

For Release Wednesday, May 29, 2013  
Contact: Greg LeRoy 202-232-1616 x 211

## **“Bosses for Buses”**

# **Study: Employer Support for Transit is Surging Locally but Fractured Nationally**

Washington, DC—American employers are organizing and winning better public transportation in many metro areas. Major employers such as universities and hospitals and coalitions of businesses help explain why state and local ballot initiatives for transit consistently win more than 70 percent of the time.

Yet at the national level, there is not a unified corporate voice for transit; this has been especially evident during three recent federal debates that affected this vital public service. Instead, there are disparate voices speaking only to selected aspects of transit.

Local business coalitions—united by geography—are mostly powered by companies that *depend on* transit, whereas national advocacy is dominated by companies that make a business *selling to* transit agencies. As well, there are competing priorities within public transportation circles, such capital budgets versus operating funds.

Those are the key conclusions in a major study released today by Good Jobs First cataloging the many kinds of businesses that support public transit and the diverse ways they express that support. “Bosses for Buses” is believed to be the most wide-ranging study ever published on the subject; it was released at a national tele-press conference and is available at [www.goodjobsfirst.org](http://www.goodjobsfirst.org).

“The remarkable local support for transit demonstrated by so many employers is truly heartening,” said Greg LeRoy, executive director of Good Jobs First and lead author of the study. “But the lack of a unified corporate voice on federal transit issues is equally disheartening. It begs the big-picture question: when will the growing corporate consensus for transit outside the Beltway translate into stronger action inside the Beltway?”

The study finds most promising the formation and growth of business-led groups in specific metropolitan areas, as well as some outstanding individual large employers—often “eds and meds,” or universities and hospitals. And every day, tens of thousands of employers subsidize transit use—or facilitate the use of pre-tax income for monthly transit fare cards or commuter van pools.

At the national level, many businesses that sell goods and services to transit agencies belong to the American Public Transportation Association (APTA), the voice of big-city transit agencies. The study also describes how employers participate within the Community Transportation Association of America, the Association for Commuter Transportation, and Best Workplaces for Commuters.

Aspects of the 2009 federal stimulus, the belated 2012 reauthorization of the surface transportation act, and the big January 2013 federal income tax compromise all bore upon transit, yet none drew a unified corporate voice for transit service. Nor has there been corporate support for federal aid to shield transit operations from the catastrophic national wave of service cuts, fare hikes and route abandonments seen since 2008.

The study profiles outstanding networks and companies:

- Washington University in St. Louis, which has anchored Citizens for Modern Transportation, a winning coalition, and has long promoted and subsidized transit use by its workforce and student body;
- Cleveland Clinic and University Hospitals of Cleveland, the city's two largest employers, which led the successful campaign for the HealthLine, one of the nation's most successful Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) lines;
- Friends of Transit in the Phoenix metropolitan area, a winning spinoff of the Greater Phoenix Chamber of Commerce, with its "Transit Means Business" campaign grooming the next generation of business leaders for transit;
- The Baton Rouge General Medical Center, which joined with other employers and a faith-based community group to win a 2012 ballot initiative that will over time double the amount of bus service there;
- Amalgamated Transit Union Local 726 on Staten Island, New York City, which organized riders and businesses to win dedicated bridge bus lanes, larger buses, and a fare cut that more than doubled ridership;
- Move LA, a large business, labor and environmental coalition that has won legislation that will nearly double the size of Los Angeles County's fixed-guideway transit system;
- Ameriprise Financial, an investment services firm in Minneapolis that was the biggest early supporter of Metropass, enrolling 47 percent of its 6,000 downtown employees in the program's first month;

- Purple Line Now!, a business-backed coalition that is now winning a sorely needed arc-shaped light rail line connecting inner-ring suburbs and four subway “spokes” in the Maryland counties that straddle Washington, DC;
- Transportation Management Association of Lake-Cook, a longstanding transportation demand management project with “Shuttle Bug” service linking corporate office parks and campuses north of Chicago with transit;
- McCaffery Interests, a Chicago-based integrated development firm that specializes in large, mixed-use transit-oriented development (TOD) projects;
- United Streetcar of Clackamas, Oregon, rebirthing the long-lost streetcar manufacturing industry in the United States with good union jobs and high domestic U.S. content; and
- “Third-party administrators” such as WageWorks and Edenred that manage the business of collecting pre-tax income and providing monthly transit pass cards. This obscure niche industry has recently undergone a great deal of consolidation, and with the Association for Commuter Transportation, it advocates to ensure that federal tax benefits for transit are at parity with those for parking.

In sum, the study finds corporate support for transit in America to be remarkably broad and diverse, but also highly fragmented. Just when market forces and energy policy beg for a unified national employer voice for growing and improving transit service, what we find instead are disparate voices speaking only to selected transit issues.

“Public transit is far too important to be left only to those companies that make their business *selling to* transit agencies,” concluded LeRoy. “Far more numerous—and deserving to be heard—are those employers that *depend on* transit for their workforces. When will *they* organize nationally?”