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PIGS ON A TRAIN

The Growing Transit Crisis
& How to Fight It

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Both photos taken during a mass fare evasion/anti-police demo in Brooklyn.

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Typeset with Montserrat and Jenson.

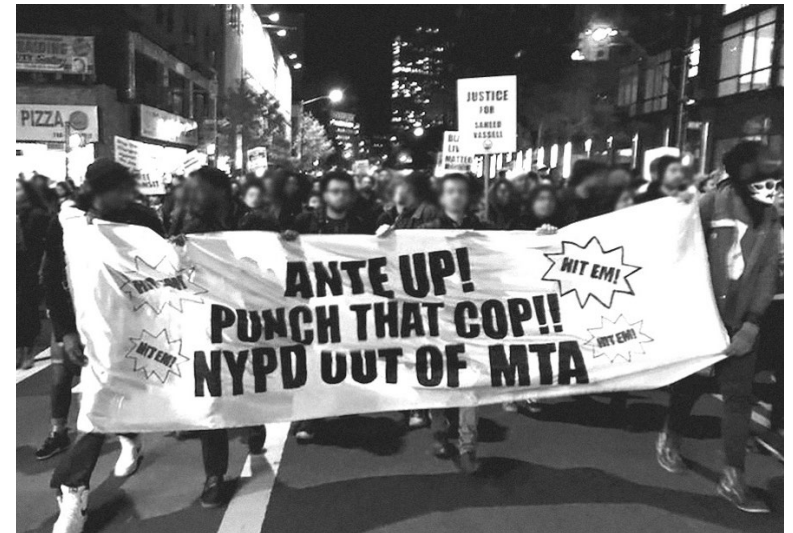
From Brooklyn to Santiago, all power to the fare evaders.

Although varying conditions in different cities may warrant different sets of demands, these are four broad goals that could inform a renewed transit justice movement:

1. Eliminate fares.
2. Fire all transit police or fare enforcement officers and divert resources to hiring unionized transit operators.
3. Frequent and reliable 24/7 service.
4. Improve transit service coverage and options in historically excluded communities of color and working class neighborhoods.

#NoFareIsFair

#HireDriversFireCops



Mutual Aid support for fare evaders

Be sure to perform adequate research and understand what the repercussions are for fare evasion in your locale. Where fare evasion is decriminalized, carrying a fine, but not usually entailing jail time or court appearances, fundraising is crucial. Where fare evasion remains a criminal offense, legal and court support will be necessary. In some European cities, such as Stockholm, mutual aid insurance schemes have been developed, in which consistent fare evaders pay a small monthly fee and re reimbursed whenever they are busted and fined by transit police. Organize recurring benefit shows and maintain online fundraising platforms to sustain funds.

Popular education and outreach

A public information campaign complete with digestible leaflets and posters as well as workshops and teach-ins can compliment a direct action strategy. Material could examine the class implications of transit fares, racist disparities in transit policing and the importance of free mass transit for reducing carbon emissions. Separate material could be developed specifically for transit workers. Popular education, leafletting and connecting with new riders could be done during mass fare evasions themselves, on platforms or in trains and buses.

Find other nodes!

Speak out at transit authority board meetings. Picket or occupy the offices of transit authorities. Organize copwatch patrols to deter harassment and violence from transit police. Get creative!

Tactical Suggestions Moving Forward

Mass fare evasion or “Fare Strikes”

Mass refusals of fare payment is one of the most common political tactics transit riders employ. Fare strikes assume a range of forms, from relatively spontaneous ones that harness the immediate momentum of a crisis, to smaller tightly organized civil disobediences that require months of planning. But the fundamental power of leveraging our economic power exists in all cases. Organizing a direct action that involves mass fare evasion must account for the particularities of fare collection on a given transit system. On many older heavy rail (“metro” or “subway” systems like NYC Subway, Boston T, D.C. Metro, Chicago L etc.), jumping faregates and holding emergency exits open (already a common, if less organized practice) may be necessary. On many newer rapid transit systems (Seattle’s Link and RapidRide or Portland’s MAX, for example) where “proof of payment” fare enforcement is used, boarding without paying will be easier. However, maintaining strong numbers throughout a transit ride will be important if fare enforcement officers attempt to bust fare strike participants while on board. Be sure to film transit police and have funds ready to pay the fines for those caught. All-bus transit networks pose more difficulties as fare payment requires interacting with bus drivers, who are too victims of the transit crisis. Nevertheless, by doing extensive outreach with drivers prior to the launch of fare strikes, transit justice organizers have successfully staged mass fare evasions on buses, often with support from drivers.

PIGS ON A TRAIN

A critique of mass transit in capitalist society and an analysis of the possibilities for anti-capitalist intervention and struggle.

EVERYWHERE PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION IS FALTERING. Everywhere riders are suffering. The transit crisis spells exclusion, frustration and danger for its users. For poor people, high fares signal a restriction or even elimination of movement. For black, brown and homeless people, militarized policing on transit networks lead to harassment, brutality and death. The riders stranded by infrequent bus service or delayed trains can expect lost jobs, truancy court, and missed appointments. And all transit users face the alarming prospects of derailments and other dangerous transit dysfunctions as infrastructure continues to deteriorate. It’s time for transit riders to self-organize and reclaim public transit as a common resource for the benefit of all.

The transit crisis is not a question of incompetence on behalf of transportation authorities or municipal governments. It is a question of priorities. These entities have consciously neglected a service that millions of working class people depend on daily. In cities where large numbers of residents use transit (New York City, Washington D.C., Boston and San Francisco among others) the disintegration of transit could precipitate the collapse of entire urban economies. When transit agencies do intervene with new capital projects, the repairs are always insufficient, the “service improvements” are merely cosmetic or only serve wealthier and whiter riders (or tourists and developers in the case of most modern streetcar projects) and all of these are always paid for on the backs of riders and working class people through fare hikes and regressive taxes. Often, resources are simply squandered on policing transit systems instead of investing in transit itself. In Portland, TriMet recently hired more fare-inspectors to bust riders who can’t afford steep fares. In New York City, 500 new police officers were hired to harass homeless people and fare beaters in the subway system. Already, several high-profile cases of racist police brutality have surfaced in NYC after since the hiring.

The transit crisis has manifested in declining transit ridership throughout the U.S. Curtailed mobility for the poorest entrenches their exclusion, placing employment, educational and housing opportunities farther out of reach. Those with means will increasingly drive or utilize ride-sharing companies like Uber or Lyft. These trends contribute to traffic congestion, road damage and poor air quality with all of their attendant physical and health dangers. Even as liberal politicians and transit agencies endorse youth-led climate strikes and employ green rhetoric, their decisions to raise fares and condemn transit systems to rot exacerbate the global climate catastrophe.

The transit crisis is a crisis for riders. Through organized collective struggle, direct action and mutual aid we can make a crisis for transit authorities and governments too. The failure of public transit to satisfy the human need to movement has catalyzed social revolts time and again. The Venezuelan riots of 1989 and Brazilian protest

wave of 2013 were initially sparked by fare increases, before generalizing into mass movements against government corruption and inequality. The 2009 racist police murder of Oscar Grant at a Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) station by a BART police officer ignited a series of protests and riots in Oakland. Autonomous anti-capitalists have also intervened in a variety of mass transit struggles, from strikes to fighting fare increases. And of course, the ongoing Chilean uprising begun with youth evading fares en masse on the Santiago Metro, forcing the government to rescind a fare hike within days.

In the United States, most transit justice work has been carried out by transit rider advocacy organizations. These groups have won crucial reforms and engage in important outreach with riders. In Seattle and Portland, low-income fare discounts and extended transfer tickets have been secured through the sustained organizing of groups like Transit Riders Union and OPAL Environmental Justice League. Pittsburghers for Public Transit has fought for restored service following debilitating budget cuts while Riders Alliance in NYC helped lobby the New York state government for increased transit funding. The Los Angeles-based Bus Riders Union successfully filed a civil rights lawsuit in 1994, forcing the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (LACMTA) to prioritize service for bus riders, overwhelmingly low-income people of color. Relationships should be forged with these organizations and their work must be supported, but their tactics should also be complimented by other direct action and mutual aid tactics.