

TransLink Opts to Continue Curfew on Bus Riders

June 25, 2003

In a showdown with the TransLink Board of Directors, the Bus Riders Union called on the regional transit authority to lift the curfew on transit dependent people, by reinstating full 7 days/week Night Owl bus service. During today's TransLink Board meeting, as Board members opted to extend night bus service on only Fridays and Saturdays, BRU organizer Beth Grayer rose to condemn this decision which leaves bus riders in the cold 5 days of the week. Following a public statement by Grayer, members of the Bus Riders Union walked out of the meeting in protest.

"We demand an end to the curfew now!" said Grayer, 22, who works for a grassroots women's organization. "Bus riders can't wait for studies and these delays when our time, safety, and economic livelihoods are at stake. This curfew is systemic racism in practice, an attack on marginalized people and communities in this region. The Bus Riders Union will not stand by while TransLink perpetuates this injustice against bus riders. Bus riders all over this region are enraged at this complete disregard for their rights and well being, and we will take action. If you do not have the political will to do the right thing, to bring back the night owl buses, there will be no peace in this boardroom!"

Earlier in the meeting Bus Riders Union delegates made presentations to the Board, attempting to impress upon them the importance of Night Owl bus service to low-wage night workers, who are mostly women and disproportionately from immigrant and refugee communities. "The central problem here is that TransLink is disconnected from the experiences of actual transit users," said Cameron Dean, a Bus Riders Union delegate and student at Simon Fraser University. "How many of you are enslaved to low-wage jobs? How many of you have no choice but to rely on the bus? How do you engage with the transit users whose lives are affected by your decisions? I'd like to remind TransLink that public transit is a human need in our region and your transportation policy should reflect that."

Dean's presentation to the TransLink Board summed up the anger and frustration felt by hundreds of bus riders. "An example of our transit system's failures is the walk home - which seems to be a frequent experience of people who can't afford cars. Walking from Burnaby to Port Moody on the Barnet Highway for 3 hours at night is not fun, I can tell you that myself. I suspect, besides killing our social lives that you are also trying to kill us."

"Eighty percent of transit users use the bus exclusively. Before TransLink spends a cent on Skytrain, it is reasonable to argue that they should first allocate billions for buses. It's important to recognize that social justice and public health should be the guiding principles behind transportation policy, not the 2010 Olympic bid. That means more buses and lower fares and it means, today, a vote on a plan for full night owl bus service and public transit that runs 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Otherwise, I'm afraid that TransLink appears to be unfit to be making transportation decisions."

Over the next month the Bus Riders Union will be collecting testimonials from people impacted by the Night Owl cuts, gathering endorsements for the campaign, and organizing bus riders for the next TransLink meeting - which they have vowed to attend in greater numbers.

BUS RIDERS UNION MEDIA CONTACTS: MARTHA ROBERTS OR AIYANAS ORMOND – 604 215 2662.