

# High transit fares are a crime! Buses and subways should be free!

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New Yorkers protest against high transit fares and police repression in 2020.

Fares on New York City's buses and subways are 58 times what they were in 1948 when it cost a nickel. That's wholesale robbery of the working class.

The current fare of \$2.90 means people going to and from work have to shell out at least \$29 a week. Many families have to spend \$60 or more per week to get to jobs, schools, or medical appointments.

It's worse for the unemployed. The Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA) wants to raise the fare to at least \$3 next year.

Even compared with other U.S. cities, Gotham's fares are steep. While it costs \$2.50 to get on Chicago's El or Atlanta's metro system, the basic transit fare is \$1.75 in Los Angeles, \$1.70 in Boston, and \$1.25 in Houston.

Hundreds of thousands of people respond to the high fares in New York City by not paying them. They jump the turnstiles, go through a gate, or avoid the farebox on a bus because they can't afford to pay. Good for them!

Transit fares are really transportation taxes on poor and working people. They should be abolished along with sales taxes. Mike Quill — the founder of the Transport Workers Union (TWU) — once called for free fares.

The billionaire class — which always tries to avoid paying taxes —

is howling about what they call "fare evasion." So do their elected officials and other servants in the media.

This form of self-help is really mass resistance by poor and working people, especially youth. When the transit fare was hiked from 20 to 30 cents in January 1970, members of Youth Against War and Fascism held subway gates open to let

thousands of riders through.

Now the MTA claims that [half of the city's bus riders](#) aren't paying the fare. They can't afford it.

The median income of NYC bus riders with a job was just [\\$28,455 in 2017](#). The wealthy and powerful consider them to be criminals.

Instead of admitting that the fare, like rent in New York City, is too high, Mayor Adams has sent another 800 more cops into the subways.

New York Gov. Hochul has dispatched [750 members of the National Guard](#) to the subways. Pay the fare or we'll fix bayonets!

### **Hatred for the poor**

The MTA claims the revenue lost to riders refusing to pay is \$700 million. Compared to the 2023-2024 New York State budget of \$233 billion, the alleged loss amounts to three cents out of a 10-dollar bill.

It's a quarter of the [\\$2.8 billion](#) that the MTA shells out in tax-free interest to bondholders on its \$47 billion debt. Banks and other financial sharks slurp up this tax-free loot like pigs at a feeding trough.

Yet [MTA Chairman Janno Lieber](#) calls non-payment of fares "the No. 1 existential threat" to the transit system. This is the same MTA that initially forbade transit workers from wearing masks during the COVID-19 epidemic.

At least [177 MTA workers](#), most of them members of TWU Local 100, died of COVID while keeping the city moving. Never forget that billionaire Mayor Michael Bloomberg called TWU members "thugs" when they went on strike in 2005.

New York Times columnist Pamela Paul wants to return to mass arrests on the

subways. One of the victims was the artist Michael Stewart, who was beaten to death by cops in the subway in 1983.

Paul's article was entitled "The Solution to New York's Transit Problem Is So Obvious Nobody Wants to Hear It." This writer thought it might be an argument for free fares.

Paul instead calls for [returning to "broken windows" policing](#), where cops look upon any small offense, like non-payment of fares, as an excuse to arrest.

This is the [same Pamela Paul](#) who attacks gender-affirming care for transgender teenagers in her newspaper columns. Paul's writings have been used by transphobic bigots in Idaho to ban such medical care.

### **Free fares!**

All of Manhattan's skyscrapers would be worthless without a transit system. A trillion dollars of real estate depends upon getting workers to them.

Yet, for the last 80 years, the capitalist class has starved the subways in the Big Apple while wrecking transit systems across the United States. Big Oil considered public transit to be dangerous competition.

New York City may be the only metropolis on earth with fewer transit lines than it had in the 1940s. That's because elevated lines like the Third Avenue El in Manhattan and the Bronx were torn down without being replaced by subways.

[Less than 29%](#) of subway stations are accessible to people with disabilities.

Instead of building new subway lines, expressways like the Cross Bronx were rammed through neighborhoods, displacing tens of thousands of families. That's a crime, not poor people getting on a bus for free.

In contrast, the socialist People's Republic of China built [62 new metro lines](#) in 35 cities just in 2021.

The proposed congestion fee that will force cars and trucks entering lower Manhattan to pay a toll will be a fiasco. It will also pit workers who need to use a car against workers who ride a bus or subway.

Just the billions in weapons being sent to kill Palestinian children in Gaza could provide free fare for everyone coast-to-coast. Just as we won Social Security and Medicare, we can win free fares.

