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Mass Transit Workers, Urban Publics, and the Politics of Time in San Francisco

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San Francisco's public transportation system is the slowest major urban transit system in the United States and has one of the worst on-time performance rates. This paper examines how these problems with time—slowness and lateness—are constructed in public discourse and mobilized in labor disputes with the drivers who operate the transit system. Demands for faster moving and more timely transit lead to the implementation and enforcement of impossible-to-meet schedules, and political economic logics configure fault for the time problems in the work practices and work ethics of the transit drivers. Disputes about the transit system's slow speeds and lateness intensify political opposition between public workers and the publics they serve, and reveal shifting conceptions of the public good. I argue that morally infused understandings of time and timeliness enable a neoliberal remaking of the transit system, its workers, and its publics.

Introduction

During evening rush hour in San Francisco, a crowded bus pulled up to the intersection of Mission and 24th Streets, where a line of people had gathered at the bus stop. After a few people had boarded the nearly-full bus, a white woman wearing a blazer and khaki pants stepped into the bus and, blocking the line of passengers, leaned in close to the bus driver and said angrily, "I want to speak to your manager. I've been waiting for over an hour. This is ridiculous and I want to speak to your manager." The African American driver looked forward and said nothing. The woman did not move and kept staring at the driver. When another rider intervened, saying, "Come on. It's not his fault," the woman turned and lunged as though she was going to hit the other rider with her pocketbook, and several people standing nearby gasped. The woman then pushed through the crowded bus and stood, fuming.

For many transit drivers in San Francisco, such scenes are all too common. The San Francisco Municipal Railway, known as Muni, is often slow and late, and riders frequently direct their frustrations towards the drivers. Muni is, in fact, the slowest major urban transit system in the country and has one of the worst on-time performance rates (arriving on-time to planned stops). In recent years, vehicles have been on-time barely more than 50% of the time.[1] The system averages about eight miles per hour, a low point after a continual, two-decade decrease in speed. Muni's slowness and lateness cause long wait times and overall trip times for passengers.

This paper examines how Muni's *problem with time*—its slowness and lateness—is constructed in public discourse through political economic logics emphasizing efficiency and productivity. The predominance of productivity logics in urban planning and governance

[1] According the "on-time" metric adopted by San Francisco's city charter, a vehicle is on-time when it arrives within six minutes of its scheduled stop.

corresponds with the ascendance of neoliberal economic forms and values. These logics enable the public and politicians to find fault for the system's problem with time in the inefficiencies of public sector labor and progressive urban governance. The drivers' Transport Workers Union Local 250-A (TWU 250-A) is an historically African American labor union, with increasing numbers of Asian American and Latino members. I argue that the expanded scope of the discourse of productivity within governing and planning practices works to privilege the mobility of the city's business class, foster resentment towards public transit drivers, and cultivate racial and class tensions in the city.

During peak commute hours, a fleet of nearly 800 vehicles—buses, light rail, and street cars—streams into the streets and contends with heavy traffic congestion, double parked vehicles, construction, and overcrowding of transit vehicles. Most Muni transit lines operate in mixed traffic, sharing lanes with cars, delivery trucks and bicycles. Lack of transit only lanes is one of the largest sources of the system's problems with time. Furthermore, a shortage of working vehicles, an aging fleet, and continual maintenance problems deepen Muni's service difficulties and create frequent delays. Initiatives to increase the speed and on-time performance face continual funding shortages. In short, Muni's problems with time are structural—they are an effect of political stalemate and persistent, nation-wide disinvestment in public services (Henderson 2013). Nevertheless, in San Francisco, riders, media and city officials often single out the transit drivers and their labor union as the cause of Muni's poor performance. In public discourse in San Francisco, Muni's problems with time are framed as stemming from the drivers' work practices, pay and benefits, and union protections.

In what follows, I provide a conceptual framing for how I understand Muni's problems with time—and responses to these problems—in relation to neoliberal transformations in the

political economy of San Francisco and the region. I begin by describing the demands for a faster and more punctual transit system, and how these demands reveal competing conceptions of urban publics and the social good at play in the politics of scheduling in transit system. I then argue that the intensive demand for a faster moving transit system leads to the design and enforcement of transit schedules that the drivers cannot actually meet. These schedules result in drivers getting blamed for their inability to meet the demand. The configuration of demand and public blame leads to exceptionally difficult working conditions for the drivers, and drivers often articulate the tension of their position in terms of harmful mental and physical stress. I conclude by exploring how the public comes to blame Muni's failures of time on transit drivers, their work practices, and their union contract, rather than a range of other structural and budgetary problems with the system. Public blame has taken the form of policy initiatives aimed at reducing transit worker pay and political power, as well as constant verbal and physical assaults from the riding public. I argue that the expansion of speed and productivity as metrics for assessing city governance has resulted in a fracturing of the urban public, opposing the needs of transit dependent riders against the business classes, and pitting riders against the drivers.

Conceptual Framing

Accusations of lateness and slowness reflect and organize power and value in the urban public sphere. Categories of time and space are constructed in social processes and reflect historically specific social and material practices, even though they are often taken as objective and natural (Bourdieu 1977, Adam 1990, Gell 1992). Furthermore, power is derived from and enacted through the ways time and space are defined in social practice (Harvey 1990b). Throughout this paper, I describe the construction of time in the city through schedules, temporal

demands, and economic accountings in minutes and seconds. However, Muni's problem with time is also a problem with space—a matter of how the city's spaces are designed, used and defined as public or private domains. *Speed* and slowness are measures of time along with space.

Social scientists have explored historically and culturally specific time-space constructions in a wide range of social and material practices such as agricultural activities, traveling, family lineage, religious practice and capitalist production (Munn 1992, Durkheim and Fields 1995, Marx et al. 1990, Thompson 1967). In the anthropological literature, *time-reckoning* refers to the use of external reference points in the counting of time—whether it be the sun's motion, calendric categories, periodized activities, events, schedules or clocks. Time-reckoning is an orientation towards time which entails "relating the actor's speed to some defined standard of timing" (Munn 1992:104). Thus, time-reckoning opens the possibility of being on-time, early or late.

Practices of time telling are also forms of social discipline, reproducing the social order by assigning people and activities to particular times and places. As I demonstrate, the failure of the Muni transit system to adhere to planned schedules provokes public disapproval of the system and discipline directed at the drivers. The rise of clock time in the 19th and 20th century urban West was associated with the intensification of industrial processes, and an increasingly fine-grained accounting of time (Marx et al. 1990, Thompson 1967, Harvey 1990b). Marxist scholars have linked the ever-increasing need for productivity under capitalism with new modes of time telling, and with social discipline leading to increased working times. In David Harvey's (2010) reading of Karl Marx's history of the working day, he argues that the inculcation of time discipline was a central aspect of socializing the population of Britain into wage laborers. E.P. Thompson (1967) argues that the widespread contemporary acquiescence to time discipline is

not an inevitable consequence of industrial wage labor relations, but rather required that a time-sense associated with the clock be instilled through social discipline. Thompson argues that this discipline extends beyond factory or workshop into social and domestic life, and becomes part of a broader cultural emphasis on a work ethic and a moral orientation towards time. Schools and families also were inculcated with a moral experience of time and regularity where, for instance, getting up early is a sign of both good moral character and industriousness. Thompson proposed that time discipline was initially externally enforced, but was internalized by the English labor force by the end of the 18th century.

Social transformations entail changes in conceptions of time and space. Scholars have given much attention to time-space changes associated with capitalism, while other theorists have emphasized the impacts of technological change, especially new communication and transport systems (Castells 1989, Schivelbusch 1987). Moreover, imperial expansion involved the imposition of new concepts of time and space. The centrality of time-discipline to colonial orders and the functioning of capitalism is evident in colonial administrators' frequent complaints when colonized groups do not conform to the timing of the "normal working day" (Harvey and Marx 2010). While time-space categories have been extended and transformed along with a range of concerns about ordering social life, the demands of capitalism have been primary. As Harvey writes, "…Public definitions of time and space throughout much of the contemporary world have been imposed in the course of capitalist development" (1990a:419).

A central transformation in contemporary time-space experience and categories is the *speeding up* of the pace of life. Theorists such as Paul Virilio (2001) and William Connolly (2002) posit manifold causes of the increased pace of life and the experience of speed as a contemporary condition, often citing new media and computer technology as key forces.

Harvey's (1990b) influential conception of "time-space compression," once again, situates transformations in the capitalist economy as the central causal mechanism leading to radically foreshortened time horizons. Capitalism—especially under conditions of post-Fordist production—has an ever increasing need for a faster pace of production and circulation of capital and commodities, and remakes the world through this process.

The demand for faster paced production and circulation translates into a demand for greater mobility of persons, information, capital and commodities. In urban settings, roads and transit lines are the central channels of mobility. As geographer Jason Henderson (2013) writes, when the capitalist economy expands, "Improving speed and access of transportation systems becomes synonymous with economic growth and individual advancement. 'Better' mobility is measured in terms of, and conflated with, higher speed and greater spatial range" (24).

San Francisco is one of the most transit dependent cities in the United States, following only New York City. Compared to other transit systems, Muni has one of the highest proportions of middle- and upper-income riders[2], and there are competing notions of what better mobility should look like. Progressive coalitions promote a conception of Muni transit as a public service or social good and have been successful in expanding access to underserved residents including youth, elderly, disabled and low income riders. The vision of Muni as a social good advances collective solutions to its time problem, including democratic planning and higher taxation on capital.

With the rise of neoliberal city governance, economic productivity becomes a central lens and metric through which movement in the urban public sphere is assessed and contested. Neoliberal governance and planning target transit drivers and their labor union with anti-union

[2] SFMTA, *Transit Effectiveness Briefing Book,* 2006.

campaigns and public blame for Muni's problem with time. Neoliberalism is a political economic rationality, orchestrated by state entities, which privileges a market logic for understanding and managing societies (Harvey 2005, Ong 2006, Wacquant 2012). Neoliberal governance is generally associated with the recapturing of public state functions for the ends of private capital, and with the flexibilization of the workforce and the undermining of labor unions. In San Francisco, a neoliberal vision of transit is promoted by a coalition of downtown businesses, real estate interests, and professional workers who make demands for more narrow access to faster and timelier transportation through privatization or the creation of premium rapid networks. The demand for better service at Muni—for increased speed and timeliness—has been channeled into a persistent focus on the drivers' productivity, work ethics, and pay. My ethnographic research finds that drivers are put in a position of being expected to meet impossible time demands and subjected to racially inflected social discipline for their failure to meet the demand.

Locating San Francisco's Transit Workers

Muni was founded at the end of 1912, after voters approved public funding for the agency in response to the private monopoly ownership of transit lines. Since the 1960s, employment at Muni and membership in the TWU 250-A has been a "path to the middle class" for African Americans in the Bay Area (Cothran 1995). The first African American city employee in San Francisco, Audley Cole, was hired by Muni in 1941 (Broussard 1993), and in 1944 the poet Maya Angelou became Muni's first African American streetcar conductor (Gillespie et al. 2008).[3] By the 1970s, the TWU was associated with historically African

[3] Angelou recounted in an autobiography that there was one African American man working for the agency before her. He was passing as white and was subsequently fired for lying about his race on his application (Angelou 2013).

American neighborhoods in San Francisco, such as the Bayview, and the union gained political power through coalitions with African American community organizations.[4] One Muni employee told me:

> Thirty years ago [early 1980s], the buses were basically all African American drivers. They all came from the same neighborhood and it was a family thing. It was like your whole family would be a bus driver […] Their families have been here for quite a few generations and have been in the union for more than one generation. The first to get a job at Muni is usually the first to be in the middle class. It was a very active choice to work at Muni and it was something that they aspired to do.

In recent years, the demographics of the workers in the system have gradually shifted, as the agency hired more Asian American and Latino workers. The occupation remains racialized as non-white, with whites making up about 10-15% and African Americans about half of the workforce, even while the African American population in San Francisco decreased to 6.1% of the city's total population in 2010. With rapidly rising housing prices in San Francisco since the late 1990s, many workers were forced to move to neighboring cities, weakening the union's political influence and community ties. Through the TWU's strong labor contract with the city, employees remain some of the most highly paid transit workers in the United States. Yet the cost of living in San Francisco is one of the highest in the country and is unaffordable for many Muni employees.

Through fieldwork, I examined both the transit system workplace and the public, political discourse about the transit system's performance. Over the course of eight months from 2012-2013, I conducted 14 semi-structured interviews with transportation workers (four identified as

[4] Interview with former TWU 250A President Ray Antonio.

African American men, two as African American women, three as white men, two as Asian American men and one as a Latina woman) and seven semi-structured interviews with managers and city planners (five identified as white men, one as an African American woman, and one as an Asian American woman). I also conducted four interviews with union officials and three interviews with labor activists. Interviewees were selected through snowball sampling. During the same time period, I conducted ethnographic observation about one day per week in the transportation system by visiting system divisions and riding on selected bus and train lines. I chose bus and train lines to ride on with the aim of observing a variety of work experiences with respect to traffic and passenger density, passenger demographics, driver seniority, and equipment type (bus, train, cable car). I had many short and informal conversations with workers during breaks, on call periods, and sometimes while they drove, from which I also derive much of the material for this paper. The interviews and observations with drivers allowed me to learn how the drivers understand and experience the demands to meet the schedule, as well as their perceptions of barriers to keeping the system working according to schedule. The interviews with planners and managers provided insight into how the transit schedules are designed and how political demands impact scheduling policy.

To assess public discourse on the transit system's performance, I observed public meetings of the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency, including the monthly meetings of the Board of Directors and other meetings where public comments are taken. Furthermore, I conducted a review of newspaper articles and of comment sections of on-line news articles relevant to the topic of Muni service delivery, including its speed and on-time performance.

While doing fieldwork, I introduced myself as a student from a nearby university conducting research about stress in the workplace and health.[5] This often elicited reactions of curiosity and requests for more information. Stress on the job is a common topic of conversation among the drivers. My first visit to a Muni division was for an Operator of the Month ceremony, where six or seven employees were given awards for their work at Muni. When each operator was given their award, the presenter asked, "What is your secret for dealing with the stress?" A driver receiving an award who had been at Muni for 31 years said, "You just have to start the day knowing what you have to do, what it's going to be like, do it, and then leave it behind when you go home." Another award recipient jokingly said, "If I tell my secret, someone might take my job." Given the attention to stress, when I was introduced to drivers, most readily discussed their experiences of working and the stresses they encounter. Some drivers and managers asked if I was going to be able to help the situation. Several workers expressed concern that I would inform management of their statements and activities and create further surveillance of their work. This suspicion reflected an ongoing mistrust between the union and the management. More often, however, drivers had much to say about transportation work, and the unrealistic schedules were a ubiquitous concern.

When I visited the bus divisions (as opposed to the street car and cable car divisions), I was often the only white person in the building, with both the drivers and the managers being mostly African American, Asian American and Latino. At the cable car division and the divisions with light rail and street cars, there were significantly more white drivers.[6]

As part of the legacy of powerful labor organizations in San Francisco, the transit union has had strong labor contracts and protections since the 1960s. The more recent neoliberal trend

[5] While not the main focus of this paper, my larger dissertation examines stress and health in transportation.
[6] All workers begin in the bus divisions and only through promotion move to other divisions.

in urban governance has weakened the position of collective labor, and the drivers' middle class wages now define them, in media and political discourse, as *overpaid* and underproductive. Racial difference undergirds claims to low productivity and drivers are often represented as lazy, overweight and slow, and accused of taking advantage of the system through excessive benefits and protections.

Urban Publics and Productivity

Efficiency has long been a central concern in transit planning. How many people does the system move per hour? At what cost? Recently there has been an extension of productivity metrics beyond the bounded sphere of technocratic planning—about routes and vehicle numbers—to the political and moral assessments about the management of the public system itself. The increasing scope of the productivity metric in urban planning and public discourse about Muni transit is associated with a neoliberal trend in urban governance. In the neoliberal perspective, as Henderson (2013) writes, "As part of the critical infrastructure for the production and circulation of capital, transit must be recaptured from progressive policies that envision the system as a social service and instead optimized for the function of the private market and to enhance the value of private property" (191). In line with the neoliberal trend, city officials in San Francisco increasingly assess public transit, along with all public infrastructure, in terms of efficiency and by its contribution to the productivity of private capital.

The system's speed is a central factor in determining its productivity. Within the extended productivity metric, Muni's slow speeds are seen as undercutting the efficiency of the system as well as the production of value within the economy at large. In San Francisco, advocacy for faster transit speeds has worked in tandem with the neoliberal trends, often passing

over concerns about accessibility for transit dependent residents and reducing the social service function of the public transit system. Furthermore, city officials and policy organizations consistently foreground the high cost and low productivity of the drivers, even while a wide range of government offices, planning policies, and urban publics are implicated in causing Muni's slow speeds.

City officials and transit planners often claim that Muni's productivity needs to increase as a solution to the web of entangled problems that has been dubbed "Muni's downward spiral." At a recent city hall meeting, an elected official summarized the downward spiral as follows:

> When service is unreliable, people are delayed and frustrated in getting where they are going. Leading to negative economic impacts and reduced quality of life. […] When Muni struggles it is at risk of going in a downward spiral. Ridership will suffer, resulting in lower fare collection, and public confidence in the system goes down making it harder to convince our city to invest in the system. More people drive, which results in increased congestion and slower Muni travel times.

As Muni slows, more people drive, crowding the streets, and resulting in even slower travel. The feared result of this vicious cycle is a transit system that is slow, crowded, and only used by those who rely on public transit the most—youth, senior, disabled and low-income city residents—while business commuters drive and use other forms of private transport. Faster operating speeds are thought to be the solution: decreasing costs per trip, attracting riders away from their cars, and reducing traffic.

In 2005, the San Francisco Planning and Urban Research Association (SPUR)[7], an influential urban planning and transportation policy organization aligned with downtown

[7] SPUR has long been one of the most influential actors in San Francisco transit politics. The organization is associated with downtown business associations, real estate interests, and a range of researchers and planners, and holds a complex mix of

business associations, released a report entitled "Reversing Muni's Downward Spiral" which outlines a full range of structural problems with Muni governance, financing and planning. The report's conclusion is encompassed in the heading, "THE SOLUTION: 25 PERCENT FASTER MUNI." The authors write, "To reduce costs, Muni must become more efficient. Doing more with less (or much more with the same number of drivers) is simple—Muni must move faster. A fast transit system costs less to operate because it has higher productivity—measured by the number of people a bus or streetcar carries for each hour it operates." Later, in 2010, the transit agency itself produced a report stating that a one mile per hour increase in the system (to nine miles per hour) could save the agency $76 million a year (Reisman 2010a).

Through the metric of economic productivity, speed and cost stand in for each other. The cost of labor is translated into a loss in system speed and performance. While the report focuses on structural problems, when they turn to solutions, the authors emphasize the drivers. Under their plan for "How to Make Muni Faster," the SPUR's report included recommendations that the management "adjust" union work rules and curb workers' salaries and benefits alongside proposals to change traffic lights, relocate transit stops, and reduce double parking. The cost of paying the drivers is directly associated with the inability to get the transit system moving faster. The report states: "In the past, Muni was able to provide much more service because the cost of each employee was so much lower. But now employees are expensive."[8] The money spent on labor could instead be spent on improvements to traffic design and system efficiency. In the section entitled, "Work with unions to reduce structural costs," the authors argue that the "most important step" is to amend the city charter to remove the drivers' guaranteed wages, giving

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progressive and neoliberal visions for city transit (Henderson 2013). While promoting a "livability" agenda advocating increased public transit, walking and biking, SPUR has consistently identified the Muni drivers and their labor union as a central obstacle to solving the transit system's problem with time.

[8] This is a result of increased costs of retirement, health benefits and workers compensation.

management more leverage during contract negotiations. The report states, "Though certain changes may run counter to the unions' short-term interests, it is in everyone's long-term interest to reduce unnecessary costs and improve transit service quality enough to boost productivity…" In addition to the report, the director of SPUR has stated that "the first and foremost concern for Muni should be labor reform" (cited in Henderson 2013:176).

The ambition to tether Muni's performance to San Francisco's economic productivity was made explicit at a recent meeting of the Board of Supervisors Land Use & Economic Development Committee. Elected officials had requested that the city economist produce a report quantifying the economic impacts of Muni delays. Until this point, in May 2013, there had not been analyses linking Muni's problem with time with negative impacts on the productivity of the city's economy. Supervisor Scott Weiner explained the motivation for the study by stating, "[A] lot of people, when there is a problem in the system and there are delays, people think, god, this is having, you know, an economic productivity impact and so this is as far as I know the first time that we have done this analysis and I think that it is a good start." The analysis was limited to the impact of delays caused only by breakdowns during peak, weekday hours. The economist found that riders were delayed 86,000 hours during the previous month of April, which he translated into a $4.2 million economic loss for the month, and a $50 million impact for the year. The officials repeated several times that this estimate was "conservative" as it only took account of delays caused by maintenance problems during rush hour. The accuracy of the number ($50 million) did not matter so much as the symbolic transformation of the experience of time delay on Muni into economic loss. While this was the first analysis linking San Francisco's broader economy to Muni's problem with time, minutes and even seconds in the Muni system have long been assiduously counted in monetary terms.

Before the presentation of the economic analysis, the officials asked the Director of Muni, John Haley, to present a "report card," which showed that Muni was not meeting many of its service standards. The on-time performance was 58% for the year, and the Director said of the noteworthy findings in the report, "One is the on time performance, and clearly, this is one that needs improvement." At the end of the hearing, the Director of Transportation for San Francisco, Ed Reiskin, brought together the economic analysis and report card by merging concerns about the economy and quality of life, saying, "I think that making the connection between the transportation system and the economy is a good way […] to think about how investments that we can make can improve the performance of the system that in turn can enhance the economy and improve the quality of life for the people in the city." This statement reflects a conception of society in which the productivity of the economy is the essential social good offered by the transit system.

A progressive political movement in San Francisco has long advanced a social service mission of Muni in which public transit is understood as a central mechanism for increasing access to resources and opportunities for low income residents, people of color, disable people, youth and seniors. The aim of increasing access has resulted in Muni being one of the densest transit networks in the nation, with stops located within two blocks of nearly every resident. Moreover, Muni was one of the first transit agencies in the country to build a lift-equipped bus fleet and provide a range of disabled services.[9] An array of community organizations and politicians has argued that an emphasis on transit speed and productivity has elided the social service mission of the transit system. Progressive community-based organizations explicitly link the productivity metric to the erosion of equity in the urban public. For example, members of an

[9] Muni implemented disabled services more than a decade before the Americans with Disabilities Act (1990). Managers and some drivers often mentioned to me that Muni was the first bus system to build in wheel chair lifts. http://www.sfmta.com/tl/about-sfmta/our-history-and-fleet/muni-history

active San Francisco community organization claim that, in debates about how to best run Muni, "*Equity gets pitted against efficiency*, and the interests of working-class communities who depend on public transit are pitted against those of professional and managerial commuters and 'choice riders'" (POWER 2012, my emphasis).

Progressives continue to have a substantial impact on transit planning in the city, but recent years have seen a split among progressives associated, on the one hand, with ethnic-based and working class community organizing and, on the other hand, with a class of professional workers. Many San Francisco progressives are highly educated tech workers and professionals who advocate an urban "livability" political agenda with strong support for public transportation. Yet they often join landowners, real estate developers, and neoliberal tech workers in the view that labor unions obstruct innovation and efficiency (Henderson 2013).

At the end of the meeting of the Board of Supervisors, the first person to make a public comment was an elderly man. He stood at the podium and spoke slowly, "I am a senior. I would say that the drivers need to be trained afresh, so that when they have to deal with the traveling public, especially seniors, that they would be more respectful […] I have seen time and time again that seniors trying to get to the bus and the bus driver is so inconsiderate, to not even take a few extra moments to wait for that senior." As these "extra moments" are increasingly quantified as losses for the San Francisco economy, the social service function of the transit system is excluded from political calculation. The rider's appeal for more time for seniors to get on the bus is directed towards the work practices of the drivers, who are accused of being disrespectful. This rider's accusation that the drivers are at fault for his inaccessibility to the transit vehicles reveals the power of the neoliberal logic to shunt attention and responsibility from the systemic sources of time pressure to the individual responsibility of the driver. Later in this paper, I show

how city-wide mobilizations of anti-worker sentiment underlies this shift in attention from collective and structural circumstances to the work practice of the drivers.

Riding on the line

The transit workers' perspectives are often elided in public discourse of Muni's problem with time. Transit workers describe operating passenger vehicles in urban environments as a highly stressful activity. The time pressure, constant vigilance, attention to the riding public, and the perpetual threat of violence and assault create an exceptionally difficult working environment. This highly stressful environment has damaging effects on drivers' health. Scientists throughout the world have shown that urban transit workers have higher rates of stress-related disorder than most other occupations (Winkleby et al. 1988, Evans and Johansson 1998, Tse 2006). Drivers in many cities have exceptionally high rates of hypertension, heart disease, stroke, musculoskeletal disorders, and depression. Studies of Muni drivers, for example, have shown that drivers' hypertension is closely linked to number of years on the job (Ragland et al. 1997). A review of the field shows that "During the past five decades occupational researchers have documented that bus drivers' health is worse than in almost any other profession" (Poulsen et al. 2007:75). Most health scientists regard stress as the primary cause of the high rate of disorders in the profession.

Drivers often told me that not everyone can do the job, and indeed many new drivers do not stay for long. The agency's turnover rate and sick leave rates are so high that there is a continual shortage of trained drivers. As one driver told me, while hitting his stomach with his fist, "You need a strong stomach to do this job. And I have one." Drivers-in-training are required

to go on "ride alongs" with experienced drivers. There have been many instances of new hires leaving training after seeing the difficulties of the job on their first ride along.

On a Thursday afternoon, I arrived at the Flynn Division a little before 3:00pm. It is a massive building with corrugated metal walls that takes up most of a city block. I walked into the barn section of the building, an immense room several stories high, past long lines of buses parked nose to tail. The building houses about 124 diesel buses, which in half an hour will start streaming out onto the streets and making runs throughout most of the city.

I walked into the office where I had planned to meet Carol, a transit dispatcher, before her shift. I met Carol,[10] an African American woman in her fifties, a week before when I visited a different Muni division. She drove buses in San Francisco for ten years before becoming a dispatcher. When she learned that I was doing research about transit workers and health she said, "You know they don't expect us to even get our first retirement check. They don't expect us to live long enough and they know that."

There was a man sitting at the desk finishing up his shift dispatching the buses. Carol came in and introduced me and told him that I was from the university and was there to learn about stress at Muni. She wanted to find a busy line for me to ride on. Hearing this, he stood up and dropped a stack of papers onto the desk and said, "You will not *really* see stress going out on the bus line! If you want to know about stress, you have to come back here everyday for 12 hours, and keep driving until late into the night. Then maybe you will start to see what the stress of this is!"

Carol nodded her head and began sorting through bundles of printed bus schedules and attaching the badge numbers of the drivers that go with the shift. Everyday, she coordinates the drivers signed up to work that day with the transit schedules handed down from the scheduling

[10] All names are pseudonyms.

office. She wanted to send me out with a driver on the 38-Geary line so I could talk to the driver about working on one of the busiest lines in the city. The 38-Geary and the 38-Limited together see more than 50,000 boardings per day. On other days, Carol wanted me to ride on the "ghetto" lines and the lines that carry the downtown business passengers. "I'm very detail oriented," she said, "I want you to ride all the different lines."

The stack of schedules is for the afternoon pullout, when nearly all the working buses at the division go onto the streets to start moving passengers for the evening commute. By the end of the pullout, most of the working buses have left, and even just a couple of mechanical problems can send a line out of schedule the rest of the day. Carol showed me a schedule for a driver named Clifford, scheduled for a 3:57pm pullout on the 38-Geary line. The printed schedule had his report to work time at 3:42pm. This gives him fifteen minutes to check over the bus and gather everything he needs for his shift including water and food. The schedule has him pulling the bus back into the division after 1:00am.

Carol went and made me a copy of Clifford's schedule. She put it down on the table in front of me and said "You watch," pointing to the time points on the schedule, "You watch as he starts getting close to here [pointing to the end of the line]. The closer he gets, the further he'll be from the time. He'll be trying, but he won't get there on-time. I bet he won't get that break." He was scheduled for a nine-minute break at the end of the first hour of driving.

A few minutes later Clifford walked into the office to pick up his schedule. He was a large African American man, at least six-foot-three and 250 pounds. After completing an inspection of the bus, we drove straight over to the VA Medical Center by Ocean Beach on the opposite side of the city without picking up any passengers. Clifford's shift starts once we get there.

Management had recently shaved off a few minutes from the scheduled trip back into town. Transit planners reformulate the schedules four times a year using computer models calibrated to new information about passenger counts and traffic speeds throughout the city. Clifford could not understand why the trip was even shorter in this most recent round. He now has 54 minutes to get to the Transbay Terminal on the other side of the city. "You probably can't even do that in a car in this traffic," he said. "Someone should look if these schedules are illegal. They expect you to drive so fast that it must be illegal." Clifford believes that the management expects him to drive faster than is possible in such a large vehicle on the poorly maintained and busy streets. He went on to say, "And you know what else is illegal? You are supposed to get 15 minute breaks every two hours but I barely get enough time to smoke and go to the bathroom before I have to turn around."

On Muni's 100th anniversary in 2012, the *New York Times* published an article about how the transit system is slower today than it was 100 years ago. In 1920, this trip across town on the A-line street car took 35 minutes (Elinson 2012). Now, a similar trip on the 38-Geary is scheduled to take 54 minutes, and often takes longer.

When we started the trip at the VA Medical Center, a man in a wheelchair got on, and the bus filled with the smell of soiled clothing as we waited for several more people to board. Clifford asked him, "What is your stop?" The man responded, "Leavenworth. Thank you sir."

The bus filled with passengers as we made our way eastward on Geary Street. Most of the time, Clifford just looked forward and drove, greeting some passengers that said hello. He learned a long time ago not to say hello to passengers if they do not initiate the greeting. On my trip on the 38-Geary line, there were quite a few elderly people with bags and carts. When an elderly person boarded the bus, Clifford waited, looking in the rearview mirror, until the person

found a seat before he moved the bus again. The passengers' safety is always on his mind, he said. He is responsible for anything that happens within 50 feet of the bus. "Never open the door for runners [people running to catch the bus]," he told me, "if they get hurt it's your fault." To limit legal liability, Muni's policy is that drivers must remain seated at all times, and never get up to help passengers. Many drivers, including Clifford, do anyway. One driver was fired for getting out of his seat to break up a fight between high school students, but was later reinstated. Another driver told me of the regret he felt when he did not get up for an elderly man teetering in the stairwell, who then fell and broke his hip.

When we reached the Leavenworth stop, the bus was nearly full, with little standing room available. Clifford extended the automatic wheelchair lift and waited for the man from the VA Medical Center to make it to the front of the crowed bus. The crowd slowly shifted to make room for him to leave, and three minutes later the wheel chair lift was pulled in and the bus was moving again. Drivers often complained that management and schedulers took no account of how long it takes to assist someone in a wheelchair.

I pulled out the schedule that Carol had given me. The schedule lists target time points for every four or five stops on the line. I looked over and could see that Clifford had the same schedule clipped to the dashboard in front of him. The upcoming time point was for O'Farrell and Powell Streets, at 5:22pm. I looked at my phone and it was already 5:33pm. We were well behind schedule, as both Carol and Clifford had predicted. When we arrived at the end of the line at 5:44, people started boarding immediately and Clifford turned the bus around without getting out of his seat. We did not need a break yet, he said, and joked that I should not drink too much because it'll be a while before we get back to the Medical Center.

On the five more trips in and out of town, I saw a range of passenger and traffic hassles slowing down the buses including double parked vehicles, construction delays, and elderly and disabled passengers requiring extra time to pay their fare and find a seat. While we were driving through the Richmond District, a man angrily yelled at a woman storing her groceries on the seat next to her. The altercation lasted only a few seconds and I saw Clifford briefly glance in the rearview mirror. We only made up time and caught up to the schedule by skipping breaks; we took three short, several minute breaks during the whole shift.

This was a typical day, yet I learned that alarming and sometimes dangerous events were also part of the everyday for drivers. During the time that I did fieldwork at Muni, I saw many arguments amongst passengers and threatening and violent language directed at drivers. Facing belligerent and intoxicated riders is a daily experience. Drivers told me of witnessing shootings, stabbings, and accidents and being victims of verbal and physical assaults. The week that I rode on Clifford's bus, the drivers back at the Flynn Division spoke about what seemed like a recent wave of people jumping out of moving transit vehicles. "I looked back in the mirror and the guy was laying facedown in the road," one driver said. When that happens, the driver needs to stop the bus and wait for an inspector to review the situation.

Impossible Schedules

A common refrain I heard from drivers was, as one driver put it, "Whoever makes the schedules, they've never been out there." The schedules are often described as being *not realistic*. A union shop steward named John said, "They make the schedule based on someone zipping around as fast as they can." The schedules do not reflect the reality of dense traffic and

crowded vehicles that the drivers face. The dissonance between on-the-ground reality and planned schedules takes a toll on drivers.

On a visit to a bus division, I met a shop steward named John who urges drivers not to rush. “It’s like people are brainwashed,” he said, “They think that they have to rush and rush in order to stay on time. But it’s impossible. I tell the operators, they are on time if they show up to the barn on time, and sign in on time. What happens out there [pointing to the street], they can’t do anything about.” Some drivers’ continual determination to meet the schedule reflects the internalization of time discipline remarked upon by E.P. Thompson. Most drivers worked to meet the schedule in order to preserve their break times and avoid citations from management. However, as the shop steward remarked, drivers are inculcated into the ethos of rushing, and indeed many pride themselves on being on-time. As one white driver said, “I am a professional operator. This is not an easy job and you have to be a professional. You have to know how to deal with everything and keep an eye on the time. I meet the schedule most of the time.” Still others said that they did not pay much attention to the schedule because it is impossible to follow, usually citing the safety of the riders as their foremost concern.

Drivers feel pressure from management to rush, but they also rush to get a bathroom break. Kelly, a driver with fourteen years of experience, has had difficulty finding time for a bathroom break in the schedule. She told me, “[Management] would rather have you pissing on yourself than missing the schedule.” When Kelly drives the bus back into the Woods Division where she works, she parks the bus and runs as fast as she can to the bathroom. Kelly has both hypertension and diabetes and her medications make her need to use the bathroom. She only takes half of the diabetes medication her doctor prescribes because of the rarity of bathroom breaks.

Finding time to use the bathroom is a major issue for most drivers. Some drivers told me about peeing in bottles or on the curb when they could not make it to a bathroom in time. Kelly said, “Please don’t laugh at me, but one time I was on the line and I wasn’t rushing. I finally got to that bathroom on Main Street. I had to go. I ran out of the bus and started banging on the bathroom door. Someone was in there and I couldn’t hold it anymore and I didn’t have a change of clothes.” If a driver is running behind schedule but needs to take a bathroom break, they have to call management on the radio and ask for permission, even if it is a scheduled break. I met a pregnant woman who has to take her scheduled bathroom breaks at the end of each trip. Since she often runs behind schedule, when she gets to the end of the line she calls management. In telling me the story, she frowned and said, “I pick up the phone and I say, ‘I’m sorry, I’m sorry. I really have to go to the bathroom.’”

A few weeks after I met Kelly, we were again sitting at the Division, this time chatting with the shop steward. The shop steward said to Kelly, “If you need to take a break, just do it. If it comes down to it, and you get written up for going to the bathroom, I can go in and take a lighter to that write up, burn it up.” Kelly said, “Okay. If I need to, I will do that.” A couple weeks before this conversation, Kelly rushed back to the Division for a bathroom emergency. She pulled in five minutes ahead of schedule and management wrote her up. Arriving more than two minutes early to any stop is grounds for a citation. While running behind schedule results in loss of breaks and anger from the riding public, it does not elicit punitive measures unless management believe the driver his- or herself is responsible for compromising the schedule.

Now Kelly is only one citation away from a suspension. The next time I saw Kelly, she held up a lemonade and said, “I’m drinking because I won’t be out on the line today.” I asked her if she had taken the shop steward’s advice and called in any bathroom breaks, and she replied, “I

just don't drink anything when I know I'm going to be out there." The driver's labor union had become increasingly disorganized during recent years, and Kelly did not trust that the union would be able to protect her in the case that management decided to suspend her for deviating from the schedule for a bathroom break.

Drivers rarely follow the shop steward's advice and often give in to the pressure from management to rush. On another occasion, when I saw John at a meeting, I told him that I thought drivers felt a lot of pressure to meet the schedule. He repeated that it's a problem of "brainwashing," and drivers not realizing that it is in their interest to work at a realistic pace. If a driver rushes to stay on schedule by speeding or aggressive driving or giving up their break, John said, "You give them that time!" Planners see that the driver can make the schedule, so they use that information and shave off a couple minutes on the next round of scheduling.

John and other union members I spoke with also expressed concern that the pressure from management and the riders to rush to meet the schedule is a threat to public safety. In response to accidents, Muni management has repeatedly blamed drivers for unsafe practices, while the union blames the considerable pressure to stick to the schedule. For instance, in 2009, a driver blacked out from a heart condition while operating a light rail vehicle through a tunnel and it crashed into a parked vehicle at the West Portal Station. The accident injured 48 people, with 24 taken to the hospital by ambulance. While traveling through tunnels, safety regulations instruct drivers to operate the vehicles in automatic mode, where a computer sets the speed, but the driver had switched the controls to manual in order to meet the schedule. The union president criticized the management for instigating unsafe driving. "The unspoken rule is that you're supposed to do it [switch to manual mode]," the union president said. "At least for the last three to four years, they've basically just said: 'Do it'" (Cabanatuan 2009).

Making the Schedule

Why do the planners design schedules that are so difficult to follow? On my first visit to the transit planning office, I signed in at front desk security, and rode the elevator to the twelfth floor. I planned to meet Bill, a planner with a Master's degree in City Planning, who had been at the agency for seven years. His office had sweeping views of the city.

In Bill's perspective, "The scheduler doesn't care about the [labor] policies. They just need to know them so they can program them in." He continued, "I think that a lot of people here are more rational and just purely technocratic without putting much thought into the other side of it." Labor policies are determined through labor-management negotiations, and the planners' job is to account for the policies in their planning models. However, Bill admitted that "They [planners] really like the computer system to be free of all constraints so that it can be the most efficient thing possible." Formally, the planners and schedulers perform a politically neutral, "purely technocratic," task. At the same time, they strive to produce the most efficient system possible, and work rules regarding shift length and breaks are a consistent source of constraint for their modeling systems. As Bill went on to say, "The more constraints you have, the more narrow your solution space is." A computer system free of constraints assumes a completely flexible workforce willing to work a wide variety of shift lengths.

Planners understand the union's demands for regular, eight hour work shifts with breaks as constraints on their optimized modeling strategies. The union contract stipulates that the majority of workers get paid for at least 8 hours per day. Another planner I spoke with said, "The more you can break shifts up overall the greater the efficiency of the schedule." The union's unwillingness to break up shifts results in an inefficient schedule.

The transit system has to deal with two peaks of commuters, one in the morning (6:00-9:00am) and one in the late afternoon (4:00-7:00pm). The management and planners want to hire part-time drivers to cover the peaks. However, the union contract historically stated that workers get paid for a minimum of 8 hours per day. To accommodate this demand, many route schedules (about 49% of weekday runs) have built-in standby time.

By speaking with other planners, I learned that there is significant pressure to cut the length of the time designated for a trip in order to reduce costs. The San Francisco city charter specifies the overall amount of service the transit system must provide the public (for instance by requiring that riders wait no more than 10 minutes for a vehicle during peak hours). Planners must provide this service, on paper, within the allocated budget. Planners ask, how many vehicles need to be running on a line in order to provide this level of service? A planner named Martin told me, "If that number goes up to 6.3 buses, you can't have a third of a bus, so you're at seven, and that's a problem." Planners commonly round down the number of buses, in this case to 6, leaving the drivers to deal with the deficit of time. He said, "So we need drivers who can drive the bus as safely, but as aggressively as possible."

Martin continued, "So there is always this tension between trying to run the buses as fast as you can, because it saves a lot of money, and the drivers… So when your running time [the amount of time in the schedule] increases, it makes it easier for the driver to make the schedule, but their costs go way up. So you are always trying to push the schedule as tight as you can." Through interviews with veteran employees in the scheduling department, I learned that designing the schedules as tightly as possible in order to save on costs is a long-standing practice at Muni. In the past, the union would often contest particular schedules that drivers felt were unreasonable. However, drivers and union officials reported that the disjuncture between the

schedules handed down by management and the reality of the streets is larger than ever, and management has been successful in limiting the union's leverage in scheduling decisions.

As the organization and operation of the transit system is increasingly evaluated through metrics of economic productivity, it becomes ever more important to maintain the tight schedules and discipline the workers to adhere to the schedules. As David Harvey (1990b) argues, the progressive monetization of social relations leads to a compression of time and space. This entails a speeding up of political economic practices, and encourages a drive to "annihilate space through time and reduce turnover time [of capital]…"(307). When the movement of the transit vehicles is tied to the productivity of the economy, the relations of social service between the management, the drivers and the public are refigured as economic relations subjected to the demands for increased speed. As planners design more productive schedules, they imagine and require movement through the city that is well beyond what the material conditions of the city allow.

A different person from the planning department admitted that the system of planning schedules as tightly as possible is hard on the drivers. He said, "Basically we say, here's the schedule. Here's what you got to do, and if you don't do it we're going to beat up on you. Because, ok, well what if some idiot decided to try to turn in front of a bus and you're stuck there for three minutes? Why is that your fault?"

I asked Bill why so many vehicles are late, and he responded, "Some things are the schedulers not updating the schedule enough. Some things are the driver is really not performing. Some things are traffic really is interfering too much, you know, it's hard to assign a cause of why you're not meeting your performance measure." Yet he acknowledged that planners often direct blame towards the labor union, stating, "Whenever you're criticized for not meeting the

performance measures, blame the work rules. But I guess it's kind of like playing labor and the public off of each other." Once again, public frustration with slow and late transit is directed towards the drivers, placing the public at odds with the union.

Public Politics of Blame

Public blame for Muni's inefficiencies has been directed towards transit drivers through a political campaign aimed at decreasing drivers' salaries and the bargaining power of the union, and through verbal and physical assaults towards drivers. These forms of public blame towards drivers reflect racial antagonisms in the city.

In the wake of the 2008 U.S. economic crisis, Muni had a shrinking budget and began to cut service. Transit vehicles were slower and more crowded than ever. Muni management sought concessions from the Transport Workers Union to close the growing budget gap. Officials argued that Muni would have to raise fares unless the labor union agreed to concessions. The union's rank and file rejected a contract containing concessions, arguing that the concessions were too broad and that the proposal decreased labor costs without considering any other sources of revenue (Henderson 2013:176).

Mayor Gavin Newsom, city officials, SPUR and Muni management all framed the budget crisis as a contest between the public interest and union wages. By 2010, there was growing public animosity towards the TWU. In response to widespread condemnation, the TWU staged a demonstration outside of city hall to protest what they saw as a concerted effort on the part of the Mayor and Board of Supervisors to pit the public and labor against each other. Union members held signs that read, "Operators are not to blame" and "Riders and Operators Unite." They chanted, "Where is the money? Where is the money?" and claimed that city hall had a lot of

money, and should tax downtown businesses to gain revenue. As one protestor said, "What we need to start doing is asking, where is the money downtown? Because what they are doing is pitting us [riders and drivers] against one another." Union representatives made speeches about the shared interest of riders and drivers. One driver took the bullhorn and said, "As for the senior citizens, I know first hand how Mayor Gavin Newsom and the board of supervisors neglect the seniors in this city. We must come together as one and show them that we are a team."

Public resentment continued, and city politicians, along with SPUR, launched the "Fix Muni Now" campaign to put the transit operators' labor contract up for a vote. The campaign collected 75,000 signatures and successfully added the voter initiative titled "Proposition G: Transit Operator Wages" to the ballot. The proposition would revoke wage guarantees and reduce the union's bargaining power. Drivers' wages had been set by a formula guaranteeing automatic wage increases. This formula was codified in the city charter in 1967 through a voter proposition meant to assure labor peace and optimize efficiency in the system by retaining professional drivers. Furthermore, Proposition G reduced the union's power to make scheduling and staffing decisions, stating that the union decisions must show "clear and convincing" evidence that the drivers' interests outweigh the public interest (Cabanatuan 2013). This stipulation echoes the popular portrayal of the drivers union as gaining resources and power at the temporal and monetary expense of the rider (Nevius 2010).

The largest donors to the campaign were familiar big business organizations including the Building Owners and Managers Association, the Chamber of Commerce, Committee on Jobs, and the Association of Realtors (Gordon 2010). The proposition focused public attention almost exclusively on how to increase efficiency by extracting more from labor, rather than addressing traffic problems or speeding up boarding times. As a consequence of Proposition G, as

Henderson writes, "drivers could be made to bear more responsibility for the time it took buses to move through the car traffic that slows Muni down" (2013:179).

Worker opposition to the campaign foregrounded racial and class divisions in the city. Muni's ridership has one of the highest average incomes of any public transit system in the country. The professional and creative classes who support progressive city planning policies had little sympathy for the drivers and their union (*ibid.*). Moreover, the proposition should be seen as part of a broader nation-wide attack on public sector labor unions, which portray union workers as lazy, privileged and responsible for city and state budget problems (Collins 2011). As one city official told me, "They get paid sixty or seventy thousand dollars, you know, twenty five to thirty dollars an hour, plus their overtime. And their benefits are a hundred percent of their wages. So you're talking about a 125,000 dollar person. You need to do 125,000 dollars worth of work, and that isn't happening."

In San Francisco, drivers and union officials charged that the public attack on the workers' wages was racially motivated. As one driver said, the riders think "[we] are black people getting paid too much." While workers and union officials repeatedly pointed out the racist implications of white politicians singling out a group of largely African American workers, city officials and residents deeply resented the accusation.

Sean Elsbernd, the City Supervisor who led the Proposition G campaign, when confronted with charges that the campaign had racial undertones, responded that he was "disappointed by the type of discussion here." Another white City Supervisor criticized Elsbernd, stating, "If a white politician moves forward with something that negatively affects a predominantly African-American class, even if the intentions are righteous, you have to accept that there are racial undertones" (Reisman 2010b).

The SPUR director stated publicly that his aim with the "Fix Muni Now" campaign was not to scapegoat drivers, but rather to fix Muni's service problems. He said that the drivers deserve decent pay because, "Being a driver is a really hard job," but undercutting guaranteed salary levels was a way of incentivizing the union to negotiate different work rules (Rhodes 2010). Readers of the news report responded by having a heated debate online about whether or not driving is in fact a hard job, which further reflected the discourse of the public employee as a drain on public resources. One reader said, "I suppose since they have no education, no work ethic and no skills that yes not being able to drive a bus without getting in an accident must be very 'stressful and difficult' [—] that must be why there are so many fat, lazy bus drivers now on disability for their injuries from sitting on their butts doing nothing."[11]

The *San Francisco Bay Guardian* was one of the only news outlets to defend the drivers through the Proposition G campaign:

> The public rightly complains of buses not arriving on time, of being passed up while waiting at bus stops, of grumpy drivers and of other certainly legitimate matters. Naturally, they blame the drivers. But drivers do not make schedules. Under pressure to keep to the schedules made by others, they sometimes speed by waiting passengers. Sometimes they're slowed by heavy traffic, sometimes by problems with faulty, broken-down down buses or slowed by having to deal with violent passengers. Sometimes, managers making out the schedules don't properly anticipate such probable delays [Meister 2010].

Proposition G passed with 64% of the vote and, with their decreased bargaining power, the TWU gave concessions including the hiring of part-time drivers and wage freezes. The increased number of part-time drivers, along with an agreement where new employees pay into

[11] *Streetsblog SF,* "SPUR Director: Muni Drivers Deserve Good Pay, But Work Rules Must Change." http://sf.streetsblog.org/2010/02/25/spur-director-muni-drivers-deserve-good-pay-but-work-rules-must-change/ Comments [Accessed February 21, 2014].

their pension while established employees do not, ushered in a two-tiered employment system at Muni. While the two-tiered system is seen as weakening the power of the union to act collectively, others believe that, with their wages on the table, the union might negotiate more aggressively. A man who led the scheduling department at Muni for nearly 20 years told me he was worried that the union would come to negotiations "with a phone book of what they want. They might come in there and ask for recovery time [scheduled break time], costing several million dollars." Furthermore, a 2013 court ruling struck down the portion of Proposition G which required the union, in making staffing and scheduling decisions, to prove that their interests outweigh the public interest (Cabanatuan 2013).[12]

Direct Assault

Muni's problem with time persists, and public blame continues to be directed towards drivers, often by direct verbal and physical attacks. Hostility from the public came up as a significant source of stress for nearly ever driver I spoke with. Many drivers ranked unpleasant or threatening encounters with riders above the demands of the schedules as the primary source of stress on the job. A 43-year-old Asian American driver said, "The people are very rude! They are definitely the hardest part of the job."

Difficulty meeting the schedule often leads to unpleasant interactions with the public. When vehicles are late and crowded, riders are more likely to act in offensive or violent ways. Drivers often told me that an offensive or disrespectful passenger can ruin their day. An African American driver with seventeen years of experience said, "My normal character is to be outgoing and friendly but I can't be that way here. You can be having a good day and then someone will

[12] The ruling claimed that "the requirement to prove drivers' interests outweighed the public's illegally interfered with the union's right to bargain on behalf of its employees" (Cabanatuan 2013).

just take that right away from you." This driver believes that conditions have worsened in recent years. "It's the construction and the traffic. And then buses are always crowded and the people are mad. It didn't used to be so bad."

Clifford, the driver on the 38-Geary line, as well as many other drivers, told me that the people can also be the best part of the job. Clifford said that he especially likes helping "old people and families with kids." Drivers spoke of regular riders who greet them and compliment their driving. An African American driver told me, "I am a civil servant. I do this job to help the people, to give them the service. The people come first. Their safety is always on my mind." When drivers reported having good experiences on the job, in the majority of cases, they described helping riders. A 22-year veteran African American driver said, "I'm happy at the end of the day if I did a good job making sure that the elderly with bags got on and off the bus safely."

I interviewed a labor activist who connects the problem with time to racist perceptions of drivers and assaults:

> The structure of the job creates enormous hostility towards the drivers […] They are late and it's not their fault. They are late and people yell at the drivers and threaten them, often with violence […] I think part of the hostility of the San Francisco population towards the Muni drivers—the spitting, the assaults, the aggressive driving—I think it's a classist and racist problem embedded in the San Francisco psyche. This is apparent in the kinds of comments, 'I don't sit on my ass to make 60 thousand a year.'

Assaults on Muni drivers are a common occurrence. A recent article reported that a Muni driver gets assaulted every 3 1/2 days. In the article, a union official blames the media for a recent spike in violence, stating, "There has been a lot of negative information put out there

about us by the media and management and we're starting to notice a real hostile reaction against our workers" (Reisman 2011).

Reader comments on the media coverage of violence towards drivers expose vicious attitudes underlying the violence. The Muni drivers' pay is often invoked as a justification for assault. As one commenter wrote, "Thats the price they have to pay if they want their 6 figure salary in a down economy." Another said, "Karma for all those times i was left waiting for a bus that never came or arrived late making me late for work & school. There's a special place in hell for lazy MUNI drivers." A commenter followed up by writing, "All overweight workers should get a beating every once in a while."[13] Drivers are often exposed to these types of alarming comments, leading to a general perception of a hostile riding public.

Stories of spitting incidents are especially salient. While none of the drivers I spoke with told of being spat on themselves, stories of these incidents circulated regularly. I interviewed a psychologist who works for the city and sees employees after assaults. He estimated that a third of assaults involve drivers being spat on, which mirrors statistics released by New York City's transit system, where spitting incidents have had more public attention (Grynbaum 2010).[14]

Conclusion

In San Francisco, the pervasive political and economic demands for faster travel speeds and more timely transit service work to refigure the transit system from being a social service to being an engine of economic growth. In this transformation, productivity comes to serve as a central planning metric, and the productivity of the transit drivers, calculated on the basis of cost

[13] *San Francisco Examiner*, "Violence Against Muni Drivers Spikes." http://www.sfexaminer.com/sanfrancisco/violence-against-muni-drivers-spikes/Content?oid=2175596 Comments [Accessed February 21, 2014].

[14] As the president of New York City's Local 100 of the TWU stated, "Our bus operators are spat upon with unnerving frequency" (Donohue 2011). New York's MTA plans to follow transit agencies in Boston, London, and Scotland where they distribute DNA tests to drivers with the hopes of prosecuting people committing these assaults.

and speed, is targeted as a key cause of the transit system's time problems. This construction of slowness and lateness as a problem of inefficient workers—rather than of structural problems with planning and management—results in untenable working conditions for the drivers, where they are under continual pressure to meet impossible time demands.

This paper demonstrates how a demand for faster travel gets used in the neoliberal remaking of the urban public sphere. Social theorists have argued that categories of time, space and speed play central roles in the reproduction and transformation of the social and economic orders (Harvey 1990b). In San Francisco, a predominant productivity metric and public ethos defines the transit system as slow and late. This assessment enables city government to discipline workers at the same time as it disregards the needs of transit dependent residents in favor of business class commuters. Attacks on public workers and the withdrawal of public services have gone hand in hand in the neoliberal transformation of governance (Collins 2011). Workers and transit-dependent riders—including youth, elderly, disabled and low income riders—are left out of conceptions of the social good which focus on the productivity of the market economy.

Lastly, this paper asks us to consider the fracturing in the urban public sphere where the interests of public transit drivers and riders are placed in opposition to one another. Transit workers become objects of public resentment when their wages and union protections are seen as having come at the temporal and monetary expense of the rider. This suggests that the neoliberal use of speed to remake the public sphere introduces an economy of time, where fast movement becomes a limited resource gained at the expense of another, and those with wealth do not have the patience for the temporal pace of an inclusive public.

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