

Transit Riders Union



2020 highlights

Rising to the COVID-19 challenge

In early March, just as shut-downs were starting, we recognized the profound economic impact the pandemic would have on our communities, and especially on people who were already struggling. TRU seized the moment and teamed up with allies at Working Washington and Washington Community Action Network to build a broad coalition that sent a strong and effective message to elected officials across Washington state:

"We urge you to use your emergency powers to preserve medical benefits, halt evictions, prevent utility shut-offs, and provide emergency income assistance."

#SeattleNeeds Relief: Taxing Big Business

In Seattle, we brought the call for economic relief to our Mayor and City Council, holding one of the first socially distant demonstrations in April at City Hall.

Working with both the Tax Amazon Coalition and the JumpStart Seattle Coalition, TRU played a crucial role in winning a progressive payroll-based tax on our city's largest corporations, expected to raise between \$214 and \$250 million per year for COVID relief, affordable housing and a Green New Deal!



#BlackLivesMatter: Police & Public Transit don't mix!

TRU members joined the Seattle uprisings in the wake of George Floyd's killing, and we learned that King County Metro buses were being used to transport a militarized police force to the protests. With allies we raised the alarm — also issuing a joint statement with transit rider groups across the country — and won a commitment from King County Metro to cease this practice.

Supporting Transit Workers & Transit Riders

Public transit is essential, and so are transit workers!

Since the COVID-19 pandemic began, TRU has been working allies including ATU 587, the union that represents Metro drivers and mechanics, to fight back against layoffs and to navigate a rapidly changing safety landscape, to better protect both riders and drivers during the pandemic.



Fighting to Fund Public Transit & Protect Transit Riders



Between plummeting sales tax revenue, Tim Eyman's I-976, and lost fares due to COVID, public transit funding is in big trouble. TRU worked with allies locally and nationally to push for federal relief funding for transit, and we're gearing up to fight for progressive, sustainable transit funding next year in Olympia, too.

On top of all that, Seattle's transit measure passed in 2014 expired this year, threatening deeper cuts. When Mayor Durkan proposed a much smaller replacement measure, TRU and allies stepped up and pushed for funding more adequate to the need. Due to our pressure, the city council approved a measure that will raise 50% more than the mayor's original proposal, a total of almost \$40 million annually for bus service and affordable transit programs.

Then, we got out the vote! We collaborated with a new coalition of transit rider groups around the country on an Oct. 6 day of action, launching the Seattle Safe Transit Project. In the month leading up to the election, TRU volunteers assembled and distributed over 1,000 transit rider care kits with masks, hand sanitizer and information about the ballot measure. Our efforts were featured in The Seattle Times, the Seattle Channel and the South Seattle Emerald. Seattle Prop 1 passed with over 80% of the vote!

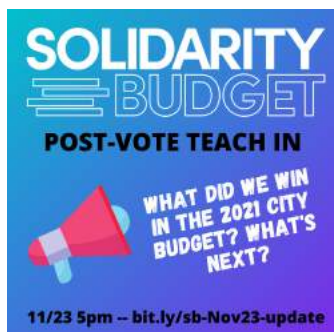
ORCA for All & Decriminalizing Fare Nonpayment

When 2020 began, TRU was in the middle of a major campaign called ORCA for All. Our central aim was to win a Seattle law requiring that large employers subsidize transit for all their workers, including low-paid workers who are currently much less likely to receive an employer-paid transit pass than high-paid workers.



When the pandemic hit we had to press pause on this legislation. But we did make progress on another piece of the ORCA for All campaign: decriminalizing fare nonpayment. After continual pressure from TRU and allies, Sound Transit announced it will run a "fare enforcement ambassador" pilot program in 2021, focusing on education and connecting people with affordable transit programs rather than fines and citations. We will be monitoring this closely and continuing to push for a commitment to divorce any future approach to fare nonpayment entirely from policing and the court system.

This fall also saw the rollout of a free annual transit pass program for the lowest-income riders, up to 80% of the Federal Poverty Level— a program we fought for for years. We are excited to see it begin, and will continue working to expand free transit to more and more riders until transit is fully-funded and free for all!



Organizing for a Solidarity Budget

Facing a challenging 2021 Seattle city budget process, TRU teamed up with allies to build a huge coalition (200+ groups!) determined to stick together in solidarity and not be divided and conquered as we championed a pro-people budget:

One that divests from policing and invests in Black lives, instead of doubling down on centuries of racial oppression. One that supports Seattle residents and small businesses struggling through the COVID-19 recession, instead of making things worse by slashing city programs. One that advances toward an equitable, world-

class transportation system and a carbon-free city, instead of letting that vision recede dangerously into the future.

With leadership from Decriminalize Seattle and King County Equity Now, we fought hard to divest from the Seattle Police Department and invest in Black communities and community-based health and safety systems. While there is much further yet to go to actually meaningfully shrink the police force, the council reduced SPD's budget by almost 20%, shifting some functions to other city departments and some funds to policing alternatives. Excitingly, at least \$30 million will go to a community-led Participatory Budgeting process!

Here are just a few highlights of other budget victories won through the efforts of the Solidarity Budget and allied groups:

- With the MASS Coalition, we fought to reverse damaging cuts to the transportation budget that would leave many communities behind. We won funds to complete the Georgetown to South Park Trail, repair sidewalks on Rainier Avenue, add protected bike lanes in South Seattle, complete the Rt. 44 multimodal corridor project, and build new sidewalks on Beacon Hill.
- Alongside our friends at SHARE, WHEEL and Nickelsville, we fought for city funding to support SHARE & WHEEL's 24-hour shelters, Nickelsville's Tiny House Villages, and SHARE's Tent City 3.
- With the Mercer Mega Block Alliance, we fought to restore \$30 million to purchase land for community-driven development projects in neighborhoods at high risk of displacement.



Encampment Outreach & Solidarity Fundraising



Governments should be stepping up to shelter and house our homeless neighbors during this pandemic. Unfortunately, that's not happening at scale. So this year, TRU members and friends stepped up — reaching out to people living in encampments, asking what they need and getting it for them.

We began fundraising for this project in August and already we've raised over \$12,000, which goes directly to purchasing food, propane, batteries, water and other basic necessities.

This year TRU also mobilized the generosity of our members and wider network of supporters to raise funds for allies:

We collected donations of groceries and raised over \$2,500 for WHEEL's 24-hour women's shelter.

Practicing international solidarity with our sister organization Riders' Rights Lebanon, we helped to raise over \$2,000 for out of work bus and van drivers with no safety net in Beirut.

Working with our allies in the MASS (Move All Seattle Sustainably) coalition, we organized a solidarity fundraiser raising over \$7,000 for Seattle organizations WA-BLOC, El Comité and Creative Justice, which are all doing vital work organizing with Black and brown youth and immigrant communities in Seattle.