Board and Vancouver Parks Board. As a result, the board is not accountable for its decisions via the electoral system. Moreover, not one of the board members is transit dependent and they do not reflect the class, racial or gender make-up, or interests of the transit dependent.

## Inaccessible meetings

TransLink holds monthly board meetings at which people can sign up to give a five-minute presentation. However, these meetings are inaccessible to transit dependent women. Meetings are held at 9 am on weekday mornings when transit dependent people are working, caring for children or have other commitments. Meetings alternate between the municipalities of the Greater Vancouver Region and are generally difficult to access by bus. For bus riders, attending a TransLink meeting can mean leaving home at 7 am, transferring several times, paying a two or three zone fare, and committing to several hours of travel time.

TransLink does not provide free childcare and does not tolerate the presence of children in the meetings. For transit dependent mothers, this makes attendance and meaningful participation at TransLink meetings impossible. In one WIT workshop, women with small children expressed the desire to speak at a TransLink meeting but lamented multiple barriers to attending the meeting such as the cost of childcare and the length of time women would spend separated from their children due to long travel times.

Transit dependent women who do not



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speakers that since the presenters were all addressing Night Owl buses they were thus all saying basically the same thing and could make it quick. Despite McCallum's racist and sexist generalization, each speaker conveyed particular experiences of hardship in their communities due to the lack of late night bus service.

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*TransLink does not provide the public with information with which to form educated opinions about public transit planning.*

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## Lack of Democratic Participation

transit dependent people when making decisions. When the TransLink board voted to restore Night Owl service, board member and North Vancouver mayor Barbara Sharp responded to the delegations by denying TransLink's culpability for the experiences of gender and racial violence lived by transit dependent communities due to the lack of late night bus service. Sharp suggested that bringing back the Night Owl buses made "good economic sense" citing that urban regions considered to be 'World Class Cities' have 24-hour bus service<sup>36</sup>. Sharp's comments demonstrate how TransLink does not make decisions to provide a public service according to need, but as a private business.

Delegates must apply to TransLink to be allowed a five-minute delegation at least two business days before the meeting. Permission to speak is never guaranteed: Bus Riders Union organizers were briefly 'banned' by TransLink from speaking on an issue more than once in a lifetime, until political pressure forced TransLink to back down. The TransLink board members, particularly the chair, are quick to become impatient with the presentations of transit dependent people and frequently interrupt. While they give TransLink staff and business organizations lengthy amounts of time to make their presentations, bus riders are told to "keep things brief." At the March 2004 meeting, representatives from the Filipino Nurses Support Group, Vancouver Rape Relief, the Palestine Community Centre, the South Asian Youth Alliance, student groups from Simon Fraser University, and the Bus Riders Union made presentations on the motion to return Night Owl service. TransLink Chair Doug McCallum suggested to the

transit dependent people when making decisions. When the TransLink board voted to restore Night Owl service, board member and North Vancouver mayor Barbara Sharp responded to the delegations by denying TransLink's culpability for the experiences of gender and racial violence lived by transit dependent communities due to the lack of late night bus service. Sharp suggested that bringing back the Night Owl buses made "good economic sense" citing that urban regions considered to be 'World Class Cities' have 24-hour bus service<sup>36</sup>. Sharp's comments demonstrate how TransLink does not make decisions to provide a public service according to need, but as a private business.

Periodically, TransLink holds public consultations in which they seek public input on a specific issue. The barriers put in place to inhibit democratic participation in the monthly meetings expose these consultations as a sham. Secondly, TransLink's interests invariably shape the 'options'. In 2002, TransLink initiated public consultations where the public was asked to choose



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between Option 1 and Option 2: putting severe restrictions on the opinions, ideas, and input of communities on transit planning that meets our needs.

## Not transparent or accountable

TransLink does not provide the public with information with which to form educated opinions about public transit planning. Decisions that hurt transit dependent women are framed in crisis situations and a lack of funds, for example the fare increase of April 2002. The publicity around the fare increase was intended to mislead the public; TransLink has money for more buses and lower fares, but they choose to spend it on privatization projects that do not benefit the transit dependent.

The process around the Millennium Line SkyTrain extension provides a poignant example of the inherently undemocratic nature of TransLink's decision-making process. The fact that the public would bear the burden of paying \$332 million in debt servicing costs for the extension project was never disclosed to the public. The fact that fare increases and massive cuts to bus service would be needed to pay the costs of debt servicing for the project was never revealed to bus riders (Stromberg). Furthermore, the evidence that overwhelmingly suggested that TransLink also disregarded ridership targets for the Millennium line that would not materialize despite the fact that the money lost by inadequate ridership would be paid by the public (Stromberg). In order to cater to the private sector, TransLink withholds information from the public to disguise the negative impacts of its decisions on transit

dependent communities. One transit dependent woman, a senior, articulates her frustration with TransLink's lack of transparency:

*"I think they should spend less money on security and more on buses. What do they think we're all criminals? They did a test and 0.01% don't have tickets. Where's the evidence?"*

*P.S. Can we have accurate statistics i.e. do cheaters cost TransLink 10m per year, according to your bulletin? We read that less than one percent of SkyTrain riders cheat – certainly I rarely see anyone stopped. How about published evidence of the above?"*

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## Conclusion

Public transit is a human right. Working class women especially rely on public transit to manage a double workday, to find and keep employment, and access other public services. Yet neoliberalism undermines our entitlement to public transit; transit is increasingly driven by the needs of private profit and a business agenda.

Public transit is a crucial public service for working class women and our communities across the region. Public transit is a necessary component of our social wage and plays an important role in the redistribution of wealth in our society. For our right to mobility to be guaranteed, and for women to lead our lives with independence and dignity, with adequate income and access to our entire region, women need affordable, accessible, fully-public transit throughout the entire region.



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<sup>1</sup> WIT Testimonial 42

<sup>2</sup> WIT Testimonial 44

<sup>3</sup> Night Owls Testimonial 40

<sup>4</sup> WIT Testimonial 16

<sup>5</sup> WIT Testimonial 40

<sup>6</sup> WIT Testimonial 37

<sup>7</sup> Night Owls Testimonial 16

<sup>8</sup> Night Owls Testimonial 25

<sup>9</sup> Night Owls Testimonial 33

<sup>10</sup> Night Owls Testimonial 31

<sup>11</sup> WIT Testimonial 18

<sup>12</sup> WIT Testimonial 23

<sup>13</sup> Night Owls Testimonial 44

<sup>14</sup> Night Owls Testimonial 70

<sup>15</sup> WIT Testimonial 14

<sup>16</sup> Night Owls Testimonial 44

<sup>17</sup> WIT Testimonial 10

<sup>18</sup> WIT Testimonial 27

<sup>19</sup> WIT Testimonial 22

<sup>20</sup> WIT Testimonial 8

<sup>21</sup> WIT Testimonial 17

<sup>22</sup> WIT Testimonial 9

<sup>23</sup> Testimonial 62

<sup>24</sup> Bus Riders Union, Stop the Fare Increase Public Meeting; July 24, 2004.

<sup>25</sup> WIT Testimonial 26

<sup>26</sup> WIT Testimonial 31

<sup>27</sup> WIT Testimonial 56

<sup>28</sup> WIT Testimonial 58

<sup>29</sup> WIT Testimonial 41

<sup>30</sup> WIT Testimonial 65

<sup>31</sup> WIT Testimonial 33

<sup>32</sup> WIT Testimonial 24

<sup>33</sup> WIT Testimonial 24

<sup>34</sup> WIT Testimonial 24

<sup>35</sup> WIT Testimonial 3

<sup>36</sup> TransLink Board Meeting March 23, 2004, Burnaby City Hall, BC

<sup>37</sup> WIT Testimonial 24

