Summary of Transit Riders United and BUSRIDER Workshop
Silicon Valley Let’s Get Moving Summit, 2015

Bus riders are generally low-income people of color and rely on transit to access jobs, schools, and services, but are excluded from the decision-making process around transit issues. Engaging San Jose bus riders to form a riders’ association has allowed transportation advocates to learn about the everyday struggles low-income commuters face. Ridership organizing has included on-the-bus surveying and engaging existing low-income transit users on how low-income bus riders utilize the Valley Transportation Authority transit system. We have learned about the logistical and access challenges of low-income bus riders to commute to work at varying distances.

Typical strategies to engage low-income people of color are not as effective because they work several jobs for long and odd hours and have limited time to participate in civic discourse and face language barriers. Engaging residents on a bus with culturally competent organizers or activating an organization’s existing membership is effective because riders are more open to discussing transit issues during their long commutes or speak to an organization they are already familiar with. Engaging bus riders will be a critical vehicle to amplifying their voices in Santa Clara County, specifically in San Jose, to influence decisions that affect their lives.

Purpose of Transit Riders United/BUSRIDERS Session:
Inform and energize conference attendees to participate in transit equity campaigns through transit rider organizing and mobilization.

The following were the takeaways from both presenters and attendees who spoke during the session:

- Although there is a stigma associated with riding the bus - "Why would I ever ride the bus?" - it can be overcome with storytelling. One attendee told a great story about meeting his wife while on a bus in Los Angeles. He considered driving that day, but was lucky to have chose riding the bus instead!
- Many decisions are made by elected officials who have never been on a bus. What if we got them to ride a bus?
- The biggest issue that came up during Sacred Heart’s survey of its own members was about how difficult it is to actually get to Sacred Heart via public transit.
- Buses represent a democracy and where we are socioeconomically in the world. Former Mayor of Bogota, Enrique Penalosa often proclaims that “In terms of transportation, an advanced city is not one where even the poor use cars but rather where even the rich use public transport.”
- Attendees had the following answers to questions about transit:
  - Use one word to describe how you believe your transit system should be: integrated, just, better, equitable, fluid, accessible, interconnected, fair, democratic, and affordable.
  - What should an equitable/just transportation system in Santa Clara County look like? Affordable, frequent & reliable service, accessible, multiple options, efficient, and accountable to EVERYONE.
  - What will it take to realize this vision? Metropolitan transit agency, people power, diverse community voices at the table, community input, funding, and informed community.
  - What role should transit riders play in building this vision? What role do you play? Use public transit as much as we can, people power, transit users should be central to decision-making, provide insight/wisdom, provide perspective, be part of decision-making process, establish priorities of transportation funding, share real experience of transit riders, help elevate voices in decision-making process, and set priorities, be a part of the decision-making.