

2017-2018 Annual Report



Letter from the Executive Director



Dear Friend,

There is a heartening lesson to draw from this year's progress on transit: community organizing works.

Seven years ago, we launched the Riders Alliance with the idea of bringing riders together to fix public transit—an essential public service that so often feels far from the public's reach. Almost every year, it seemed, the fare would rise and service would decline, entirely beyond riders' control.

Now, thanks to deep commitment and years of effort from Riders Alliance members and allies, we are celebrating progress on transit on many fronts.

In Albany, Governor Cuomo and state lawmakers have responded to our members' advocacy and organizing by passing congestion pricing—a **new policy that will provide more than \$1 billion every year to modernize the transit system.** It's not a silver bullet, but it's the most significant new investment in public transit in a generation, and may mark the beginning of the revitalization of our subway system. Winning congestion pricing was a broad coalition effort, and our members were at the heart of it.

At City Hall, this year's New York City budget includes more than \$100 million for half-price MetroCards for low-income New Yorkers—a program we call "Fair Fares." **This is a huge win, not only for the 700,000 low-income New Yorkers who won't as often be forced to choose between**

a meal and a Metrocard, but for all of us who are trying to build a fairer and more inclusive city.

And at the MTA, our advocacy alongside our allies in the Bus Turnaround Campaign helped win an unprecedented commitment to improve local bus service through vital tools like all-door boarding, transit signal priority and redesigned bus routes. More than 2 million bus riders will benefit every day from these changes in policy.

Step by step, neighborhood by neighborhood, **we are building transit riders into a powerful constituency that our elected officials can't ignore.** And at our core, that is what the Riders Alliance is doing: not just winning policy changes that will make a difference in New Yorkers' lives, but building the power we'll need to make a difference in the long term. There is more work to do in the coming years, and we're building the power we'll need to get it done.

Thank you for being part of our mission, and for being part of the team.

Best,

Handwritten signature of John Raskin.

John Raskin
Executive Director



Letter from a Riders Alliance Member

Dear fellow transit rider,

In 2016, I began writing a blog about the challenges facing low-income New Yorkers—including **the difficulties we face affording and accessing public transit**. As soon as I heard about the Riders Alliance—I was doing research for my blog—I immediately reached out to see how I could help, and **I got involved in the campaign for better bus service**. As someone living with a chronic illness, I know first-hand how important it is to be able to access work, health care and family in different parts of the city, and **I can't do that when the bus is slow and unreliable—or sometimes doesn't even show up at all**.

What I didn't realize when I joined the bus campaign is that I was **joining a movement**. Because that's what we are—not just riders, not just New Yorkers who are frustrated with the status quo, but a movement of people coming together to demand change.

The heart of the Riders Alliance is people just like me who care deeply about our city, who believe that the status quo is unacceptable, and who are willing to invest our time and energy to make our city better.

If you're reading this letter, it's because you're like me: **you know that in order to win lasting change, we need a movement**. We need for all those millions of transit riders who want to make a difference to join together, to rise up and to demand that the people running our city and state listen to us.

There are eight million people on the subway and bus every day. They're not all members of the Riders Alliance. But they will be! **And I wouldn't want to be the governor or the mayor who stands in our way.**

Best,

Ramona Ferreyra
Riders Alliance Member

That's what we are—not just riders, but a movement of people coming together to demand change.

Winning Fair Fares for Low-Income Riders

Public transit should be a gateway to opportunity for all New Yorkers—a way to connect with jobs and education in one of the wealthiest cities in the world. But for too long, hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers living below the poverty line have been unable to afford public transit. The turnstile has been just another barrier to opportunity.

So when our partner the Community Service Society proposed a discount transit fare for low-income New Yorkers, we jumped at the opportunity to make public transit live up to its promise. Our members organized, strategized, lobbied elected officials, called the mayor, recorded videos and spoke courageously about their own struggles to choose between a Metrocard and other household necessities. And now, for the first time ever, the New York City budget includes more than \$100 million for half-priced Metrocards for 700,000 low-income New Yorkers. In other words, **we won Fair Fares!**

Our coalition, led by our staff and members and the Community Service Society, included more than 70 organizations and 50 elected officials who endorsed Fair Fares.

Fair Fares wouldn't have happened without powerful grassroots organizing, and it would also not have happened without the leadership of our elected officials. That includes **City Council Speaker Corey Johnson**, who made Fair Fares a top priority in budget negotiations; **Mayor Bill de Blasio**, who ultimately made the program a reality; **47 other City Council members** who endorsed the proposal and pushed for its success; and city-wide elected officials like **then-Public Advocate (now Attorney General) Letitia James** and **Comptroller Scott Stringer** who joined us from the beginning. And so many more—it really takes a village.

Thanks to the **incredible campaigning of riders, activists and allies**, the fare will now fall for the hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers who are struggling hardest to get by.

“Fair Fares means I won't have to choose between a basic necessity and a Metrocard. It means I can afford to get to work.”

—Darlene Jackson,
Riders Alliance member



Rescuing the Subway

“If our elected officials don’t do their job, we can’t get to our jobs. That’s why I’m part of this fight: to make sure our subway cars—and our elected officials—stop stalling.”
— Reema Hijazi, Riders Alliance member

Our subways have been falling apart gradually for years: equipment has gotten older, performance has become spottier, and our elected leaders have steadily siphoned off money to use for other priorities.

In 2017, the gradual slide became a sudden crisis: in the “summer of hell” and beyond, it felt like **every day we left for work without knowing if or when we were going to arrive at our jobs.**

The Riders Alliance sprang into action. When the governor tried to avoid taking responsibility for the steep decline in subway service, **we brought hundreds of riders together to rally outside his office**—and our members launched the viral hashtag #CuomosMTA. **We demanded the governor create a serious plan** to modernize the transit system and the money to make it possible.

When the governor finally responded with a proposal to raise billions of dollars for transit through congestion pricing, **we led a grassroots charge to support the idea.** We rallied, traveled to Albany, met with legislators and spoke out in the press to highlight the transit crisis and press for a solution. We launched our first-ever texting action program, signing up thousands of transit riders to become activists right there while waiting for their trains.

And we made progress. First, in 2018, the state budget included a new fee on taxis and services like Lyft and Uber, which together are now producing hundreds of millions of dollars each year to improve transit service. **In 2019, we helped lead a broad coalition effort that won congestion pricing, which will produce more than a billion dollars every year to modernize public transit in New York.**

Congestion pricing will be transformational for our city, but it’s not a silver bullet that can solve the transit crisis on its own. We will need new revenue sources to fund the rest of the MTA’s ambitious modernization plan, and we will need to work hard to guarantee that new funding is used efficiently and fairly to pay for improvements that will make a noticeable difference to transit riders. **Congestion pricing won’t solve our transit problems, but it will help make all the other problems that much easier to solve, and our members should be proud of the leading role they played in winning this historic change.**





Turning Around the Bus

The bus is slow. The bus is unreliable. But also, **the bus is one of New York's best weapons in the fight for economic opportunity and social justice in our city.** Buses can reach into every neighborhood, allowing people to live in more affordable communities, often far from the subway, and still access jobs and education throughout the entire region.

Unfortunately, today's bus system isn't living up to its promise. Buses run on outdated routes, they arrive infrequently and in bunches of two or three, and they get stuck in traffic, **dooming some of the most vulnerable New Yorkers to unfair hours-long commutes.**

Along with our allies in the Bus Turnaround Campaign, we are fighting for buses that work: **fast, reliable, and convenient**, not just on Select Bus Service lines but on hundreds of local routes in all five boroughs.

Our effort took a big step forward in the last year. First, **the MTA released the most ambitious new plan it has ever produced to reinvent bus service.** The new Bus Plan includes key endorsements of our top priorities for bus service, including implementation of all-door boarding citywide; system-wide redesign of the bus map; evening out bus stops; and a new focus on customer experience, including ADA-approved digital screens on all buses.

Then, Mayor de Blasio committed the City to doing its part, pledging action on some of our key priorities including a significant expansion of bus lanes and a faster implementation of Transit Signal Priority, important changes to city streets that help bus riders get ahead.

Now we're working hard to hold the MTA and the City to their commitments, and to guarantee that bus riders continue to play an active role in shaping transportation policy. We'll keep pushing our elected leaders to think big. **If we succeed, we won't only have faster buses; we will also have a fairer, more inclusive city that helps everyone find success.**

"I joined this campaign because I believe that our buses should serve all New Yorkers and serve them well. If New York is a city of opportunity, then our bus system should reflect that ideal."
—Mitch White, Riders Alliance member



Powering a Movement



“There are eight million transit riders every day. We should be so powerful that politicians are shaking in their boots.”
— Brian Zumba, Riders Alliance member

We have an ambitious agenda, but we understand that in politics, good ideas don't always win. **Power wins.**

That's why we're building power: **a grassroots movement for better public transit.**

Often, our elected leaders aren't paying attention to what our city will need 50 years in the future, and they're not even thinking about what millions of New Yorkers need right now.

They care about what their constituents are demanding of them, particularly when those constituents are **organized, informed and dogged** in their pursuit. That's what we do.

Our job is to take all the frustration that people experience on public transit, and the anger over an unjust transit system that makes life harder, and to **channel it into real power that will make a difference in people's lives.**

Some people become powerful because they are wealthy, or because they are well connected. **We are powerful because we are organized.**

Thank you for making that possible.

Statement of Activities

For the year ended September 30, 2018 (Fiscal Year October–September) with comparative totals for the year ended September 30, 2017.

Riders Alliance is a partner project for the Fund for the City of New York.

Statement of Activities		
Expenses	FY2017-2018	FY2016-2017
Staff	\$746,364	\$582,401
Office and Administration	\$142,323	\$116,295
Programming OTPS	\$49,203	\$57,245
Fundraising OTPS	\$63,557	\$10,146
Building a Reserve Fund	\$200,000	\$100,000
Grand Total	\$1,201,448	\$866,088
Revenue		
Individual Donors	\$509,311.81	\$336,893.01
Monthly Membership	\$76,615.00	\$60,529
Foundation Support	\$514,450.00	\$387,500
Corporate Support	\$125,000.00	\$85,000
Grand Total	\$1,225,377	\$869,922

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Our Mission

The Riders Alliance fights for reliable, affordable, world-class public transit in order to build a more just and sustainable New York. We organize subway and bus riders to develop grassroots power across racial, economic and neighborhood lines. Together, we hold our elected officials accountable, engage the public, and take direct action to guarantee that riders have a powerful voice in the decisions that affect us.

