

OPPORTUNIT

Youth riders, the affordability crisis,
and the Youth Pass solution.



By **YOUTH WAY ON THE MBTA**

June 2011

A photograph of a person with a large backpack boarding a bus. The person is wearing a red shirt and blue jeans. The bus is white with blue and yellow accents. The background is slightly blurred, showing a street scene.

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OPPORTUNI

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Public transportation is a gateway to opportunity for youth in the Boston area. More than two-thirds of young people, ages 12 to 21, ride the MBTA on a daily basis.¹ Many of us travel on multiple bus routes and train lines, through several busy stations, beginning and ending our day with the T.

The T is our opportunity.

We ride the T to school, G.E.D. class, tutoring, community college, college prep, and SAT prep. We catch the train for job searching and training, and take the bus to work. Public transit takes us to the doctor, the dentist, and the counselor. It's how we participate in our family, community, religious, cultural and civic lives, and it's how we get home safely.

We are youth riders.

There are tens of thousands of us. Half of us have access to a Student Link or Student Charlie Card, discounting fares during the school day.² The rest of the time we pay full adult fares of \$1.25 to \$2.00 per ride. Two-thirds of us spend more than \$20 per month on the MBTA, and a quarter of us spend \$60 or more.³ In Boston, more than one-third of children live below the poverty line.⁴ Too many of us simply can't afford to ride.

Youth riders are in crisis.

In recent years, the rise of fares, fall of job prospects and wages, and dispersal of youth services have created a financial disaster for youth riders. Public transportation is part of the social fabric of our communities and provides a pathway to our future—it must be affordable.

In this report, we are excited to share three years of original youth-led research on youth riders and the affordability crisis. To solve this crisis, we propose the creation of a Youth Pass—an unrestricted Monthly LinkPass available at Charlie Card machines for youth ages 12 to 21 for \$10 per month. Its creation will transform youth riders' access to the MBTA, bridging the gap to education, employment, healthcare, and community involvement.

Innovation, affordability, and equity—it's the Youth Pass solution.

Youth are the future of our state, our economy, and our public transit system. Work with us to make this vision a reality.

¹ Youth Way on the MBTA (2010), Survey of 2,400 youth

² Youth Way on the MBTA (2010), Survey of 2,400 youth

³ Youth Way on the MBTA (2010), Survey of 2,400 youth

⁴ Boston Public Health Commission (April 2009), *Health of Boston: 2009*



OPPORTUNI



TO LEARN

27% of youth agree with the statement,
“I can’t afford to get to school.”¹

THOUSANDS OF YOUTH RIDE THE T TO SCHOOL. Despite the Student Link Pass and Student Charlie Card, 48 percent of us have been late because we didn’t have money for the T and needed to find alternative transportation. Even worse, over 20 percent of youth have been absent because we did not have money for fares.²

There are serious repercussions to being late or missing school because of financial difficulties. Students incur absence violations, fall into trouble with teachers, fail tests and classes, and even get held back. Over time, the cycle of being late or absent is the greatest predictor of whether a young person will drop out.³

Failure to finish high school doesn’t just hurt our own future, it impacts our ability to pursue a career and give back to society. Young men who drop out are 47 percent more likely to be incarcerated.⁴ Those who do not graduate will impose a net lifetime fiscal burden of \$275,000 on state and federal systems, compared to a net lifetime contribution of \$181,500 for high school graduates.⁵ When we can’t learn, everyone pays the price.

Young people’s school success should be the utmost priority for our commonwealth. We need to be able to get to school—it’s our opportunity to learn.

1. Youth Way on the MBTA (2009), Survey of 1,600 youth

2. Youth Way on the MBTA (2010), Survey of 2,400 youth

3. Heppen, J & Therriault (July 2008), *Developing Early Warning Systems to Identify Potential High School Dropouts*

4. Sum, A, Khatiwada, I, & McLaughlin, J (October 2009), *Consequences of Dropping Out of High School: Joblessness and Jail Rate for High School Dropouts and the High Cost for Tax Payers*

5. Sum, A, Khatiwada, I, & McLaughlin, J (March 2007), *State and Local Fiscal Consequences of High School Dropout Problems in Massachusetts*



Davonte Jordan, 17

South End, Massachusetts

I ride the Silver Line, Orange Line...all of them.



I'm energetic, friendly, and a good person to talk to when you need advice. I'm the oldest with three sisters and two brothers, and I live with my mom. I have a wonderful grandmother, and I also have a son who is very active, just like me.

I left high school last year because I had to help my mom with my little sister. She was too young for daycare and my mom was trying to get into school or job training. Just before I left, I was missing two or three days a week. It was for different reasons, but one was because I didn't have money to get on the train or the bus—and my grandmother didn't have money to give me either.

Math was my favorite subject when I was in school. I miss learning new problems and solving equations. I also miss sports, and learning something new every day. I want to go back so I can do those things and graduate.

The transportation system is supposed to help you succeed. If you don't have affordable access, you won't be able to succeed. I would use a Youth Pass to get back in school and move forward toward a career.

OPPORTUNI

TO LEARN

In a 25-person G.E.D. class, at least one student will be absent every day due to a lack of transportation funds.¹

YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE BOSTON AREA pursue educational opportunities outside of middle and high schools such as G.E.D. classes, after-school programs and tutoring, community college, college prep, and SAT prep.

G.E.D. programs build knowledge and skills, boost earnings, and reduce unemployment.² These non-traditional students do not receive a student discount for the T. Transportation costs are a huge financial burden for G.E.D. students and directly affect attendance:

*"Many students are unemployed and some are even homeless. They try to buy a weekly or monthly T pass at the full rate, but too often, that isn't possible."*³

Today, in an era of budget cuts and privatization, an increasing number of alternative education and enrichment options are located far from our schools and homes. We need to ride the T to access tutoring or homework help. The T connects us to extracurricular activities like sports, arts, dance, music, and more. Even college access and SAT prep classes are often located in different parts of the city.

As young people, we are working to open doors for our future. We need to be able to learn—it's our opportunity to grow and succeed.

1. Interview with a Roxbury-based G.E.D. Program administrator (September 2010)

2. Kahn, C, Davis, T, & Martin, J. (2008). *Boston's Education Pipeline: A Report Card*


3. Interview with a Roxbury-based G.E.D. Program administrator (September 2010)



Wendy Aridou-Merlain, 22

Mattapan, Massachusetts

I ride the 28, 31, Mattapan Trolley, Orange Line, and Red Line.



I screwed up in high school pretty bad. It was senior year when I got my act together, and I decided to attend community college. I got into the honors society my first year and I was elected president of the honors society my second year. We held a fundraiser for Haiti after the earthquake and I learned a lot from putting it together.

Through school, I used the T all the time! If I had to pay for a car, I wouldn't have had time for my studies. My mom also takes care of our family in Haiti, so it was tough for her to pay for my travel to school.

I finished in 2010, and today I'm a student at UMass Amherst, majoring in public health and biology. I want to go to medical school. I know I want to serve the public—that's where my heart is.

I can honestly say that if it wasn't for public transit, I wouldn't be where I am today. The Youth Pass is something worth fighting for, because it would help people like me succeed.

OPPORTUNI

TO WORK

29% of young people have arrived late or missed work because they couldn't afford the fare.¹

YOUNG PEOPLE WORK. Many of us need to earn money to meet our basic needs and contribute to family expenses like rent, food, and utilities. Working builds our confidence, character, and skills for future careers.

Jobs are often far from where we live.² Searching for a job can take weeks and become prohibitively expensive—a typical trip to submit applications at a shopping center can involve two buses and a train and total nearly \$10. Too often, these costs prevent us from even looking for work. With youth unemployment already at its highest level since the Great Depression,³ we need to remove this barrier to entering the workforce.

When youth are employed, we tend to hold part-time and minimum wage jobs. These jobs often fall short of covering all our personal and family expenses. When we scrape by from check to check, it's hard to have money left

for transit—a reason reported by nearly one-third of us for missing work or arriving late.⁴ This can cause us to lose our jobs. The problem grows even worse in the summer when more of us are employed, but student discounts are unavailable until the fall.⁵

Youth employment helps families, communities and the commonwealth. The majority of us pour our wages back into the local economy—paying for food, housing expenses, clothing, and merchandise. Young people who are employed now will gain the experience to hold jobs with more responsibilities and higher wages, contributing more to the public good over the course of our lives.⁶

The MBTA is our opportunity to work. We need rides to be affordable so we can play our part building a strong workforce and economy.

Tai Tang, 19

Malden, Massachusetts

I ride the 23, 28, 99, 106, and Orange Line.



Currently I have two jobs. For one, I'm a mentor and tutor at the South End Library. I like the fact that I work with young people. It's very rewarding, and I've learned a lot doing it.

I think of myself as a leader because I'm very responsible. I graduate from high school this year, and will be going to UMass in the fall and majoring in business. I save some of my money for college, but I also provide for my sister. I pay for phone bills, electricity, food, and clothing.

I've been through a lot of struggles in my life—I want to be successful. To me, success means that you're happy with your accomplishments and you do things you can take pride in. I want to live in a world where people love each other, respect each other, and take care of each other.

I ride the T to get to work, and work is the path to my future. I need to afford it. I need a Youth Pass.

1. Youth Way on the MBTA (2010), Survey of 2,400 youth
2. Youth Way on the MBTA (July 2010), *Distance from Block Groups with High Percentages of Young People to South Bay Shopping Center*. MassGIS and Census data
3. Sum, A & McGlaughlin, J (January 2010), *Dire Straights for Many American Workers: The Economic Case for New Job Creation Strategies in 2010 for the Nation's Teens and Young Adults (20-24)*
4. Youth Way on the MBTA (2010), Survey of 2,400 youth
5. Youth Way on the MBTA (2009), Survey of 1,600 youth
6. US Department of Labor (2000), *Report on the Youth Labor Force*





OPPORTUNI

TO THRIVE

Every week, 10 patients or more miss appointments at Boston Medical Center's Adolescent Clinic due to a lack of public transportation funds.¹

YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE BOSTON AREA RIDE THE T TO ACCESS HEALTHCARE SERVICES. We take the train or the bus to doctor visits, dental appointments, and counseling sessions. The T is our opportunity to be healthy.

Many of us can't afford to ride the T to these services, leaving us vulnerable to sickness and causing us to miss even more school or work. Healthcare is essential for our success in school, employment and future opportunities.

The asthma and diabetes epidemics have impacted many young people in the Boston area.² Managing these conditions ourselves and taking care of our siblings require regular appointments—missing them jeopardizes the health of entire families.

The same is true for mental health and counseling services. Accessing these resources is our opportunity to maintain resilience through tough times, to heal and overcome.

Missed appointments also strain the healthcare system. Doctors and nurses are forced to work around absences and end up treating expensive crisis situations instead of focusing on prevention. With asthma for example, every 25 cents spent on prevention and management saves 60 cents on emergency care.³

Being able to afford the MBTA means staying healthy and maintaining a strong healthcare system for everyone. The T is our opportunity to thrive.

1. Interview with Adolescent Clinic Advocate (September 2010)

2. Boston Public Health Commission (April 2010), Health of Boston: 2010

3. Keefe, D (May 2010), *Distorted Financial Incentives Allow Asthma Cases to Increase*

Eric Dejesus, 18

West Roxbury, Massachusetts

I ride the 1, 8, 34, 34E, 39, 40, 57, 66, Orange Line, Green Line, and Red Line.



I was diagnosed with diabetes at the age of two, so I've had it for 16 years. It's nothing fun. I test my blood sugar and take insulin three times per day. If I went without it, I could develop complications like kidney failure, blindness or gangrene.

I also have to make bimonthly visits to the doctor. To get there, I ride the 34 and the 39. When I don't have money for the T that day, I have to cancel and reschedule.

I go to Brighton High School, class of 2012. After I graduate, I want to go to college and study to be a nurse practitioner. I think because I'm diabetic, I want to take care of sick people. I dream of living in a sick-free world.

To get to my medical appointments and to get to my future, I need to afford the T. I need a Youth Pass.



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TO CONTRIBUTE

Engaged young people make vibrant, world-class cities and towns.

YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE BOSTON AREA LEAD RICH AND FULL LIVES. We are athletes, artists, dancers, and musicians. We are parishioners, neighborhood volunteers, and community organizers. We are family members and caretakers.

Academic enrichment, sports, music, and arts activities are increasingly located outside of our home neighborhoods. Each day of the week, we travel hours by bus and train to volunteer and worship. Family responsibilities, extracurricular activities, and social outings take us throughout the MBTA system.

When we can't afford the T, we lose the ability to participate in valuable experiences like helping good causes, and can't fulfill our family and civic duties. As a result, we lose opportunities for mentorship and growth. Unaffordable fares put our development at risk.

We live in world-class cities and towns and we want to participate. The T is our opportunity to contribute. We need to be able to afford it.

Amatullah Mervin, 18

Cambridge, Massachusetts

I ride the Red, Green, and Orange Line.



I take the T every single day, about four or five times a day, maybe six. I take the T to school, my internship, sports, music lessons, work, church, and back home.

In addition to everything, I help my older sister raise her kids, Janessa, Janaya and Jakahai. When she needs it, I take them or pick them up from school or appointments. I believe I'm instilling in them certain values, to be good people.

This fall I'm starting at Curry College. Then I want to go to Northeastern Law, and I want to be a civil rights attorney. My hopes for the world are that people stop being selfish and realize there are problems we need to fix. Everything my nieces and nephews need should be invested in.

I'm dependent on the T. It's an essential part of my life and activities. When you can't pay for something like that, it's very frustrating. Young people like me need a Youth Pass, so we can participate in the many things we do in life.

The **Youth Pass** Solution:

*We propose the creation of a new **Youth Pass** fare category for the MBTA.*

WHAT IS THE YOUTH PASS?

Monthly LinkPass

The Youth Pass should have no day or time restrictions, and should be available year-round. Young people's responsibilities last well beyond school days. We need a pass that allows us to live full lives, including opportunities to learn, work, thrive, and contribute.

Available for ages 12 to 21

The Youth Pass would start at age 12, when young people begin to pay fares, and should be available until at least age 21. Many young people in their late teens and early twenties need to ride the T to pursue non-traditional learning opportunities, enter the workforce, and contribute to our families and communities.

\$10 per month

The Youth Pass needs to be affordable to young people, especially those of us living in poverty and in families with multiple children paying fares.

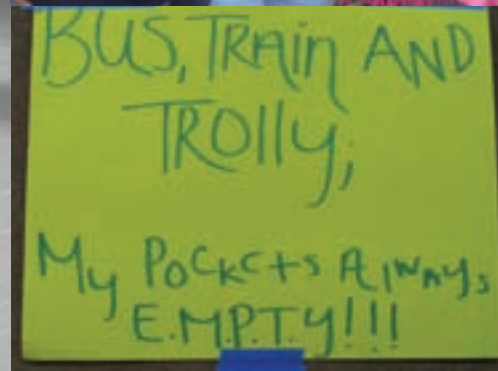
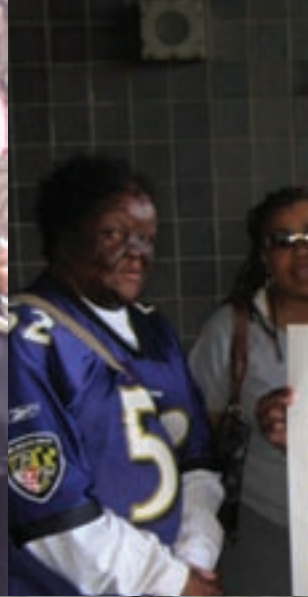
Available at Charlie Card machines

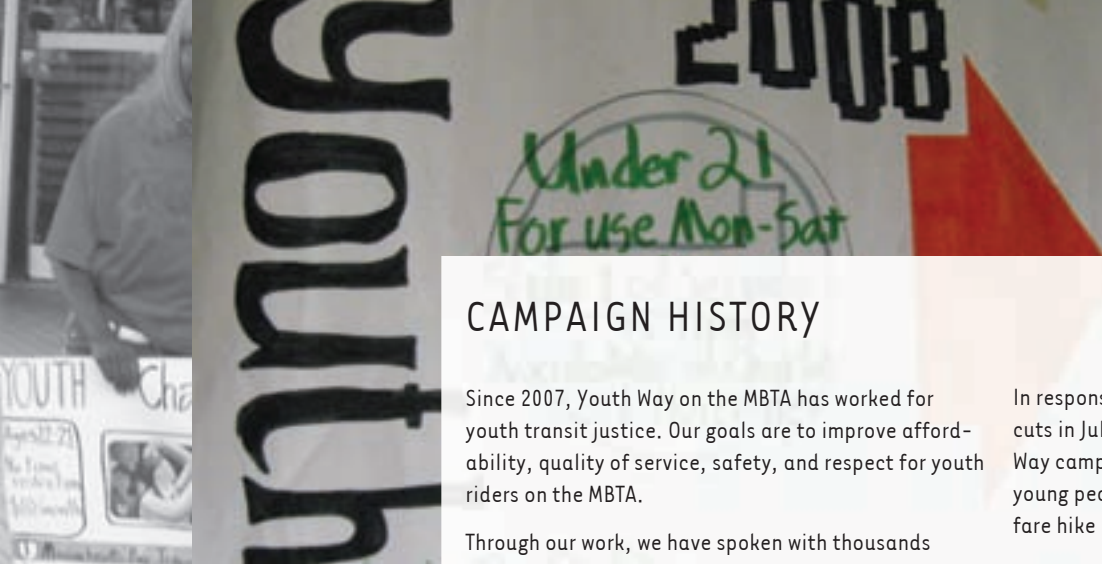
The Youth Pass should be distributed by the MBTA and be easily accessible for young people to purchase each month.

The Youth Pass is an innovative solution to youth riders' crisis of affordability.

It is our opportunity to learn, to work, to thrive, and to contribute.







BUS	with Charlie Card	1.25	1.50
TRAIN	with Charlie Card	1.70	2.00

CAMPAIGN HISTORY

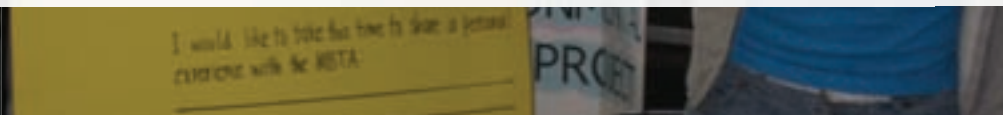
Since 2007, Youth Way on the MBTA has worked for youth transit justice. Our goals are to improve affordability, quality of service, safety, and respect for youth riders on the MBTA.

Through our work, we have spoken with thousands of youth in the Boston area about improving public transportation for young people. In 2009, we met with the Secretary of Transportation, James Aloisi, Jr., where we presented the results from a survey of more than 1,600 youth. We requested an immediate extension of the cutoff time for the MBTA Student Monthly Pass and Student Charlie Card from 8:00 p.m. to 11:00 p.m. and a commitment to research the implementation of a Youth Pass. Secretary Aloisi agreed.

Three months later, students across the Boston area cheered as we returned to school with expanded access to the MBTA, an extension started on September 1, 2009. This victory made the lives of 30,000 students both fuller and safer!

In response to proposed fare increases and service cuts in July 2009, members and supporters of the Youth Way campaign testified about the potential impact on young people, alongside other transit advocates. The fare hike proposal was later withdrawn.

Since 2009, we have met quarterly with representatives of the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (MassDOT) and the MBTA. In 2010, we conducted another survey of more than 2,400 youth. Our results demonstrate the continued crisis of unaffordable fares for young people, both inside and outside of school. Based on the experiences of youth, we will also continue to work for increased bus service and improved relationships between young people, T employees, and T Police.





RESEARCH AND WRITING PROCESS

This report is a result of three years of youth-led qualitative and quantitative research into the issue of affordable MBTA access for youth riders. We have surveyed over 4,000 youth, age 12 to 21, in stations, public places, schools, and youth employment programs. We surveyed youth in all neighborhoods of Boston, Cambridge, Somerville, Chelsea, Quincy, Milton, and Brookline. We have also collected stories and testimony during dozens of workshops.

The Youth Way Leadership Team decided to create this report in February 2010 to tell the story of youth riders on the MBTA. After collection and analysis of our most recent survey—from which most of the statistics in this report are taken—and a retreat facilitated by smartMeme in December 2010, we formed an intergenerational writing team in February 2011. The team included youth organizers and adult support from ACE and BYOP, who worked collaboratively to choose the information and develop the language in this report.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to the thousands of Boston area youth who have contributed to this campaign over the last four years by completing surveys, sharing stories, and taking action!

We especially want to thank the youth leadership of BYOP, REEP, and TRU whose efforts have built this campaign: Ronnell Almond, Antonio Anderson, Ricardo Arias, Wendy Aridou-Merlain, Deandra Atherly, Shaniquekwa Avinger, Naeyjalite Baez, Irvin Bailey, Nechalye Bailey-Cribbs, Cherelle Ball, Shameka Blake, Ronneshia Bolden, Mishon Browne, Kish Cameron, Edwin Carrasquillo, Caroline Casey, Jessica Cetoute, John Collins, Eric Concepcion, Vasta Coombs, Jalelle Cosgrove, Monique Cropper, Tineshia Cureton, Thaina Dessin, Handel Dixon, Charles Anthony Dowell, Dashawn Dowell, Jazmyn Fairhurst, Cristian Feliciano, Dakeria Fulks, Bryant Huff, Louisa Irele, Tavon Jacobs, Sweenda JeanBart, Aaron Johnson, Andrey Jones, Davonte Jordan, Davel Juba, Trevain Keene, Whitney Lopez, Melissa Lopez Henriquez, Simba Martin, Corina McCarthy-Fadel, Asia Medley, Dana Mendes, Quianna Mendez, Amatullah Mervin, Xavier Miranda, Washim Mohammed, Roy Molina, Carlos Moreno, Raymond Moreno, Whitney Ogbesoyen, Samantha Osunde, Shanell Parsons, Tanajah Pierre, Isaac Ramos, Cleora Reid, Megan Reynolds, Kadian Richardson, Anthony Rivers, Brianna Rose, Modesto Sanchez, Keara Sierra, Larissa Sloan, Adriana Snow, Stuart Spina, Khalifa Stafford, Anike Staples-Martin, Shakeen Stewart, Padraig Sullivan, Hakim Sutherland, Tai Tang, Vassia Vaneus, Shineekqua Walker, Abdulai Wanu, Tyree Ware, Tiana Williams, and Adanech Woldemariam. We won't stop!

Thank you to the ACE & BYOP staff and adult support.

We would also like to acknowledge the staff of MassDOT, the MBTA, and CTPS who have met with us over the past two years. Thank you for your patience and respect, your willingness to listen to our experiences and perspective, and your openness to approach challenging issues during difficult times.

Thank you Markie McBrayer of Tufts UEP for your tremendous support with research, data collection and analysis.

Thank you smartMeme for your process and vision in helping us develop and refine our message.
www.smartmeme.org

Thank you On The Move: Greater Boston Transportation Justice Coalition for contributing resources to develop and print this report. www.bostononthemove.org

All photos were taken by Ernesto Arroyo Photography, unless otherwise noted. Thank you, Eroc!
www.facebook.com/erocphotography

This report was designed by T.J. Hellmann. Thank you, T.J.!



YOUTH WAY ON THE MBTA

Youth Way on the MBTA is a youth-led campaign partnership between the Boston-area Youth Organizing Project (BYOP) and two programs of Alternatives for Community & Environment (ACE): Roxbury Environmental Empowerment Project (REEP) and the T Riders Union (TRU). Find us online at youthwayonthembta.org or on Facebook at Youth Way on the MBTA. Contact us at youthway@ace-ej.org.



BYOP, established in 1996, has 14 years of youth-led organizing experience. We are an organization of youth, led by youth, supported by adults, and united by a common purpose: to increase youth power and create positive social change. To do this we identify values, build relationships across differences, train and develop leaders, identify key issues of concern, and take action for justice.

We are located at 565 Boylston Street, Fifth Floor, Boston, MA 02116 or byop.org. For more information, contact us at (617) 262-1895.



ACE builds the power of communities of color and lower-income communities in New England to eradicate environmental racism and classism and achieve environmental justice. We believe that everyone has the right to a healthy environment and to be decision-makers in issues affecting our communities.

We are located at 2181 Washington Street, Suite 301, Roxbury, MA 02119 and ace-ej.org, or find us on Facebook at *Alternatives for Community & Environment*. For more information, contact us at (617) 442-3343 or email info@ace-ej.org.



REEP is the youth-led organizing program of ACE. We build youth power, community, and leadership to win campaigns for environmental justice in Roxbury, Dorchester and across the City of Boston.

Find us on Facebook at *REEP* *ACE* or contact us at reep@ace-ej.org.



The **T Riders Union** (TRU) organizes transit riders to fight for first-class service in Greater Boston. TRU is a voice of the movement for equitable public transportation in lower-income communities and communities of color. We demand respect, equality, accountability, first-class service, accessibility, affordability and comfort.

Find us on Facebook at *T Riders Union* or contact us at tru@ace-ej.org.

