

# ACTION KEELE

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FREE



## MIND THE GAP: QUALITY BUS SERVICE IS A GENDER JUSTICE ISSUE

On Equal Pay Day in March, women in Germany's capital city of Berlin paid 21 percent less to ride the public transit system than men. Berlin's transit operator -- BVG -- sold women tickets at a lower price to highlight Germany's gender pay gap, the third largest in Europe. "You have to speak out when people are treated differently for no reason," the transit service said in a press release. "This is a small gesture of solidarity, though it is nothing in comparison with what women are deprived of in income every year."

Canada's gender pay gap is even larger than Germany's. Canadian women earn only 74 cents for every dollar earned by men.

Improving public transit means improving women's lives. Here in Toronto, well over half of the TTC's riders are women, while immigrants and women of colour are far more likely to rely on public transit

than are other city residents. When fares go up, many women are forced to choose between accessing the services they need—medical appointments, employment services and even recreation—and putting food on the table.

As women are more likely to be caregivers for their families the problems aren't just the fares—the fact that the TTC is not fully physically accessible, means that women with strollers may have to struggle with stairs of elevators as part of their everyday commutes. If busses, like the 41, are too crowded, women with strollers might have to wait for the next one (or the one after that!) before they can get on, adding to already long wait times. Better bus service is good for everyone but it is also necessary to have gender justice in our city!

# A BUS-ONLY LANE FOR KEELE?

If the TTC adds the 41 Keele Bus to its “10 Minute or Better Service Network” as we say it should, one major problem that has to be overcome is the heavy car traffic that makes travelling on Keele Street such a headache. We’ve all experienced it. Sitting on the bus, looking out the window only to see a line of cars stretched out for miles ahead, with no end in sight. Luckily, there is an answer to this problem, one that’s simple enough. But it won’t have a chance of coming to pass unless bus riders and drivers stand together and make it happen: Keele Street needs a dedicated bus lane.

The bus gets a bad rap. Compared to other forms of public transit, like the subway or the streetcar, we tend to think of the bus as slow, unreliable and just downright uncomfortable. But it doesn’t have to be that way. Actually, buses are the most flexible—and the cheapest—form of public transit a city can run. The real reason that buses are so lousy is that they have to share the road with cars that get in their way. When was the last time a traffic jam clogged the Bloor Danforth Line?

Researchers interested in urban transport have found that buses driving on dedicated, bus-only lanes can carry four times as many passengers per hour and drive three-times faster than buses that have to deal with car traffic. The benefits for bus riders are obvious. With faster buses, we’ll have to spend less time waiting outside in the cold or in the rain. And once we’re onboard, we’ll get to go where we want much quicker, giving us more time to do the things we want, like spending time with family and friends, relaxing at home, or just enjoying life.

But bus riders would not be the only people to benefit from a dedicated bus lane on Keele Street. Bus drivers, too, would reap rewards from not having to deal with so much car traffic. Less traffic on the street would go a long way in eliminating workplace injury. It may not seem like it, but driving a bus can be a very dangerous job. Just think about it: Driving a 20-ton machine through crowded city streets for eight-hours

at a time is hard work. As many as half of all urban bus drivers are forced to take an early retirement because of work-related injuries. Not surprisingly, traffic accidents are the most common cause of workplace injury for bus drivers, making up more than 40 percent of injuries among US bus drivers, according to a 2013 government study.

Driving in heavy traffic is also remarkably stressful. Not only does it make people feel angry, it also leads to a host of long-term health problems, like high blood pressure and heart and stomach diseases. Worse yet, research shows that people simply do not adapt to the stress generated by heavy traffic like they can with other stressors. No matter how many times you do it, driving in heavy traffic never gets easier. Simply put, a dedicated lane would go a long way in reducing stress and making bus drivers’ working lives a whole lot safer and more pleasant.

Less car traffic would have other, perhaps less obvious benefits. It’s becoming increasingly clear that we’re in a traffic crisis. Toronto has the worst commute times of any major North American city. And, alarmingly, researchers in the United States have found that after years of steady decline, deaths from traffic accidents are once again on the rise. The reason may come as a surprise: The growth in ride-sharing services like Uber and Lyft, are causing so much extra congestion that our streets are now more dangerous for drivers and pedestrians than were they just a few years ago. Since 2011, ride-sharing services have caused an additional 1,100 deaths per year in the US. Clearly, Uber is not the answer to our traffic woes. When it comes to urban transit, the bus remains the cheapest, and safest option. Building a better bus service would encourage more drivers to ditch their cars and hop on the bus. With fewer cars on the street, our streets would be safer, quieter and cleaner spaces for all of us.

Building dedicated bus lanes on Keele Street is a win-win for all of us. Let’s make it happen.

## COMMUNITY EVENT: STOP THE ATTACKS ON OUR SCHOOLS!

**May 11, 6:00-8:00PM Downsview Library**

It’s no secret that the education the city provides for the wealthy is different from what working class families get. Schools in rich neighbourhoods have new buildings, new technology, and offer fancy field trips. Meanwhile, schools in working class neighbourhoods, like those along Keele street, are dilapidated and often can’t even afford basic materials like textbooks.

Not surprisingly, rather than fixing these problems, Doug Ford is making them even worse. We can’t afford to ignore these attacks on our children’s futures! On May 11, come join us at Downsview Public Library to hear from teachers about the disastrous effects of Ford’s cuts to our already-struggling public schools – and learn how we can push back and fight for a public school system that works for all children.

## WHAT WE'RE ABOUT

There are two Torontos: one for Bay Street bankers and lawyers, another for working people. While the city’s wealthy elite drive by in luxury cars on their way to fancy restaurants and expensive condos, the rest of us lack access to adequate and affordable public transit to bring us to work, get our groceries, take our kids to school, and to visit our friends.

Public services of all kinds are underfunded so that Bay Street billionaires can keep their taxes low. As a result, public transit is too crowded, too expensive, and service too infrequent. This is especially the case for working class, poor, racialized, and immigrant neighbourhoods, such as those along the 41 Keele route.

We are here to say that it is time this came to an end. Better public transit means less stress in our lives and a fairer and greener city. It also means more and better public sector jobs. Access to reliable, efficient transportation is a right. As such, we demand accessible and dignified public bus service on the 41 Keele route, and for working people across the city.