



**OUR  
PUBLIC  
TRANSPORT**

**PEOPLE'S PUBLIC  
TRANSPORT POLICY**



# **PUBLIC OWNERSHIP**



This chapter was written for the ITF by We Own It (<https://weownit.org.uk/>) to inform policy proposals on public ownership for the People's Public Transport Policy ([www.OPTpolicy.org](http://www.OPTpolicy.org)). The ITF would like to thank We Own It for its contribution.

Each chapter in the People's Public Transport Policy focuses on different policy issues related to public transport. The chapters include case studies, as well as campaign materials and educational resources.

The ITF's Our Public Transport (OPT) programme promotes a social model of public transport. A social model includes organisational and employment rights for workers and requires that any expansion of public transport guarantees decent jobs.

**OPT:**

- works in target cities to strengthen the voices of workers in the development of new urban transport modes, including bus rapid transit (BRT), and in negotiating the transition from informal to formal work
- campaigns to improve working conditions for all public transport workers – informal transport workers in particular – through increasing their industrial power. This includes building union networks in public transport multinational corporations, developing alliances with passengers, communities and other organisations and promoting women's employment in public transport
- works to develop an alternative public transport policy – one that is built on public ownership, public financing, decent jobs and union rights for workers

[www.OurPublicTransport.org](http://www.OurPublicTransport.org)



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1.

## WE BELIEVE IN PUBLIC OWNERSHIP

Public transport belongs to all of us – you, me, and everyone. Our buses, mini-buses, taxi-buses, transit, metros, trolleybuses, trams, urban and national railways – all comprise our public transport.

And who are we? We are the workers. We are the community. We are the passengers. We are the public. We built it, we operate it, we pay for it, we use it, we care for it – we should own it.

Public transport is an opportunity for community, connection, liveable places and decent jobs – not private profit. We will fight together in solidarity across the globe for OUR public transport.

Who **are we not**? We are not the shareholders. We are not the private investors. We are not the multinationals bidding for local contracts. We do not believe in making a profit from public transport. Public transport is not a market opportunity, it exists to support our economy and society.



**I believe that we are not just transport workers – above all we are transport users, and so are our wives, our children, our families and our friends.”**

Francisco Mora, SNTT, Colombia

In December 2017, we asked YOU – ITF-affiliated unions, transport experts, passengers and the public – to fill out the #OurPublicTransport public ownership survey. In participating in the survey you helped to create this policy document.

The #OurPublicTransport public ownership survey:

- we got 319 responses from at least 22 countries: India, Thailand, UK, Mexico, Kenya, The Netherlands, The Philippines, Switzerland, Norway, Germany, Australia, USA, Turkey, Estonia, Indonesia, Russia, Ireland, New Zealand, Argentina, Spain, Colombia, Belgium
- at least 30 different unions are represented in the results. 122 respondents were from a transport union, 68 from another kind of union, 30 from passenger groups (15 of whom also belonged to a union) and 95 with no affiliations

We have used your answers and your feedback to help write this policy. We have also used research, conversations with partners and past work.<sup>1</sup>



**We need to be clear on the political meaning of ‘our’ – it needs to be inclusive of the millions of people relying on public transport, moving around our cities and the millions who do not have access. We need to ensure we include the mobility needs of women, disabled people and elderly people into this political aspect ... It is about building industrial power, but also laying the deeper political foundations for bigger, long-term change.’**

ITF, Our Public Transport policy group

We hope this report will inspire you and inform you in your fight for publicly owned public transport, wherever you are in the world.

**1.1**

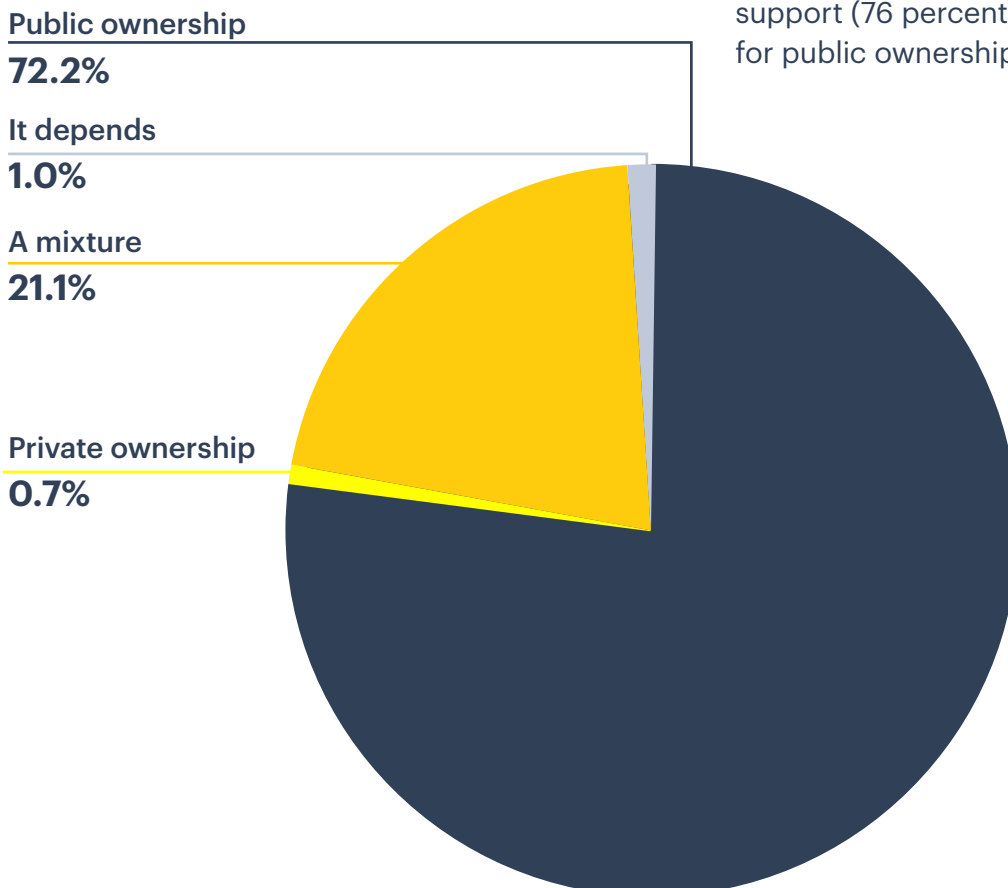
**WHY DO WE BELIEVE IN PUBLIC OWNERSHIP?**

- we all need the vital service provided by public transport to live our lives. We need public transport to take us to work, to school, to the shops; at a price we can afford. Public transport is key local and national infrastructure that we cannot do without – it is not an optional extra
- public transport affects our everyday lives, our communities, our countries and our environment. That means we should all have a real say over it. Instead of letting private companies decide what happens, we want a democratic say over the future of our public transport

- you do not really get much 'choice' in public transport. You get on the first bus that comes along. There is only one train line. Public transport is a natural monopoly and a network. It takes planning to deliver an integrated service. It does not make sense to create an artificial 'market'. Instead we can run public transport as a whole network that works in harmony for the benefit of the people it serves

Perhaps these reasons help explain why public ownership is popular. In our survey, 77 percent of you said that public ownership is best for public transport, as opposed to 21 percent who said they preferred a mixture of public and private. Our survey sample is not considered representative, as mostly members of transport unions and transport interest groups answered it. However, a much wider survey conducted by the right-wing Legatum Institute found similar levels of support (76 percent) among British people for public ownership of trains in the UK.<sup>2</sup>

**Figure 1: What form of ownership is best for public transport?**





**1.2 WHAT IS PUBLIC OWNERSHIP?**

We believe that public transport cannot be considered to be in public ownership unless it meets two vital criteria:

**1. THE SERVICE IS OWNED BY GOVERNMENT AND RUN ON BEHALF OF THE PUBLIC**

In this case, government can be local, regional or national. Ownership by democratic government on behalf of citizens is an important baseline because it means that all citizens in a certain area, rather than just a sub-group, collectively own public transport. The public can hold government accountable for a service that rightfully belongs to everyone.

**2. PROFITS ARE REINVESTED**

Public ownership means people come first. Profits must be reinvested for the benefit of the public. This might mean direct reinvestment into the service or returning money to the public purse, at the appropriate level (local, regional or national). There should not be any shareholder dividends. We do not believe in public transport that makes a private profit.

**Figure 2: What models of ownership fit your definition of public ownership?**



**Case study: READING, UK**

Reading Buses in the UK is owned and operated by Reading Council. All profits are reinvested either into the service or to other council projects. This allows for less profitable routes to be subsidised by more popular routes.

As a municipally owned bus service, Reading Buses can invest an additional GBP3 million a year in the bus network (around 12-15 percent of its annual turnover) because it does not pay out dividends to private shareholders. The extra money means better-quality buses, which encourages people to take the bus in Reading.<sup>3</sup>



**Public ownership is the best way to ensure public transport is purposely designed as a network of public services rather than as a means to provide profit to private transport companies and their shareholders."**

Ian Taylor, Transport for Quality of Life

**QUESTION: DOES PUBLIC OWNERSHIP MEAN NATIONALISATION?**

In our survey, we asked you which models of ownership you would count as public ownership. Overwhelmingly, you voted for nationalisation – where the national government owns and operates the service. Local ownership or municipalisation got fewer votes.

Traditionally, public ownership has often been assumed to mean that national government owns it. However, local public ownership is just as valid as national public ownership – and in fact it is complementary to it. For many urban public transport services like buses, trams, local rail and taxis, it makes sense to operate them at the city level, locally or regionally.



**QUESTION: WHAT ABOUT CO-OPERATIVES? DO THEY COUNT AS PUBLIC OWNERSHIP?**

If passengers, workers or communities own and run the service in a co-operative form, this is much better than private ownership. Co-operatives offer opportunities to reinvest surplus income for public benefit, and they can mean much more accountability to passengers, workers or both.

However, we would not count co-operatives as publicly-owned organisations because they are accountable to a group of members rather than to all citizens in the area. They are working on behalf of a sub-group of the public, not the whole public. Also, private companies can buy them out unless there is a protective 'asset lock', which prevents this from happening.

Of course, we need to be flexible in moving towards public ownership. Many thousands of informal transport workers provide services to millions of people across the world. Most urban passenger transport in Africa and Asia is informal and the transport gig economy in the 'developed' world (Uber and similar services) is increasing too. In this context, private ownership often means bad conditions and a lack of control for workers.

Full public ownership and accountability to citizens might ultimately be ideal, but a more realistic first step could be to organise to bring services under worker and/or passenger control. We need to keep our principles in mind without being too idealistic.

**Case study: KENYA**

In Kenya, matatu minibus drivers and other workers in the matatu industry (eg conductors, stage attendants/callers, mechanics, technicians and vendors) have unstable and insecure incomes.

Matatu drivers have to earn a cash target that is paid to the owner of their matatu, before they can start to earn money for themselves. They also pay conductors, traffic police, and 'stage attendants' who drum up business. For detail on the matatu workforce, see [www.BRTlabourimpact.org](http://www.BRTlabourimpact.org).

Profits, therefore, go to the matatu owners rather than towards workers' wages or service maintenance and improvement. Bringing the matatu industry into co-operative ownership by workers, passengers, or both would be a great first step towards public ownership.

**QUESTION: WHAT IF GOVERNMENT OWNERSHIP DOES NOT ACTUALLY MEAN PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY?**

Government ownership of public transport is a key precondition of public ownership, but by itself does not guarantee great services or democratic involvement by the public. For that to occur, we also have to get the right kind of management, incentives, structures, processes and culture in place. Government ownership does not automatically mean that citizens and workers are empowered or that we have the accountability and transparency that we need.

We must recognise – and make sure our governments recognise – that good public ownership should involve mechanisms for public accountability, and ways to bring communities, passengers and workers into the decision-making process. While skilled managers are needed at the top, we also need a bottom-up, grassroots approach that recognises that brilliant services require knowledge and power to be shared.

Later in this chapter, we will look at ways to make public ownership accountable to, and empowering for, citizens and workers alike.



### 1.3

#### TEN BENEFITS OF OWNING

#### #OURPUBLICTRANSPORT

We believe that public ownership is the best framework for creating a great public transport system for passengers and workers. A publicly-owned transport system would run services that meet the needs of society and the economy as a whole, not just those of profit-centred shareholders.

Public transport creates public goods. Here is what public ownership can offer, if we do it right:

#### 1) QUALITY

We need high-quality, urban public transport: buses, minibuses, taxis, trams, metros and trains. But private companies make profits by cutting corners or underinvesting in services. There is an intrinsic conflict between making a profit and genuinely serving passenger needs.

Public ownership means we can make sure transport workers do have time to care – advising passengers about their journeys, keeping them safe and helping older and disabled people with mobility and accessibility issues.

#### 2) EFFICIENCY

Privatisation means profits must be paid to shareholders. It creates inefficient fragmentation and extra costs for regulation. Also, interest rates for investment are higher for private companies than they are for government. It is cheaper, therefore, for the public to pay for nationalised services than privatised ones.

Public ownership also saves you money as a taxpayer and a fare payer. It means we can reinvest profits into reducing fares to make public transport affordable or even free.

Our survey found 86 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that public ownership is a good idea for public transport because profits can be reinvested in better services or lower fares.

#### 3) EQUITY

Public ownership helps us to meet the mobility needs of everyone in the community, including women, disabled people, older people and younger people. We can plan and deliver transport that works for everyone, not just people who can easily pay or who own a car.

Public transport works best when it is planned and delivered as a universal service, not treated as a consumer product. Good public transport encourages richer people to leave their cars behind or stop driving altogether. Good public transport would ensure our taxes are used efficiently to provide a great service for everyone and to build a sense of society and solidarity.

#### 4) PLANNING

Unfettered car use in urban areas is damaging and inefficient for everyone, including drivers. Public transport is much more efficient – a shared resource that helps reduce pollution and congestion. But if we leave public transport to private companies, we create a fragmented mess rather than the integrated service people need.

Public ownership can make towns and cities enjoyable places to live in, because we can plan for and invest in the public transport system as a whole. We can deliver the transport system people need, alongside clean air and quiet, green, safe city environments.

In our survey, 87 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that public ownership is a good idea for public transport because it makes it easier to plan and deliver an integrated network with co-ordinated services.





## 5) LOCAL ECONOMY

With public ownership we can create a positive economic impact by providing high-quality transport for workers to help them get to and from work. The public sector can also be a great local employer, offering high-quality jobs, encouraging women to work in transport and formalising previously informal work to improve worker conditions and quality of life.

In our survey, 80 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that public ownership is a good idea for public transport because it means that transport workers and unions can influence the number and quality of jobs.

## 6) ENVIRONMENT

When cars dominate our urban areas, it makes life worse for all of us. Public ownership can help us plan public transport better to dramatically reduce pollution and congestion in towns and cities.

Globally, we desperately need clean, green public transport to reduce carbon emissions. Public ownership is vital to help us to tackle climate change where market-driven, private solutions have failed.

## 7) ACCOUNTABILITY

If a private company runs your bus or light rail service, they are not accountable to you. You do not have a voice. Contracts with private companies are often agreed behind closed doors, with very little transparency. The public has little power to hold these companies accountable.

Public ownership gives us the chance to improve services together. It should go alongside giving communities information and real powers to intervene and ensure we have excellent public transport.

## 8) DEMOCRACY

When you go to the shops, you make your own individual decision about what you want. Public services are different – they give us a chance to come together to decide what kind of society we want to live in.

People want a real say over their public transport. With public ownership, the starting point is that all citizens collectively own the service. This makes it easier to build democratic participation.

In our survey, 84 percent agreed or strongly agreed that public ownership is a good idea for public transport because it means more democratic accountability and control for communities.

## 9) CROSS-SUBSIDY

Private companies cherry pick the profitable parts of our public transport network. For example, bus companies will only run services in busy areas where they can make money. This means rural communities lose out unless the government steps in with a subsidy.

Public ownership means we can run public transport as a real network. The profitable routes can cross-subsidise the loss-making routes so that we all have the transport we need.

## 10) PUBLIC CONTROL

Relying on private companies means we lose control. Public ownership can provide more stability and reliability because we are not dependent on private companies that might collapse and leave us to foot the bill and find a new transport solution.



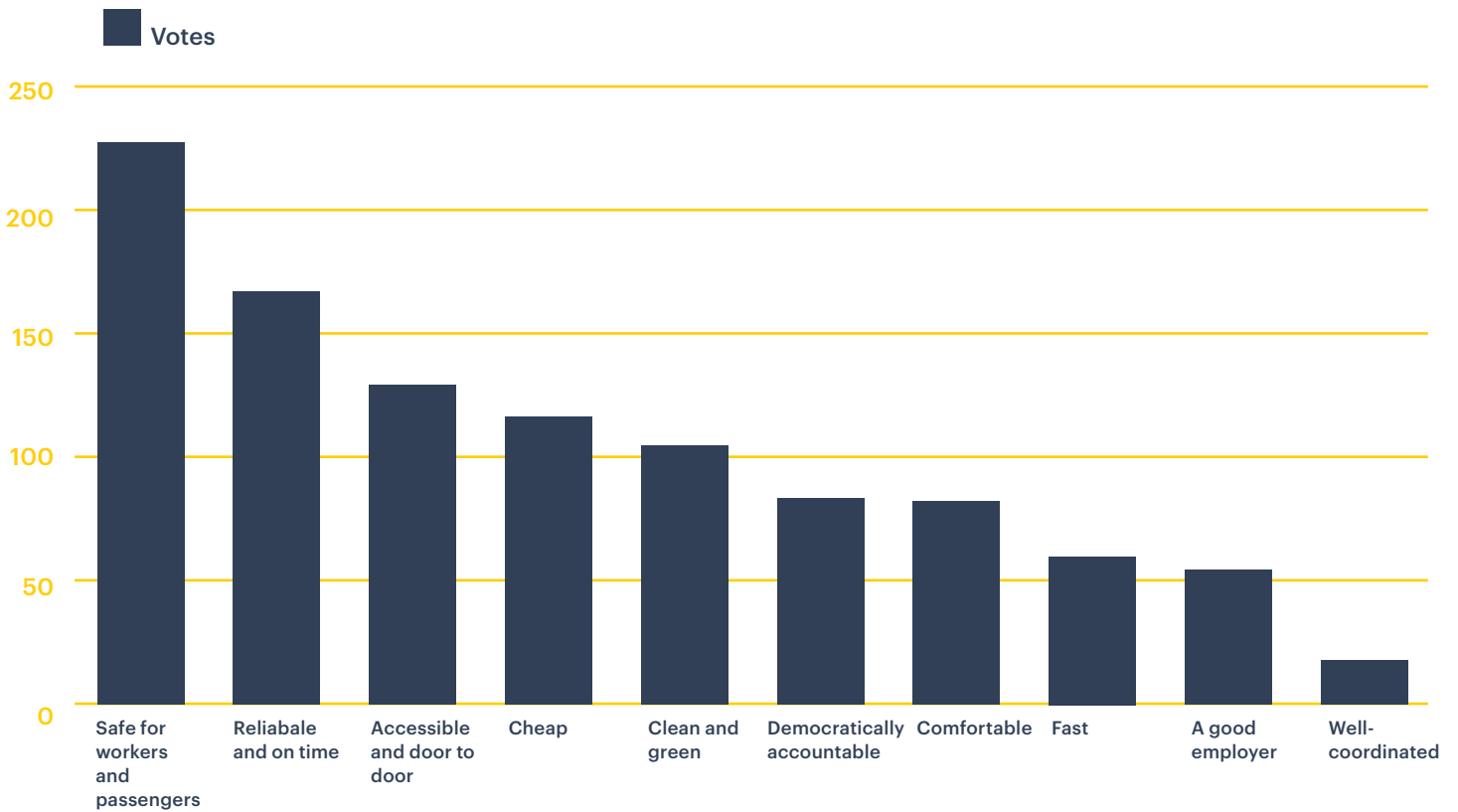
In comparison, keeping services in public hands gives government the flexibility to make changes depending on public need – rather than having to pay to update contracts with private companies. Keeping assets and land in public ownership gives the public more options and resources for delivering the expanded public transport system we will need in the future.

Our survey asked for your priorities for public transport. Here is what you said.

Public ownership means both workers and users can start to feel like their organisation is a key part of the community. They can suggest new routes and make sure they're integrated with the rest of the network. We can all feel a real sense of pride and ownership in our local bus network or rail line.

Ownership is key and it has a vital impact on whether public transport is well run. Of course, it is not the only thing that matters. Other factors include funding and investment levels and the skills of workers and management.

Figure 3: What are your priorities for public transport?



## 2. HOW TO MAKE PUBLIC OWNERSHIP WORK FOR US

If we are going to build and protect public transport that belongs to all of us, we need to know what that looks like. In our distinct battles across the globe, we can co-create solidarity; be sure of our purpose and be united in our values.

Public ownership is the model of ownership that can empower us as citizens and as workers. But we need to make sure that mechanisms are in place that give us real power. There are two questions to ask in order to ensure that the model of public ownership is genuinely empowering:

- Is it democratically accountable?
- Are workers empowered?

This section will explore real-life examples regarding these two questions, to help us visualise the 'ideal' public-ownership model. We will suggest key criteria and questions to ask.

We have not found a real-life example of ownership that answers these questions with a definitive 'yes'. This does not mean that it can not exist, but rather, that there are standards to work towards.

Traditional forms of public ownership do not necessarily guarantee democratic accountability or worker empowerment. We recommend that the ITF looks for and encourages transport policies that move towards this benchmark.

## 6

**The ITF and affiliates are redefining and reclaiming the meaning of public. Public is about inclusivity, democracy, common interests and being rooted in the community.'**

ITF, Our Public Transport policy group

### 2.1 EMPOWERED AS CITIZENS

Public transport affects our everyday lives, our communities, our cities and countries – our environment. We need public transport to get to work, to school, to the shops. It is a vital local and national infrastructure – so decisions should not be left in the hands of private companies. We all need a real say over OUR public transport and powerful ways to hold decision makers to account.

## “

**Ideal public transport would be jointly owned by both the government and civilians. This will work around management accountability and oversight to ensure quality services at friendly prices to commuters.”**

Edward Mbogo, CEO of MyRide Kenya.<sup>4</sup>

## “

**Mobility, or the ability to reach crucial destinations, is a necessary condition for a good life. People should all have access to at least a baseline mobility. These fundamental conditions are the prime responsibility of government, so public transport should be government controlled.”**

Bram van Liere, Milieudefensie,  
Friends of the Earth, Netherlands



**QUESTIONS TO ASK:**

- Do citizens ultimately own the organisation? Or as a second best option, do its users and/or workers own it?
- Is legislation in place to protect the public nature of the organisation and its assets?
- Is there regular public consultation about the service and how it could be improved?
- Does everyone understand how decisions are made and is the public encouraged to have their say and help shape services by attending AGMs, board, committee, and panel meetings?
- Does the board include representatives from the general public and from user groups?
- Is information about the service (financial and performance data, minutes of meetings) made publicly available?
- Can members of the public easily gain answers to their questions, in person and online?
- If the answers are no – what can we do to change this?

**Case study:  
LONDON, UNITED KINGDOM**

Transport for London runs public transport in London. It holds regular public meetings, which are advertised on its website. In fact, any member of the public can attend most of the board meetings and smaller committee meetings held throughout the year.

Because the elected London Assembly manages the transport system (which includes the metro and buses), residents of London can directly elect the people in charge of their transport system, and hold them to account.

**2.2  
EMPOWERED AS WORKERS**

Public transport is essential and so are the people who deliver it. Workers represent the frontline, the human face, the heart and soul, the brain and brawn behind our public transport. They should be respected and appreciated for their knowledge, skills, experience and hard work. This entails decent working conditions, union rights and the opportunity to work together with passengers and communities towards service improvements.

When workers feel secure and supported in their jobs and have a sense of pride and responsibility in providing an essential service for their community, the quality of the service improves. This sense of pride and responsibility is difficult to cultivate in a profit-oriented privately-owned organisation.



**We are in support of public transport, because in our country they want to privatise it. We are working towards another alternative for the transport in our city.”**

Alma Teresa Gonzalez, La Alianza de Tranviarios de México

**QUESTIONS TO ASK:**

- Do workers have decent pay, rights, terms and conditions?
- Are trained workers valued as an integral part of the service, or is there a trend to replace them with unpaid volunteers?
- Are all workers equally valued and not discriminated against?
- Are women encouraged to ask for promotions and/or pay rises, and to take on managerial or supervisory positions, and supported when they do so?



- Are workers encouraged to share ideas with the board or managers?
- Do workers influence the management culture or elect staff to managerial positions?
- Does the board include worker representatives?
- Do workers feel proud to provide a vital service and act as ambassadors for the organisation?
- Do unions have the opportunity to work with passenger groups?
- Are workers able to join an independent union?
- If the answers are no – what can we do to change this?

Our public transport should be publicly owned and the answers to the above questions should ideally be an unequivocal 'yes'. If not, then workers, unions, campaign groups and public transport users must stand together and demand change.

**2.3 THE CHALLENGES AHEAD**

The People's Public Transport Policy comes at a time when we face multiple challenges – presenting both opportunities and threats. A number of key social, economic, environmental and political shifts are particularly important at this time. To take our agenda forward, it is crucial that we harness these shifts in order to make our public transport a reality.

**● A GROWING CONSENSUS THAT PRIVATISATION HAS FAILED**

Although governments continue to embrace austerity and relentless privatisation, the underpinning ideology is starting to crumble as people realise the policies have failed. The

majority of the public, globally, believe in public ownership, and left-wing movements are pushing back to encourage this. There is an exciting global trend of remunicipalisation, with cities around the world taking vital services, such as water, waste, energy and transport into public ownership. Research by the Transnational Institute found 835 cases of remunicipalisation across the world in recent years. It is possible that with the right pressure at the right moments, public transport could be brought under the control of citizens and communities.

**● THE NEED TO TACKLE CLIMATE CHANGE**

As global temperatures rise and increasing climatic chaos becomes a pressing reality, public transport presents a vital solution for the future of our communities on this planet. Good public transport encourages people to leave carbon-heavy cars and aircraft behind. It helps plan liveable, low-carbon cities. And a people's public transport system would create resilient communities, able to play their part in transitioning to a low-carbon economy.

**● THE DEMOCRATIC DEFICIT – A LOSS OF CONTROL**

Political nationalism is on the rise in many parts of the world. Arguably, at least some of this is caused by a genuine lack of control over politics and the economy. The concentration of power with multinational corporations means that there is often a real shortage of economic democracy. Bringing fundamental services, like public transport, into public ownership can begin to return greater power and control to the people.

**● THE NEED FOR COMMUNITY**

Public transport gets people from A to B but it also provides a physical space where we are together. Whether walking or cycling or taking a bus, public transport connects in a network that brings us into the same, shared space. It can be an antidote to individualism



and loneliness and helps to foster a sense of community. Bringing public transport into public hands can strengthen that connection between people and make sure it is really working for us all.

● **NEW TECHNOLOGY**

Technology such as automation and smartphones are changing the way we live our lives and get around. While they offer opportunities, it is vital that workers and passengers work in alliance to ensure the technology works on behalf of everyone – not the interests of the corporations who own it. When public transport is viewed as a right and a universal service, it can increase equality and safety for both workers and passengers. A people's public transport system can contribute to a more equal society in terms of jobs and access to work, family, culture and opportunity. Technology must be harnessed towards this greater good for all.

The introduction of new Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) often results in jobs and livelihoods being stripped from informal transport workers who provide transport solutions in the absence of formalised options. However, efforts to protect informal workers' jobs around BRT routes can bring about an end to exploitative working practices while creating decent jobs and clean, green, affordable transport systems.



**Our focus is on the majority; the people who use and work on public transport. This is in contrast to the neo-liberal definition of 'OUR', which focuses on the interest of the minority, and there is complete invisibility of passengers and workers.'**

ITF, Our Public Transport policy group

**3.**

**CAMPAIGN STRATEGIES: HOW CAN WE GET THERE?**

While the challenges are manifold and complex, we have created the values and interests under which workers and passengers can unify to build strategic campaigns that win across the world.



**Who holds the power? Public transport decision making is largely informed by market-driven principles and there is an increasing role of private companies in providing public transport services and a lack of governance models. However, there are opportunities to contest these dominant power relations – for example, mobilising for alternatives, negotiating the transition from informal to formal work, organising to defend and strengthen the public transport sector, and ensuring decent jobs in new and existing workplaces.'**

ITF, Our Public Transport policy group

We share a belief in public ownership and if we – ITF-affiliated unions, passenger campaigns and the public – share our strategies, our stories, our knowledge, we can grow stronger together.

**QUESTION: As campaigners and organisers, how can we fight back to bring our public transport into public ownership?**

Campaigns are a way of focusing and leveraging our power to achieve the results we want. We might think we have less power – fewer resources or perhaps less political power. But we have other kinds of power. This section is all about the power that we do have and how we can use it. Solidarity is the key.

In our survey:

- 48 percent of you said you had participated in a campaign about public transport



• 78 percent of those who campaigned said it had been a success. This doesn't mean that privatisation was reversed or held back in all of those cases – sometimes success meant that the tactics were executed well and the public was informed of the issues



**It's just not good for the private companies to be treating public passengers in such a way. That's why our union has been campaigning for the private system to come back into public hands."**

Vic Moore, Rail, Tram and Bus Union (RTBU) Victoria, Australia.

Just because we are right does not mean anyone will listen to us. We have to communicate our messages powerfully to achieve victories. We can do this through powerful stories. We can also do this through repeating key ideas. Throughout this section we will be highlighting the **key campaign messages** that have proved themselves in helping to win campaigns. You can adapt these messages to fit your campaign, and use them in campaigning materials, with allies and in the media.

These messages include:

- **privatisation is toxic/privatisation fails**
- **public ownership is cheaper! Without paying shareholder dividends, we can reduce fares and improve services**
- **public ownership is popular! People want it**
- **public ownership is safer! Safety comes before profits**
- **public ownership is greener! It is the future**

### 3.1

#### THE POWER OF ORGANISING

## KEY CAMPAIGN MESSAGE: PRIVATISATION IS TOXIC/ PRIVATISATION FAILS

Privatisation has repeatedly been used as a tool to crush union power, for example when the railways were privatised in Japan<sup>5</sup>, making it harder to build a fight back for public ownership. However, unions are attacked precisely because of their huge potential power.

Union organising is the bedrock of many successful campaigns, because so often it works. Unions have the power to mobilise large numbers of people where other organisations can not. A well-organised campaign can become unbeatable.

#### Case study:

#### KEEP TRANSIT PUBLIC, ATU, CANADA<sup>6</sup>

'Keep Transit Public' was the Amalgamated Transit Union's (ATU) campaign to stop the privatisation of transport in Ontario, Canada. There had been several attempts to privatise the Toronto Transit Commission (TTC), but members of the ATU Local 113 knew privatisation was not the answer.

They started a campaign to make the idea of privatisation 'radioactive' or toxic and unpopular, gaining support from lots of groups. They had anti-privatisation adverts on TV as well as on the side of TTC vehicles. They created online videos, newspaper ads and flyers. Members attended all the candidate meetings to ask questions, ran a poll to show public support and created a daily contest to raise publicity for the campaign. Over 80 percent of the public were opposed to the privatisation of the TTC and it became the largest public advocacy campaign ever spearheaded by a union in Canada.



The ATU continues the fight against privatisation with actions taking place in other cities as part of the Keep Transit Public campaign. In 2018, in Hamilton, Ontario, the ATU gathered over 6,000 signatures for a petition and flooded Hamilton city councillors with emails and phone calls. The pressure worked, and it was decided that maintenance on the new light rail line would not be privatised and would continue to be carried out by the existing public operator.

**Case study:  
JUST TRANSITION  
FOR JEEPNEY DRIVERS  
MANILA, PHILIPPINES**

In Manila, the jeepney bus phase out or Public Utility Vehicle Modernisation Programme (PUVMP) is opposed by unions because, as they argue the programme's only purpose is to bring private corporations into public transport.<sup>7</sup> The PUVMP was launched in the Philippines in 2017 and calls for the phasing out of jeepneys, buses and other Public Utility Vehicles (PUVs) that are at least 15 years old. The intention is to replace them with safer, more comfortable and more environmentally friendly alternatives.

However, while credit loans are available for organisations or franchises that wish to buy more modern vehicles, they are not available to individual drivers. This exclusion of small-scale, micro-entrepreneurs is one of the reasons the program has been labelled 'anti-poor'.

In its current form, the programme will take power away from drivers and give it to larger groups, encouraging private companies with capital to buy multiple modern jeepneys and run them as a franchise. Profit will become the only motive for providing the service. Micro-entrepreneurs will be discouraged from managing their own assets.

The National Confederation of Transport Workers' Union (NCTU), an ITF affiliate, is campaigning for a just transition to the new vehicles, where all drivers have the chance to maintain their livelihoods. The campaign calls for a guaranteed right to work, and compensation and retraining for those workers who choose to leave the sector. The positive environmental impact of the modernisation, in terms of congestion and carbon emissions, is not denied by the campaign. Rather, it focuses on the rights and needs of workers to make that transition fairly.

This modernisation plan can also be seen as an opportunity to demand a collectively and publicly-owned urban transport system through the setting up of transport co-operatives. Co-operatives would empower jeepney drivers to earn individual livelihoods while also supporting each other and compete with private transport providers.

**3.2  
THE POWER OF ALLIANCE BUILDING**

Working with the public and passengers makes us even stronger, because it:

- gives broader legitimacy and resilience to our movement, ensuring that we cannot be accused of 'producer interest' or being self-serving. When we are working for the common interest, we are more likely to be listened to by politicians, the media and the wider public
- taps into the existing strong sentiment against privatisation and for public ownership
- builds a stronger army of people to take action in whatever way is required – demos, petitions, lobbying, social media. With our movements joined up, we can plug skills gaps too





**Organising passengers – we need to become relevant in communities especially with key issues like climate change, safety etc. Unions are often perceived to be selfish by only focusing on the narrow interests of their members. We should see ourselves as leading and building a public transport social movement.'**

ITF, Our Public Transport policy group

Alliance building can happen with passengers, environmentalists and taxpayers.

In this section we will explore alliances made by ITF-affiliated unions in previous campaigns. These campaigns were not all for public ownership, but the strategies and tactics they used could be applied to campaigns for public ownership as well.

**NB:** You can find more materials on alliance building in the resources section of the People's Public Transport Policy.

**WITH PASSENGERS**

Passengers (or riders) have a clear interest in better public transport. It makes sense for unions and passenger groups to work in partnership for public ownership that will benefit them both. Many user groups want more say over services, whether they are private or public – this drive for more control can increase the power of our alliance.

**Case study: 'AMERICANS FOR TRANSIT', USA<sup>8</sup>**

The Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU), USA saw the need for community organising in response to the public transport crisis. The ATU, along with Good Jobs First, launched **Americans for Transit** (A4T) a non-profit organisation, which aims to create, strengthen and unite grassroots passenger groups.



**Transit is a major social justice issue of our day. Ridership is the highest in decades, but riders have suffered the worst wave of fare hikes and service cuts in post-war history. These are tax hikes imposed on the working poor, plain and simple. Americans need better, affordable transit services. The ATU and Americans for Transit will work to make that happen by organizing more riders, workers and advocates to fight for public transit."**

Larry Hanley, ATU International president and chair of the A4T board

A4T organises community-labour 'boot camps'; training grassroots groups and local union leaders how to organise passengers. They have also produced Transit Rider Organizing: A How-To Manual, which compiles eight case studies of winning campaigns, catalogues best practices, and provides a national directory of grassroots passenger groups.

A4T addresses transport as an equity and social justice issue; everyone has the right to equal access to public transport. They organise activities on Transit Equity Day on 4 February (to honour Rosa Parks' birthday). In 2018, people took action in dozens of cities across the USA demanding that local, state and federal governments make public transport accessible and affordable to all, create good jobs by expanding public transit systems, and protect health and climate by using renewable energy to power buses and trains.



WITH A BROAD COALITION

**KEY CAMPAIGN MESSAGE:  
PUBLIC OWNERSHIP IS  
CHEAPER! WITHOUT  
PAYING SHAREHOLDER  
DIVIDENDS, WE CAN  
REDUCE FARES**

Passengers are not the only group of people that unions can work with. There is a wide range of groups that benefit from public transport that puts people before profit. These can include faith groups, environmental groups, disability rights groups, the business community, community campaigners and NGOs.



**We are always circulating group sign-on letters, always going to group meetings. You really can't win anything important unless you do it in coalition, acknowledging that it is always challenging to achieve consensus even in like-minded groups."**

Gene Russianoff, staff attorney,  
New York Public Interest Research Group (NYPRIG) Straphangers Campaign,  
New York City, USA



**It worked well that people were hearing from someone whom they felt connected to, someone they saw in church or met at a fish fry. People are much less likely to hang up on you when you call from their church!"**

Katie Jansen Larson, director of Metropolitan Congregations United during its successful campaign for transit funding in St Louis, US. The campaign brought together Citizens for Modern Transit with a broader coalition of workers groups, universities, faith groups, disability rights activists and other transit advocates.

**Case study:  
SOUTH KOREA**

In South Korea, railway privatisation was first put on the agenda following the 1997 financial crisis. At first, the public, which had a general distrust of state-owned enterprises, was supportive of the government's policy.

However, years of campaigning by the Korean Railway Workers' Union (KRWU), other trade unions and civil society allies has made the public aware of the dangers of privatisation and led to a change in attitude.

In 2013, the push for privatisation was back. In its struggle against the government's privatisation plan, the KRWU gathered one million signatures on an anti-privatisation petition online. The public strongly supported the union's campaign. Individual union members used their own social media to act as 'informal spokespeople' for the union's message against privatisation.

KRWU members called a strike for 23 days in 2013 against the government's plan. The strike ended with an agreement to form a body to discuss future rail policy in the National Assembly. It did not stop the first phase of privatisation; the establishment of a separate operator for high-speed rail. However, it did receive such broad public support that it was impossible for the government to pursue any further restructuring.

Prior to the strike the union spent a year preparing; educating member and also building a coalition of over 1,000 community, political, social justice, environmental and democracy organisations that operated both at the national and local level. As the result of the strike, rail policy was a major issue in



the following presidential elections, during which even the conservative candidate could not openly support privatisation due to public opposition. Since this time, the government has effectively given up privatisation of long-distance rail and there is now public discussion of a move towards reintegration of high-speed rail infrastructure and operations.

**Case study:  
GET GLASGOW MOVING CAMPAIGN,  
GLASGOW, UK**

The campaign Get Glasgow Moving was started by Ellie Harrison; Glasgow resident and a founder of Bring Back British Rail (that campaigns for the UK rail system to return to public ownership). Most people in Glasgow rely on public transport to get around (only 49 percent of households have cars), yet its public transport system is 'a total mess'.<sup>9</sup> The campaign aims to deliver 'a world-class, fully-integrated & accessible, publicly-owned, public transport network for everyone in our city.'<sup>10</sup> While Edinburgh's buses are publicly owned, Glasgow's are run by First Bus, a company that has raised fares and profited from the rise.

Get Glasgow Moving wants the transport minister to make it possible for Glasgow to have a publicly-owned bus company. Get Glasgow Moving has worked with Friends of the Earth and Unite the union to increase the power of its campaign.

The campaign's efforts have resulted in a government consultation proposing that Local Transport Authorities be given the power to take buses into public ownership.

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**We want a newly enhanced 'Transport for Glasgow' to be granted the powers necessary to run its own bus company, a new 'Strathclyde Buses'. This bus company should be part-owned by Glasgow City Council and the surrounding councils, which presently make up Strathclyde Partnership for Transport and, most importantly, constituted so that all its profits are reinvested in expanding the region's public transport network, improving reliability and reducing fares.'**

Get Glasgow Moving

**WITH THE PUBLIC**

**KEY CAMPAIGN MESSAGE:  
PUBLIC OWNERSHIP IS  
POPULAR.  
PEOPLE WANT IT.**

Globally, since the 1980s privatisation has created havoc in the lives of workers and passengers as governments have embraced policies of outsourcing and selling off public transport.

Over that time, however, it has become clear that these policies have failed. The public – taxpaying voters – are realising we could do things differently. The evidence clearly indicates that privatisation is not more efficient, in woeful contrast to the dogma that continues to surround it. In fact, it costs more – because we must pay for shareholder dividends, the higher cost of borrowing and the costs of regulating an artificial market.

Public ownership is popular, because it meets vital needs, is cheaper, can be made to ensure transparency and offers more choice. The rise of public opinion for public ownership makes it easier to galvanise support for campaigns against privatisation.



Additionally, politicians are willing to promote it because of the public's support for it.

“

**It is striking that, given the near universal political consensus in favour of neoliberalism, and particularly privatisation, that the public has never embraced this idea. Indeed, far from becoming accustomed to privatisation, voters have become more resolutely hostile, as numerous Australian governments have found to their cost... Rather than allaying concerns, familiarity with privatisation has bred contempt in the electorate. Public views on privatisation are firmly negative and consistently so.”**

John Quiggin, economist, University of Queensland, 2018<sup>11</sup>

**Case study:**

**CAMPAIGN FOR A PUBLICLY-OWNED RAILWAY, WE OWN IT, UK**

**KEY CAMPAIGN MESSAGE: PUBLIC OWNERSHIP IS SAFER! SAFETY COMES BEFORE PROFITS.**

Privatisation is highly unpopular in the UK and 76 percent of people want the railway to be publicly owned. When British Rail was privatised in 1994, Railtrack was created to run the infrastructure. It was a failure – profits seemed to come before safety and three fatal crashes on the network left the public horrified. In 2002, Railtrack was replaced with the publicly owned Network Rail. Yet by November 2015, the government's Shaw report was looking at options for Network Rail that included 'full privatisation' of the government-owned company. We Own It and other campaign groups took action. We Own It's polling on Network Rail showed that passengers and the public did

not want it to be re-privatised. Fears about safety resurfaced.

Working with other rail campaigners and unions, We Own It organised actions at stations in London, Glasgow, Bristol and Birmingham, collected petition signatures and garnered media coverage. Thousands of supporters responded to the government's consultation over Christmas 2015 – which was promoted with a light-hearted video. The final report shows the government got the message loud and clear. We won! Although the government continues to push Network Rail to sell off railway assets, the company itself is staying public. We Own It is now campaigning for the East Coast line to be brought into public ownership; it has failed three times in private ownership but was highly successful in public hands from 2009 to 2015.

‘

**The report team has dismissed privatisation of the whole company ... The report team is not recommending the introduction of private sector capital at the whole company level, recognising that, for the foreseeable future, Network Rail ownership will remain in the public sector.'**

'The Shaw report: The future shape and financing of Network Rail', March 2016



WITH THE PLANET, FOR THE FUTURE

## **KEY CAMPAIGN MESSAGE: PUBLIC OWNERSHIP IS GREENER. IT IS THE FUTURE.**

### **Case study: NEW ZEALAND**

Privatisation of the railway in New Zealand happened in 1993 with much fanfare. By 2008, the government had decided to bring it back into public ownership so that a modern, low-carbon, sustainable transport network could be built. Prime minister Helen Clark said rail was a “central part of 21st century economic infrastructure.”

The failures of rail privatisation were becoming clear by the mid-2000s and public opinion indicated concerns about private greed. Citizens realised that they paid for the profits of the private companies, while, many felt, the railways were being run into the ground. Privatisation had not been efficient – finance minister Michael Cullen described it as ‘a painful lesson’ for the country. New Zealand’s railway today may not be perfect but the fact that it is government owned is an exciting step in the right direction.



**By bringing our rail system back into public ownership – following the buyback of the tracks four years ago – we will spare future generations from subsidising a private rail operator and will be able to create an integrated, sustainable transport system.”**

Finance minister Dr Michael Cullen



**By making a stand for progressive common sense, New Zealand has at least helped break the spell that privatisation is somehow the natural order of things in the modern world.”**

Seumas Milne, 2008<sup>12</sup>

### **3.3 CAMPAIGNING RESOURCES**

We would recommend the following resources.

#### **For learning more about campaign strategy and planning:**

- ITF manual ‘Developing strategic campaigns’: <http://admin.itfglobal.org/en/cross-sectoral-work/education/in-focus/developing-strategic-campaigns/>
- Organizing Transit Riders: A How-To Manual: <http://www.goodjobsfirst.org/sites/default/files/docs/pdf/transitmanual.pdf>
- Chris Rose campaign strategy website - the 12 guidelines for campaigning: [http://www.campaignstrategy.org/twelve\\_guidelines.php?pg=intro](http://www.campaignstrategy.org/twelve_guidelines.php?pg=intro)
- New Economy Organisers Network (NEON) campaigning resources: <http://neweconomyorganisers.org/resources/>

#### **For learning more about privatisation:**

- We Own It: <https://weownit.org.uk/>
- Reclaiming Public Services report, Transnational Institute: <https://www.tni.org/en/publication/reclaiming-public-services>



## 4. CONCLUSION

This is what the future looks like ...

Public transport belongs to you, me, and the whole community. The government, on behalf of all citizens, owns it.

Legislation protects our public transport organisations and assets for the benefit of everyone. Companies delivering public transport have managerial freedom – they are arm's length from the government, but owned by government. All boards include members of the general public, representatives of user groups, workers and experts.

Surplus income is reinvested into better services; people come before profit. Public transport runs late into the evenings and at weekends so you can rely on it. Services are frequent, reliable and extensive – reaching beyond cities into rural areas. Ticketing is affordable and easy – you have a smartcard that tracks the journeys you make and costs are kept low or are free.

That is why everyone uses public transport – young and old, commuters and students, parents and grandparents, disabled people and so on. It is a public space as well as a public service, providing community and a sense of solidarity.

The ideal urban public transport system is run as a network. Wherever you live, you are part of it and taking public transport is easy. You know you can leave your front door and get around the city without hassle, make the journeys you need to make to visit friends and family, go shopping or go to work. There is a seamless transition from your house to taxi to bus, from cycle to train. The timetable and the physical infrastructure are integrated.

Walking and cycling are encouraged, and for those with mobility issues, there is a flexible taxi-bus service that coordinates with the

rest of public transport. Transport staff help older and disabled people to manage journey transitions, ensures accessibility and keep an eye on everyone's safety. This public transport system puts people first and cares for its diverse passenger groups.

You can leave your car at home or decide not to own one at all. Ideally, your city is car free, and public transport is as clean and green as possible, reducing carbon emissions and addressing the needs of our planet.

Every month, you are invited to a public meeting where you can share concerns you have about the public transport system or ideas you have for improving it. Some people in the community spend more time making sure the services meet people's needs but everyone has the chance to be actively involved in the conversation. There are regular public consultations about improving the service – in person as well as online. All the information you need – financial data, performance data, answers to your questions – is online.

Drivers and staff – of taxis, buses, metros, trams, trains – are paid properly, treated fairly, and highly valued whatever their background or gender. When they have suggestions for improvements to services, they are listened to. When technology changes, they are actively involved in the discussion of when, how and where it should be adopted. Staff and passengers work together to make services better. Management seeks out the views and ideas of the staff on the frontline as well as analysing the statistics and feedback from passengers to improve the system.

It is your environment, your community, your city, your streets and the public transport is yours too. You feel proud to use it; proud to work for it; proud to be part of it.



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PUBLIC  
TRANSPORT

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People's Public Transport Policy

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