

# Socialism and dignity: We need free public transit

written by Stephen Millies

August 26, 2020



The lack of an elevator at the Seventh Avenue and 53rd Street station in Manhattan that killed Malaysia Goodson.

New York City bus riders will have to start paying \$2.75 again on Aug. 31. That's 55 times what the fare was in 1948, when it cost a nickel.

Transit systems in Baltimore, Chicago and Detroit have already been collecting fares, while [Atlanta's local buses](#) are still free.

Millions of people need buses to go to work, go to school or see a doctor. [One out of eleven households](#) in the United States doesn't have a car.

Yet public transit in much of the U.S. is inadequate or doesn't exist. Only a quarter of New York City's 472 subway stations are [accessible to disabled people](#).

It was the lack of an elevator at the Seventh Avenue and 53rd Street station in Manhattan that killed [Malaysia Goodson](#). The 22-year-old Black mother fell down the stairs to her death while protecting her one-year-old daughter.

COVID-19 continues to kill people and [a fifth of New Yorkers](#) are unemployed. That hasn't stopped New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo and Metropolitan Transportation Authority CEO Patrick Foye from demanding that every bus rider pay. That includes seniors and disabled people who are charged half fare.

The MTA never stopped making people pay to take the subways. Generosity wasn't the reason why buses were made free on March 23 with backdoor boarding. Cuomo and Foye did so because they feared justified job actions.

At least [127 MTA workers died](#) of COVID-19, forty of whom were bus operators. Over [9,500 MTA workers](#) got sick.

The heroic Transit Workers Union Local 100 members who kept New York City moving were called "thugs" by former Mayor Bloomberg during a 2005 strike. Billionaires like Bloomberg are the real thugs. His [\\$54.9 billion stash](#) could give every New Yorker \$6,383.

Back door loading on buses helped protect the operators from the coronavirus. If even one more bus operator catches the virus, it must be reinstated.

In the city that never sleeps, Cuomo's MTA suspended overnight subway service. One reason was to clean the trains. Another was to kick out homeless people.

In 2017, 75 percent of NYC bus riders were people of color. The [median yearly income of riders with jobs](#) was just \$28,455. The \$2.75 fare eats up 5 percent of these workers' income in a city where 44 percent of households have to spend more than [30 percent of their income on rent](#).

No wonder Mike Quill — the founder of the Transport Workers Union — once called for transit fares to be free.

## **War against public transit**

Most U.S. cities have worse public transportation systems than New York's. The lack of public transit reinforces housing segregation and makes it harder to find and keep a job.

The [original plan](#) for Baltimore's subway included a line from the city's downtown south to the Thurgood Marshall International Airport. Politicians in Anne Arundel County initially blocked it.

These racists didn't want Black youth to come to their suburb and fill out job applications. A light rail line was later built to the area.

New office buildings and industrial parks are often located on the outskirts of metropolitan areas. Capitalists use the lack of bus service as an excuse not to hire Black and Latinx workers living in central cities.

Many folks need cars, including disabled people. Workers who have cars and those

who use public transit shouldn't be pitted against each other.

Millions live in rural areas without any public transportation at all. Seniors suffer the most.

Thousands of miles of electric interurban railroad lines that connected cities and served the countryside were ripped out. Beneficiaries of this wrecking were Big Oil and GM, who wanted to get rid of competition to private automobiles.

The tracks of the [Key Line](#) that connected San Francisco with Oakland and other East Bay cities were removed from the Bay Bridge in 1958.

The largest interurban system was the Pacific Electric. Its "big red cars" once operated over 700 miles of track in Southern California. Richard Nixon's father was employed as a motorman.

The last line from downtown Los Angeles to Long Beach stopped running in 1961. The Los Angeles Metro's A line now uses the right of way.

### **Socialism means good public transit**

Capitalist New York City took 90 years to open three stations on the Second Avenue subway, a line that was first planned in the 1920s.

[Twenty-one cities](#) in the socialist People's Republic of China have opened subway systems just since 2009. The gleaming subway systems in Beijing and Shanghai are the busiest in the world, each moving more than 9 million passengers a day.

That's the power of socialist economic planning. All the socialist countries emphasized public transportation systems in order to make life easier for working people.

In contrast, under capitalism, the main function of New York's MTA is to [pay interest](#)

[on its \\$44 billion debt.](#) In 2018, banksters and other bondholders slurped up over [\\$2.5 billion](#) in tax-free interest.

While this robbery was going on, [cops arrested thousands](#) of poor people because they couldn't afford the fare. Ninety percent of them were Black or Latinx.

The socialist Soviet Union built subway systems in almost all of its large cities. The stations on the Moscow Metro are famous for their beauty.

During World War II, they were used as bomb shelters. Never forget that 27 million Soviet people died defeating Hitler.

Before the Soviet Union was overthrown, the fare on the Metro was five kopeks or less than a nickel.

During the Korean War, U.S. planes dropped 420,000 bombs on Pyongyang. Today, the capital of the socialist Democratic People's Republic of Korea has a beautiful subway system.

The Socialist Republic of Vietnam is building rapid transit systems in both Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City.

Working and poor people in the U.S. need free public transportation. Millions of workers could be employed at union wages building new transit systems and high-speed rail lines between cities.

Two hundred billion dollars a year can be found to do this by abolishing the police and bringing 2.3 million prisoners home to their families.

*The writer is a retired Amtrak worker.*



<https://www.struggle-la-lucha.org/2020/08/26/socialism-and-dignity-we-need-free-public-transit/>