

What follows is a general introduction of public transit field trips, and how they differ from conventional trips aboard a school bus.

This introduction may be valuable for teachers interested in conducting transit field trips on their own, separately from TransitPeople. However, please **don't take anything that follows as an assurance that these trips will work for you.** We don't know you, your class, your school, your transit agency or your school district. If we did, we might heartily encourage you to stay on campus, or raise money for a school bus.

Almost all our experience is with grades K - 5. Middle and high school teachers also may benefit from reading this document, but will regard some of the procedures as too restrictive. We do conduct trips for junior high, but our expertise is with elementary schoolers.

### **What is a Public Transit Field Trip?**

Instead of chartering a school bus, the teacher walks her class to the appropriate transit stop and chaperons them on regularly-running public transit buses and trains to the field trip destination.

The children sit or stand alongside other transit riders. The teacher may pay a cash fare, or use transit passes furnished by the transit agency.

### **How is a Transit Field Trip different from a 'Regular' Field Trip?**

Travel depends on the availability of transit services for your school

If you can pay \$300 for a school bus, you probably can book a worthwhile field trip for your class. That isn't so for a transit trip.

Most of our participants hail from schools close to major rail or bus lines. We have little to offer teachers who would have to walk ten blocks to board a bus that runs once an hour and goes nowhere especially worth visiting.

Likewise, schools generally have good transit access to some destinations, and not to others. Schools close to the Blue Line in South Los Angeles can travel easily to the Aquarium, but not to the Arboretum in Arcadia. Schools close to Huntington Drive in El Sereno can travel easily to the Arboretum, but not to the Aquarium.

Some public transit agencies are also more professional than others. It probably wouldn't be wise to conduct these trips aboard buses that are notoriously late and overcrowded, or if transit agency staff are uncooperative.



## Limited group size

We travel with a maximum of twenty-four children aboard public transit buses in Los Angeles. That may be too large a group for your city, if bus services are especially crowded.

It isn't safe or fair to other passengers to travel aboard buses with groups that are too large. Further, such groups risk being stranded. The driver of an uncrowded bus may let everyone on, but the driver of a crowded bus will pass the extra-large group by.

Several classes can ride the same train, if the classes spread out on the rail platform.

## Transit trips require advance planning

Someone has to research the transit routes, judge whether or not a given vehicle has space for a class or classes, and craft an itinerary that allows time for transfers and a prompt arrival at the day's destination.

Try to enlist planning help from someone who knows your area's transit services well. Computerized trip planners are helpful, but shouldn't be relied on. A computerized planner may recommend a route using once-an-hour buses, but miss an alternative route using lines that run much more frequently.

## Transit trips often require prompt departures

The school bus will wait. The public transit bus won't. If you miss that every-forty-minutes bus to the art museum, your class will stand on the curb for forty minutes until the next one shows up.

The importance of an on time departure depends on the transit services used. If you'll take a once an hour bus, it's very important. If all of your transit lines that day run every ten minutes, an on time departure matters much less.

## Transit trips require much more walking

We regularly walk ten or more blocks from a school site to a transit stop, and additional blocks from the transit stop to the destination.

## Seats aren't guaranteed

If there aren't enough seats, the kids stand, like other passengers in 'standing room only' transit vehicles. Further, trains and buses don't have seatbelts.

## Students sit or stand by other transit riders

The transit agency doesn't send a 'special' transit vehicle just for your class. You sit and stand beside anyone else riding the bus or train.

## The teacher may need to bring money to pay a cash fare

If your transit agency will not provide transit privileges, the teacher will have to bring cash to pay for transit for her group.

## **Is a public transit field trip dangerous?**

A teacher chaperoning a public transit field trip will encounter several potential problems that don't exist in a conventional school bus trips.

- Pedestrian safety concerns. More walking = more driveways and intersections to be crossed.
- Issues with other passengers. Teachers who lead frequent public transit trips should be prepared for encounters with drunks, the homeless and the mentally ill.
- Rail station platform safety.
- Safety while riding as a standee -- or a 'straphanger' -- on a bus or train.

## **Can any teacher in my school conduct public transit field trips?**

These trips aren't a good fit for:

- Inexperienced or challenged teachers struggling with classroom management issues.
- Experienced teachers working with particularly difficult classes.
- Experienced teachers who can safely manage children, but won't ... who will 'let them run wild' unless an administrator is watching.

For TransitPeople, these trips have worked well for:

- Experienced teachers leading reasonably well-behaved students.
- Teachers who do not think they will be overwhelmed while shepherding children on a bustling rail platform, or aboard a crowded bus.

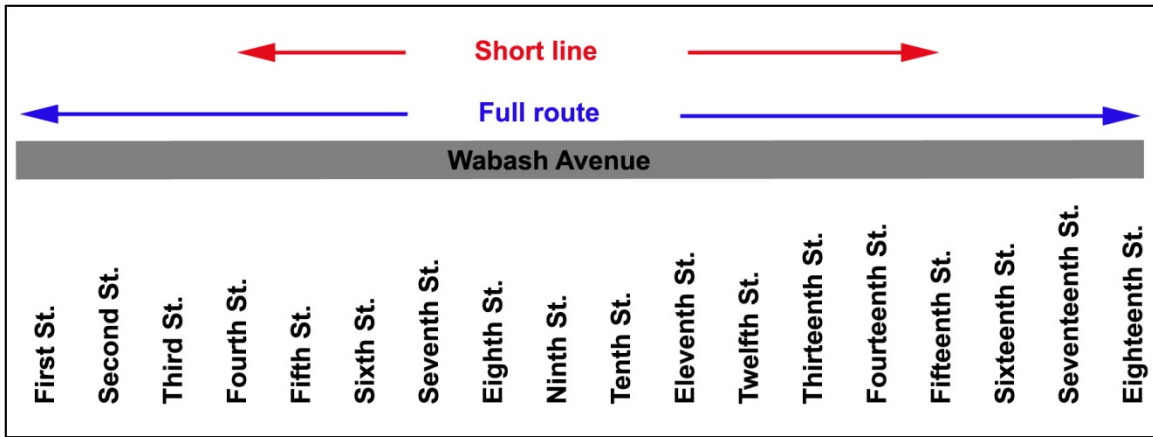
It is also necessary that the group include an adult who feels comfortable dealing with problematic passengers, as well an adult who can navigate the transit system. These two roles are vital, but do not necessarily have to be fulfilled by the teacher.

### **Tips on route and itinerary planning**

- Frequent running bus and rail lines are a much safer bet than infrequent running lines. If you miss the departure time for a once an hour bus, or if the bus breaks, the day is probably shot. If you miss an every ten minutes bus, you can wait for the next one.
- A field trip group requires much more time to transfer from one transit line to another than do individual adult passengers. If train A arrives at 10:35, you won't have time to board train B from the same station at 10:36.
- In estimating walking times, remember that children walk much more slowly than adults.
- A few destinations can be accessed by public transit, but are not safe for children to walk to. An example in Los Angeles is Descanso Gardens. The 90/91 line comes reasonably close, but the La Canada streets near the gardens lack sidewalks. We do book trips to the Arboretum in Arcadia, but take special care when navigating the narrow portion of the sidewalk by busy Baldwin Avenue.

TransitPeople generally scouts all new destinations at least once before booking a trip there. If you arrange a trip without an advance scouting expedition, you could face an unexpected road block with the trip well underway: a street that simply isn't safe to cross, for instance. Weigh this possibility as you begin planning.

- Trains and buses are usually less crowded at the beginning or end of a route than they are in the middle of a route. Groups boarding a northbound 200 at Exposition Park will enter a nearly empty bus. By the time it reaches Seventh, the same bus will be crowded.
- In Los Angeles, Metro and other transit agencies run 'short line' trains and buses on some lines to provide more service to the most heavily used portions of a transit route. Watch for 'short lines' when planning trips.



In the graphic above, the 'short line' serves Fourth through Fifteenth Street. Eastbound buses boarded at First and Wabash may run half as frequently as buses boarded at Fourth and Wabash, depending on the schedule.

## Preparation

- Try to establish a liaison at your local transit agency. The transit agency may:
  - ✓ provide free transit passes or privileges for your group
  - ✓ provide a 'hotline' phone contact, in case of problems during the trip
  - ✓ provide emergency backup transit, in case the transit vehicle breaks or is stranded

The better your relationship with the transit agency, the likelier these trips are to succeed.

- Purchase or agree on an article of clothing that will identify all kids and adults as trip participants. TransitPeople buys jerseys imprinted with our logo from Carolina Safety Sports. School t-shirts could also be used. Jerseys or t-shirts should be worn as a top layer of clothing, rather than hidden under jackets or coats.

Outfitting adults with this jersey or t-shirt shows all strangers that the children have adults on hand as guardians. This safety measure may discourage some potential problem adults from interacting with kids in your group.

- Decide on a way to share an emergency contact number to participating children.

Our jerseys are imprinted with the TransitPeople phone number. Before the trip, children are told that they could seek a responsible adult to call this number if they were separated from the group. (As of this writing, TransitPeople has never received a call from a lost child.)

Children could wear simple string lanyards with the teacher's cell phone number on file cards, or could carry the school office phone number on a folded file card in their pockets.

- Consider taking a 'dry run' of the trip, particularly for a first-ever transit trip. Some teacher-trip leaders and adult volunteers dedicate a day to scouting the trip itinerary in advance.
- Immediately before the trip, check with the transit agency (or relevant section of the transit agency's web site) to insure that no detours will affect your travels that day. Los Angeles transit riders contend with regular detours for movie shoots and other special events, as well as rail service reductions to accommodate construction. These detours occur most frequently on weekends.

Late-breaking detour announcements can require hurried, last-minute changes in plans, and even the cancellation of trips. Here especially, you can benefit from help from someone with deep knowledge of your area's transit services. The transit expert may be able to suggest one or several alternate routes.

If traveling from or to an area with limited transit service, a detour could force you to cancel the trip.