Francisco should prioritize use of transit resources for operations, rather than large capital investments.

6. Shift transportation policy to prioritize public transit over car travel.

Local, regional and national transportation policy needs to shift to prioritize public transit over car travel. Currently, 80 percent of federal transportation spending goes to freeways and automobiles, and only 20 percent towards public transportation. We need to reverse this funding allocation so that the majority of funds support quality public transit.

7. Collect and publish race, class, and gender demographic data about transit riders in San Francisco.

Equity in public transportation is a basic civil and human rights issue. Low-income communities and communities of color have the highest rates of transit dependency, and the SFMTA should consistently track information about the ethnicity, gender, or income levels of riders so that equity in service delivery can be measured.

8. Create a mechanism for greater democracy and community accountability within the SFMTA.

The SFMTA manages a multi-million dollar budget, and decisions made by its board have huge public impacts. Its board should be publicly elected, like the Board of Education and the Community College Board.

Endnotes
3. The Metropolitan Transportation Commission and the Bay Area Air Quality Management District teamed up with Bay Area transit operators on the “Spare the Air” campaign between 2004 and 2007. Commuters got free transit rides on the first four weekdays when unhealthy levels of air pollution were predicted. Transit use went up 22 percent regionwide on the first two “Spare the Air” days in August 2007. See Lee, Terry. (November 2007). Ridership Soars During Spare the Air/Free Transit Campaign. Found at http://www.baycrossings.com/dispnews.php?id=1905.
Next Stop: Justice examines public transit in San Francisco from the perspective of those who rely on it most: working-class and low-income residents and communities of color in the city’s southern and eastern neighborhoods. Putting these communities at the center of transit policy and planning will produce benefits that spread far beyond Bayview–Hunters Point, the Excelsior, the Mission and Chinatown. Affordable, accessible, and reliable transit for all will serve the city as a whole, fueling economic development and contributing to a healthier environment.

This report, a collaborative project of POWER (People Organized to Win Employment Rights), the DataCenter and Urban Habitat, took a multi-pronged research approach. It combined an extensive literature review with data from the U.S. Census and its own survey of 727 San Francisco bus riders. It also drew on the day-to-day experience of people who use the system as well as those who are organizing to improve it. It provides personal testimony from several riders and compares the performance of lines serving the southern and eastern neighborhoods with system-wide goals.

As Muni celebrates its 100th birthday and looks to the future, key questions hang in the balance. Will working-class bus riders be at the center of our transit policy priorities, or will public transit become a privilege accessible only to those who can afford the rising fares? Will expanding bus service take precedence over expensive capital construction projects? Will our city and the region choose to invest in public transit as a green economy growth sector, and one of the largest employers of black workers? We hope that Next Stop: Justice will help guide the creation of the transportation system we know is both possible and urgently needed for our communities and our future.

Key findings in the report include:

1. Nearly half of the 727 bus riders surveyed said they could not afford Muni’s rising fares. Nearly three-fourths of the survey participants reported that they had seen someone cited and removed from transit for non-payment of fares.

2. Muni’s “Proof of Payment” program generates far more fear than fares. The city spends $9.5 million per year to implement the fare enforcement program, and recovers only $1 million in lost fares.!

3. Investment in transit operations and service—and in bus drivers, mechanics and support staff—is an efficient and effective economic development strategy. An analysis of federal stimulus spending showed that transit operations created 72 percent more jobs than similar investments in transit capital, $10 million invested in transit operations produces $30 million in increased business sales.!

4. Effective and user-friendly public transit has a vital role to play in fighting global warming—and reducing fares boosts transit use. In San Francisco, as in Los Angeles and London, we see that when fares increase, transit ridership decreases—and vice versa. Free Muni rides enticed more than 200,000 San Franciscans to leave their cars at home during the first two Super Bowl weeks in 2007, for example. Every 10 percent increase in fares decreases ridership by 4 percent, according to the American Public Transportation Association. 8

5. Bus riders in the core communities of color in San Francisco are impacted by long waits and overcrowded buses. Comparing the MTA’s data on the core lines that POWER members ride with the MTA’s recorded system average, ridership that overall is significantly worse than the system average.

The report makes several recommendations to guide the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency (SFMTA) as it steps into its second century of existence. Among them:

1. Increase investment in San Francisco’s public transportation by assessing large developers and corporations a fair share for the benefits they receive from the system.

For too long, the city has balanced its transit budget on the backs of riders and drivers. Corporations need to pay their fair share so that we can lower public transit fares.

Large developers and corporations already benefit from how public transit increases property values and brings jobs and customers. The city should seriously investigate the following options: increasing the impact fee on new development to a more appropriate level; taxing technology, finance and real estate companies, creating a transit assessment district, and taxing sport franchises for transit services.

2. Make the necessary investments to expand and improve transit in San Francisco’s southern and eastern neighborhoods.

The SFMTA must commit to improving transit service in working-class communities of color in order to meet the needs of its residents who rely on transit the most. The lack of service, long waits, and overcrowding that plague the eastern neighborhoods affect all riders, especially low-income parents, seniors, and people with disabilities. Deeply investing in these neighborhoods is essential to making San Francisco family-friendly and increasing connectivity in the city.

3. Scale back aggressive fare enforcement on Muni.

Renew all resources saved to improve service. SFPPD officers saturating bus stops and boarding buses to see if bus riders have paid penalizes people for trying to ride while poor and Black, Latino or Asian-Pacific Islander. Muni should stop using armed police officers as fare inspectors and return to the model it used for 92 years, up until 2005.

Muni could direct the money saved by cutting out the POP program towards improving service.

4. Reduce transit fares as a central strategy for reaching San Francisco’s climate objectives.

American cars and pickup trucks put out nearly half of the greenhouse gases that are emitted by automobiles globally—emissions that contribute to catastrophic climate change. In order to make mass transit the first choice for workers, youth, and families, we have to make public transit truly affordable and accessible. San Francisco can take an important first step towards this goal by establishing permanent funding for free Muni passes for all youth in the City.

5. Expand mass transit as a green job growth sector.

Public transit not only supports the environment, but also sustains a racially diverse unionized workforce that earns living wages—making it a model of a green jobs sector. Muni workers have health benefits, pensions and wages that allow them to support their families and remain in San Francisco despite the rising cost of living. To expand transit jobs, San Francisco