



2002-2003

Catholic Campaign for Human Development

Profile of a Funded Group

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Transit Matters

Do you remember the children's song about the wheels on the bus go round and round? Wheels aren't supposed to fall off, but for bus riders this summer in Baltimore, that's exactly what happened. In fact, the **wheels fell off the buses eighteen times**. A subsequent investigation revealed a host of technical problems, management issues, and communication pitfalls in Maryland's Transportation Administration. One other thing was clear: **buses are the backbone of transit** for Baltimore city's metropolitan area.

That is one of the reasons the Citizens Planning and Housing Association (CPHA) began organizing riders of buses, riders of Metro, the Light Rail and MARC trains. In 1999 the **Transit Riders League** was born, and today there are over 1,000 members. Transit Riders League works on four main issues: a) improvements to and expansion of MARC train service; b) access to service for riders with

disabilities; c) customer service; and d) driver accountability. It is also working cooperatively with the CPHA Transportation Committee on comprehensive bus route restructuring. This plan will be presented in early fall 2003 to the MTA.

TRL uses three means to **influence transportation outcomes** in Maryland: 1) impact funding decisions, 2) research and prepare policy choices, and 3) influence MTA direct services. But, as TRL's community organizer Caroline Harmon acknowledges, "this [point of delivery] service is the hardest to influence." Nonetheless, **TRL successes since 2001** include new contracts to install and maintain modern bus shelters in the region, new information boxes at every stop, a program to provide regular maintenance at CPHA's list of "Worst Bus Stops". New Sunday subway service has been added and there are more mechanisms of state accountability. The state's publication of "Maryland Transit Guideline" identifies necessary conditions for providing high-quality transit service.



Who makes up the Transit Riders League at CPHA? People like **Barbara Cutko, a retired school social worker**. For her, it was one ironic event that led her to get involved. As a social worker, she rode the #8 bus regularly from Baltimore County to a Baltimore City school. One morning, she passed a mom with whom she was planning to meet later that day. In fact, the parent

had left much, much earlier to get to her appointment with Ms. Cutko. As a city resident, this parent had several buses to ride and wait for just to *get* to an appointment with the social worker. For Ms. Cutko, the #8 bus ride was never quite the same.

TRL is also made of people like ***Norma Jennings, a senior citizen who has no driver's license and who is legally blind.*** She is retired from the Social Security Administration and has ridden public transit all her life. Until TRL came along, she was never involved with transportation issues. But Norma proved to be very skilled during early dialogues with the MTA and transportation unions.

TRL is made of people like ***Eugene Peterson, a regular MARC train rider.*** He came to TRL with lots of knowledge and skills, but is one whose perspective has broadened immensely since he joined. He is now more informed about the daily concerns of bus riders, about the effects of transportation decisions on low income riders and about community needs, not only commuter convenience. Three different people, one Transit Riders League.

Legislative battles for TRL members, however, will not be easy to fight in 2003. Environmental concerns and transportation equity appear *not* to be priorities for the new Maryland governor. The former governor's "Transit Initiative" funding sources are particularly under attack. The current administration favors the highway lobby and favors balancing the budget with funding cuts to MTA. A current bill that introduces a 1% sales tax increase to fund public transit costs sends a dangerous signal for the future. As Caroline Harmon points out, "This policy shift hurts poor people and transit

riders by shifting more of the [economic] burden on them." Along with the national economic downturn and a state budget deficit, the fight is more challenging than ever.

But TRL's successes are built on their strengths. One of their greatest strengths is in their people. For instance, TRL works hard to recruit young people and young leadership. With a recent **grant from Catholic Campaign for Human Development**, a graduate intern from University of Maryland's School of Social Work is organizing youth and young adults in 2002-2003 around transit issues. "**Students for Better Transit**" will officially emerge as an active TRL player this year.

Transit issues affect the health of our city and region. We have CPHA and the TRL to thank for their **annual State of the Buses reports**. As a result, the 2002 MTA bus wheel failures are more explicable and the solutions more feasible.



TRANSIT RIDERS IN LOBBY ACTION
(photo courtesy of Transit Riders League)

The next **Transit Riders League lobby night** in Annapolis is **March 17th**. To support them, please call (410) 539-1369 x236 or contact Caroline Harmon, CarolineH@CPHABaltimore.org. A bus leaves the CPHA building on West Saratoga Street at 5:30pm. With MTA's help, **Transit Riders** and their supporters will make it **to Annapolis, wheels and all.**