A BAD TRIP ON THE BIG T

(CPS) The Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority took in 14 million fewer fares in 1971 than in 1970. That means local residents took 14 million fewer rides on subways and busses than in the year before.

"MBTA officials," the *Boston Globe* reported, "attribute the drop mostly to the reluctance of people to go out at night. Some say the business recession, with a shrinkage in employment, is another factor."

Obviously the MBTA would like us to believe this.

People are turning away from the MBTA because fares keep going up and service is bad, particularly on the busses. Busses don't run on time, people have to wait in the cold for long periods, and busses don't take people where they need to go.

This kind of public transportation just can't compete with highways and cars. Judging from the policies of both the MBTA and the State, that's the way they want it. As long as the State continues to force expressways into Boston, and the cities and towns in the region are lax in developing a strong policy to restrict the movement of cars (especially access to downtown), then the MBTA will continue to lose riders.

From 1950 to 1960, the total number of rides taken on the MBTA dropped from 614 million a year to 255 million a year, a drop of over 55%. During this time, the Central Artery and the S.E. Expressway were built, bus fares went from 5¢ to 10¢, rail transit from 10¢ to 20¢.

From 1960 to 1971, ridership dropped from 255 million a year to 186 million, a drop of 25%. During this time, Interstate I-93 (through Somerville and Charlestown) was being built; land had been cleared in Roxbury, Jamaica Plain, Hyde Park, and Lynn for the construction of I-95; the MBTA had been systematically cutting bus service; and fares on busses jumped from 10¢ to 20¢, and on rail transit from 20¢ to 25¢.

The MBTA would love to get out of the bus business. The rapid rail lines, which serve mostly suburbanites commuting to downtown Boston, make the money. Bus service, the only public transportation in many inner urban communities (like Somerville, Chelsea, Lynn, most of Dorchester and Mattapan), doesn't pay.

Bus service creates 85% of the MBTA's operations deficit, the difference between the actual cost of running the system and what is collected in the fare box. And who pays for this deficit? The same people who ride the busses, or would if they could. Poor and working class people; tenants and small homeowners -- they pay the deficit through property taxes.

Clearly, what is needed is State takeover of the MBTA deficit. The State should subsidize mass public transit, not highways and cars. The State Highway Trust fund (money from taxes on gasoline which presently can only be used to build more roads, should be busted, and this money used to pay for operations of the MBTA.

Secondly, the businesses and corporations who benefit from public transit bringing in the consumers and workers to their places, should start paying their fair share for public transit.

A coalition of bus riders and transit workers in San Francisco, opposing increased bus and trolley cuts on the "Muni," have demanded that downtown stores give away tokens, instead of validating parking tickets. They are also demanding that: reduced fares be sold on a weekly and monthly basis; unlimited transfer service within a certain time limit be allowed; and all private car traffic in the heart of the downtown area be eliminated.

In the Boston area, this could mean reduced fares, increased transit service, and a return to sanity.