

The case against Muni "saturation" raid fare enforcement

When you pay to get on the bus, it seems self evident that everyone should pay as well. The SFMTA management, the Mayor, SFPD, and the corporate media are all exploiting this assumption to defend extensive fare enforcement "saturation" raids. The reality of the raid needs a closer look.

On November 25th 2009, at 8pm, Gloria Garcia was riding the 49 inbound. She's 55, unemployed and uses her disabled fast pass to ride Muni. When it stopped at Market and Van Ness a large group of people that she believed were police rushed on the bus through both doors and started shouting at passengers. When they surrounded her she was terrified, thinking that a violent crime must be taking place behind her, and the police might start shooting any second. She was shocked and confused that they were shouting at her and that no crime was taking place. They demanded to see her transfer. She was frightened and didn't respond. They told her to get off the bus. They pulled her from the bus to give her a ticket. She didn't know if she was under arrest or where they were taking her. They took her purse from her and searched through it to find her ID. They gave her a \$75 ticket. Then they watched her use her disabled pass to get on the next bus.

Gloria appealed her ticket in writing. She included copies of her ID, disabled pass and a letter from her doctor. Her appeal was rejected without explanation. Gloria began circulating a petition with MORE Public Transit to stop threatened Muni service cuts. She quickly signed up hundreds of angry riders. When she asked for more petitions, she mentioned her ticket. MORE Public Transit activists offered to help fight the ticket.

Gloria and a MORE Public Transit volunteer spent most of a morning arguing with one clerk after another before being allowed to have a review hearing. She had to waive the option of community service if she lost the appeal. One clerk demanded a \$75 deposit before she could have a hearing. When she replied that she didn't have \$75 to deposit, the clerk said Gloria had to leave. Another clerk produced a "hearing deposit waiver request form". If she gave a complete accounting of her personal finances, they would consider waiving the deposit.

The hearing officer immediately reversed the ticket. He said her written appeal was exactly what was necessary to reverse the ticket and should have been accepted. He was kind and apologized for wasting her time. Gloria was relieved that her ticket was thrown out, but worried that most people would be forced to pay expensive bogus tickets. She was furious she had been treated this way while riding the bus. She continues to collect petitions with M.O.R.E. Public Transit.

Her story is not an isolated incident. What few statistics come from the MTA, about these raids indicate, a widespread phenomenon. Since the "saturation" raids began late last year, over 130 raids have targeted about a dozen intersections where a number of bus lines converge. Most raids take place in the Mission and Bayview. Each raid involves 10 to 20 police and 10 to 20 fare enforcement "POP" agents. The raids last about two hours and stop 50 to 120 busses. Tickets are issued for expired transfers. People with discount passes are ticketed if they can't prove the pass is theirs. People who don't speak English or don't understand what's happening are ticketed for not showing proof of payment to an agent.

MTA management claims they are a huge success. They claim to have issued over 9,000 tickets. The MTA board seems completely in the dark regarding the most basic details about the raids. M.O.R.E. Public Transit opposes the raids.

What's wrong with MTA "saturation" raids?

Raids harm Muni service without much benefit:

- MTA had over 130 raids, stopping 50 - 120 busses each raid, holding busses passing for 2 - 5 minutes. (hundreds to thousands of riders affected per raid).
- SFMTA numbers indicate the raids cost more money than they collect.
- Numbers "proving" lower fare evasion, as a result of raids, are highly suspect and show NO causation. (MTA claims fare evasion has been reduced from 10% to 3%. Ask a bus driver or rider and they will tell you emphatically otherwise.)
- Even if the suspect MTA numbers are to be believed, very little money was raised while dramatically reducing the quality of a bus ride for hundreds of thousands of riders.

Raids are abusive to all riders:

- Riders struggling with children, groceries, disabilities, homework, etc, have to interrupt their ride to dig for a flimsy transfer, fastpass or even ID while surrounded by people that are easily confused with police.
- Many riders are being ticketed despite valid proof of payment.
- Challenging a bogus \$75 ticket is difficult and time consuming.
- Unlike most bus drivers, many "POP" agents have been unsympathetic, commanding, arrogant, rude, abrasive, impatient, and even verbally and physically abusive (many witnesses including bus drivers can attest to this).

Criminalizing riders is against progressive priorities:

- People shouldn't miss school, doctors appointments or other needed services because the lack of bus fare.

Bus raids are racist:

- Bus riders and drivers have seen "POP" agents and police ticket or arrest immigrants, youth and people of color while sending white people to the front of the bus to pay \$2. Witnesses were shocked by the obvious disparity.

Fare evasion is a distraction from other more serious problems:

- MTA management is overpaid, overstaffed, under supervised, beholden to a Mayor with dubious commitment to public transit (except his publicly funded limo) and inaccessible to the public.
- The MTA board is incapable of disagreeing with the Mayor or of overseeing MTA management.
- Other well funded agencies like SFPD raid Muni's budget without any transparency.
- The governor illegally gutted MTA's budget.
- Strings attached to Federal funds encourage boondoggles at the expense of daily operating costs.
- The rich don't pay enough taxes.
- Banks, and big businesses profit from being located close to public transit but pay almost nothing.
- All public transit systems have fare evasion "problems" in the same way the ocean has a moisture problem. It's a dishonest distraction for public transit managers to claim that fare evasion has anything to do with the current crisis.

Stop the "saturation" raids!

Get involved with M.O.R.E. Public Transit!

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