



The Value of Mass Transit

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As someone with a degree in labor relations (I'm not kidding), I feel I should have more to say about the ongoing collective bargaining negotiations between the MTA and the TWU. The posturing before the Friday deadline is typical of these types of negotiations and you have to understand the [history of the TWU](#) to understand why it is more militant than many other public sector unions. More than the actual dollar amounts involved, I believe this union is fighting for **respect**. The kind of respect that blue collar workers used to get, but so rarely do in this age of globalization. But you can't outsource a bus driver or a track repairman(not yet at least). They simply want a fair share of the wealth that they help create for the city. And to be fair, a lot of wealth rides on those rails.

What I always find interesting about the run-up to the contract deadline is calculations of just how valuable mass transit is to a city like NYC. In the [city's lawsuit](#) to seek an injunction against the possible strike, they estimate that everyday the system is shut down, the city will lose \$440m - \$660m per day and the city would lose \$8m - \$12m in tax revenues from lost business. By that calculation (365 x \$660m) the subway system is worth \$240 billion annually to New York City and the nation's economy. That's a staggering figure and shows that employers and business are just as dependent on the subway system as much as the everyday riders. This is why it always baffles me when people complain about "subsizing" mass transit and therefore raise fares higher. Mass transit allows workers, shoppers, theater-goers, tourists, etc to efficiently get around the city which creates economic value for thousands of businesses. I can't imagine that all those businesses want to create a higher barrier for people to come do business with them.

New York's mass transit system is the lifeblood of the city's economics and we should treat the workers servicing that system with respect by paying them a wage that gives them a good middle class salary. The MTA, the governor and the mayor should explain to businesses the value of taxes to fund mass transit. And I add that the union should do a better job of making their members more service oriented toward the public.

If a strike does happen, perhaps this will wake up some people who take mass transit for granted.

Also, I don't want a strike anymore than the next person, but I'll be much less affected than most because:

1. I have a bike to get around the city
2. I live 2 miles from my job
3. I am within walking distance of friends, shops, restaurants, etc.



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