Executive Summary
On February 22, 2020, the Philadelphia Transit Equity Day Coalition held its second annual Transit Equity Day. Transit Equity Day is a national call to action for unions and organizations to elevate the message that public transit is a civil right, and a key strategy to combat climate change.

More than 60 Philadelphians gathered and discussed what transit equity means and how transportation in Philadelphia can be more equitable for everyone. The Coalition designed this Transit Equity Town Hall event to serve as a model for community engagement that is both transparent and equitable, and could be tailored to inform the design of future public participation processes. In addition, what was heard this year affirms what was learned through surveying last year when the Philadelphia Transit Equity Coalition organized a 2 part surveying effort that collected 348 responses at community events and transit centers. Below is a summary of the top 4 issues gathered through 2019’s surveying and the 2020 event: fares, cleanliness and communication, accessibility, and service frequency.

Fares: As highlighted by the 2019 Pew Study, SEPTA fare is expensive, particularly for those paying cash fare. Penalizing cash payment is unacceptable. Ending the transfer fee, reduced fare programs for low-income riders, additional fare support for youth, and a family pass are all proposed strategies for making SEPTA more affordable.

Cleanliness and communication: User experience is an important aspect of transit. Clean vehicles and covered and comfortable waiting areas are important in communicating that riders matter and making riders feel safe. Transparent service updates with realtime information is also an important part of the user experience. Clearer announcements and better detour communications are necessary to improve rider experience.

Accessibility: Philadelphians deserve an accessible transportation system. Increasing the number of physically accessible MFL, BSL, and Regional Rail stations as well as standardizing when buses kneel for passengers are proposed ideas. Neighborhood transit access – having a neighborhood well served by public transportation – is an important part of accessibility as well. Sharswood, where Transit Equity Day 2020 was held, is an example of a neighborhood that needs better transit access. Without safe and continuous sidewalks, no transportation system can be accessible.

Service frequency: SEPTA riders deserve more frequent service with better coverage of Philadelphia throughout the week. For Philadelphians to be able to use transit outside of a 9-5 work schedule there needs to be frequent, dependable options available at off-peak times.