

# Sharing the road to basic rights for all Oregonians

BY AMY LAM  
CONTRIBUTING COLUMNIST

When Jeana Frazzini was growing up in central Washington, her family owned the local pizza parlor. It was the type of hang-out where anyone who

came through was always treated with dignity and respect.

"Folks who felt like they didn't belong anywhere were always welcomed at my

dad's pizza place," said Jeana. She started working around the restaurant when she was eight years old and was raised in an environment that laid the foundation for the work she would do. "I've just always been a person who fights for the underdog."

After graduating from college, Jeana moved to Portland to pursue organizing and social justice work. After a number of years working on a variety of causes, in 2005, Jeana joined the staff of Basic Rights Oregon (BRO), a statewide organization that formed to fight against anti-LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Queer) measures. The far right had been pushing for anti-LGBTQ ballot measures since 1988—and Basic Rights Oregon was an underdog pushing back against their attempts at anti-equality policies such as Measure 36.

As a board member, Jeana and the Basic Rights staff worked steadfastly to mobilize voters to vote "no" on Measure 36, a 2004 state ballot that would amend the Oregon Constitution to define marriage as a union between a man and a woman. Their opponents had hired an African-American woman as the spokesperson for an otherwise white-led campaign, a tactic that helped to make voters feel as though

Measure 36 wasn't discriminatory because a woman of color was speaking on behalf of it.

The pro-equality campaign scrambled to engage leaders in communities of color and LGBTQ people of color because those relationships had not been in place prior to the campaign. But it didn't feel right. "We hadn't done the work in advance to build strong relationships in communities of color," said Jeana.

When the votes came in, Measure 36 passed. Basic Rights had to reevaluate how they were doing their work and with whom. And this included being thoughtful when asking themselves "How do we, as an organization, engage people of color?"

"It was humbling," Jeana recalled. "We received feedback that our LGBTQ members of color were saying that 'I don't see a place for myself in this organization. You don't prioritize the needs of my community.' It was difficult to hear these things because I've always fought to include everyone in the struggle for justice and here we were leaving people behind. We were missing a whole lot of the community."

The Basic Rights Oregon team realized that it wasn't so much about how to get people of color to the table to discuss these issues, but how to create a table that is welcoming and inclusive. In 2006, they launched a partnership with Western States Center to integrate racial justice in its organization, starting with basic dismantling-racism training. The Center provided a roadmap as to what the work would look like for an organization like Basic Rights.

"Without the help of the Center, it would have been much more of a struggle to transform our organization and begin to do work that engages LGBTQ people of color," said Jeana. "Together, we were able to create cultural change for our organization and for our members."

By 2007, the Center supported Basic

Rights through an internal organizational transition and now the organization was ready to get their members on the same page. Within the year, they hosted a series of workshops on immigrant rights and racial justice that informed their members about why it is important for an LGBTQ organization to ally with other groups who are being attacked by the same far right organizations. The Center supported Basic Rights in deepening their relationship with organizations like CAUSA, Oregon's immigrant rights coalition.

"Our opposition is often the same—the person who promoted a local anti-immigrant ballot measure in 2008 was the same person who had been involved in earlier anti-gay ballot measures," said Jeana. "Most importantly, these anti immigrant ballot measures impact LGBTQ immigrants—so this is a direct issue for our members."

Since 2009, racial justice work has become a core part of Basic Rights Oregon's work in every aspect of their programs and they have prioritized the engagement and leadership of LGBTQ people of color.

"Nowadays, rather than saying, 'Isn't it interesting that we are doing this type of work?' Now our members expect us to do this work."

## Save the date

Basic Rights Oregon wants to march together with you! Join them in the march or visit their booth.

### Portland Pride

When: Noon-6 p.m., June 17th – 19th, 2011 (March on the 19th)  
Where: Tom McCall Waterfront Park

### Latino Pride

When: Noon-9:30 p.m., July 17  
Where: Eastbank Esplanade

**Portland Black PFLAG** is co-hosting a family-friendly picnic with CAUSA (Oregon's Immigrant Rights coalition) and Indigenous Ways of Knowing. Join them for an afternoon of good food, good fun, and live entertainment.

### Families of Color Day Out Picnic (at Portland Pride)

When: 4-9 p.m., June 19  
Where: Kenton Park



Amy Lam is the Development & Communications Associate at the Western States Center, which aims to build a progressive movement by supporting grassroots organizations. The Center's Uniting Communities project works with organizations based in communities of color to advance LGBTQ equality.

# Extend the TriMet transfers and gain riders, sustainability

Chrystal Wabnum is the organizer with OPAL Environmental Justice Oregon, a 501c3 intercultural grassroots nonprofit empowering working class communities and people of color to promote environmental and social justice. Environmental justice is the equal protection and opportunity for meaningful involvement for all people, without regard to race, ethnicity or income, in communities where we live, work, play and pray. To connect with OPAL to see how you can support the Campaign for a Fair Transfer, call 503-277-9058.

BY CRYSTAL WABNUM,  
BUS RIDERS UNITE  
LEADERSHIP TEAM  
CONTRIBUTING COLUMNIST

As cohabitants of this city, we all share a basic human right to safe, affordable and accessible transportation. And yet here in the Portland metro region, champion of "livability", those who depend on public transportation are disproportionately bearing the burden of TriMet's decisions to cut service and increase fares. The value of a TriMet fare has never been lower, wait times between buses have never been longer, and riders are getting squeezed with missed connections and overcrowded buses and pass-bys. OPAL's Bus Riders Unite! leadership has launched a Campaign for a Fair Transfer to restore value to the system by increasing transfer times to 3 hours and extending rides through the end of service for evening boardings.

TriMet has cut 170,000 hours of bus service the past two years, resulting in longer wait times between buses and more critical transfers. And even though TriMet continues to raise the cost of the fare, the time given to transfer has stayed the same: 2 hours from purchase on the MAX or streetcar, but only one hour past the time it will take to reach the "destination point" such as the downtown transit mall when heading into the city on the bus. When service was good, transit riders could actually use the system to take care of basic needs and reasonable round-trips on one fare: go to the grocery store and back, take their kids to school or daycare or go to the doctor and back—a reasonable trip at a reasonable cost, one fare.

But with the service cuts, especially in evenings and on weekends, the limited transfer time has made this impossible.

And as fares continue to rise—70 percent over the past 10 years and counting low-income transit riders are hurt most. With unemployment and rising costs (an all-zone monthly pass will be \$92 come Sept. 1), many of those who need to use public transit every day cannot afford a monthly pass, relying more and more on precious single-fare tickets. And if you are a bus rider traveling across town, your transfer might not even last through the end of your trip.

Yes, you'll hear all the usual arguments. TriMet points to rising diesel and health care costs, indicating fare increases and service cuts well into the future. "You can have low fares but less service, or more service but higher fares," they say. Or, "Capital improvement projects like light rail or streetcar attract large sums of federal money and create jobs, which we will lose if we pass up these projects." But these are false choices, and we see it differently. Instead of driving a wedge between transit riders and transit workers, and between those that depend on transit and "choice" riders or the public at large, TriMet should make transit equity its number one priority. Everyone will benefit from having safe, accessible and affordable public transportation with extensive service. We can take care of our transit workers and have enough money to maintain frequent service hours. Numerous reports studying the recent stimulus money show that investing in transit service actually creates three times as many jobs as investing in capital projects—jobs that are permanent, offer a living wage, and are "green." And we know that the federal money for capital projects is not truly free money: both the Portland-to-Milwaukie Light Rail project and the Lake Oswego Streetcar project will cost TriMet and the City hundreds of millions of dollars in local money, money that we won't have in

the future to meet current levels of service operations, even as we continue to add service obligations with these new projects. For a region that has long prided itself on smart growth and sustainable development, this is most unsustainable.

So what's the solution? Longterm, we need stronger criteria around transit equity for our region. But shortterm, we must give back some value to those who depend most on transit and yet are the least able to afford escalating costs. Intentionally or not, TriMet is currently taking advantage of our most vulnerable riders: those who ride transit everyday and have to use multiple single tickets for basic needs, yet cannot afford a monthly pass. By extending the transfer time to three hours for both the bus and the MAX, and extending rides through the end of service for evening boardings, TriMet can provide a no-cost benefit to offset the heavy burden of recent service cuts and fare increases, while also generating revenue from new "choice" riders. It gives TriMet a golden opportunity to meet its commitments to transit equity and to restoring service.

And why Bus Riders Unite!? Bus riders make up two-thirds of all daily boardings, and the bus is the backbone of our wonderful transit system. Our members often use a mix of modes: we ride the bus and MAX, we bike, we walk, and we carpool. But the bus is what we use most often to get around, to make critical connections, and is often the first and last trip of the day. Our region's transportation system will only be as good as our bus service, and that means frequency, accessibility and affordability. Support OPAL's Campaign for a Fair Transfer to extend the current transfer time and support transit justice.