

# CITYSPEAK

## GET WOKE ON PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION!

Public transportation is a unique opportunity to get woke, to get real with real people.

This past weekend my wife reluctantly accepted my invitation to take public transportation ([Amtrak](#)) on our trip from San Diego to Truckee, California, to attend the annual “Owners Only” retreat of the California Staffing Professionals ([CSP](#)) organization, which was held at the beautiful [Ritz Carlton in Lake Tahoe](#).

This trip was quite an experience...more memorable in fact than the retreat itself.

This travel experience reminded me that if you *really* want to get close with your community, take public transportation for a day!

Personally, I have always loved public transportation because I love talking with real people! My wife is not as enthusiastic about talking to strangers, for obvious reasons, but even she benefited from this trip.

Don't you ever get tired of talking (communicating) with your *peeps* (as my kids say), looking at a 3” x 5” (15 square inch, 15 in.<sup>2</sup>) piece of digital real estate? The world is so much larger than 15 in.<sup>2</sup>! California is 163,696 mi.<sup>2</sup>, and the United States is 3.8 mi.<sup>2</sup>. The earth is, well, you get the picture, huge!

There are so many of our fellow peeps all around us. We just need to get our eyes off the phone (and if you've got the guts) to chat with them for a spell. And as you know, *they're all our neighbors*.

So my wife and I traveled over 1,000 miles on public transportation last weekend, sitting side by side with hundreds of different people on the train, plus on the connecting bus rides through Amtrak.

There was no shortage of peeps to talk to, especially in the Café car where everybody gathered for a drink, a meal, or a snack while they stretched their legs from the long trip. I realize some peeps don't want to be bothered (depends on their age and background, of course), but it's easy to identify the peeps you can or can't talk to. I especially enjoyed talking to the train conductor who had something special to say about every City we passed throughout our agriculturally-rich Central California. Here are some of my favorite stops:

- [City of Wasco](#) – Famous for its beautiful **roses**.
- [City of Corcoran](#) – Famous for housing **Charles Manson** in its prison.
- [City of Hanford](#) – Famous for the fresh ice cream at its **Superior Dairy**.
- [City of Fresno](#) – Home to **Fresno State University** and world agriculture production.
- [City of Modesto](#) – Birthplace of Star War's creator **George Lucas**.
- [City of Stockton](#) – Touted as the “**Asparagus Capital of the World**” (sorry Michigan).
- [City of Lodi](#) – Known for its wine grapes and called the “**Zinfandel Capital of the World**”.

I'm sure I'm not doing these Cities justice in describing what they're famous for; the train conductor described the above Cities better. And she made the trip fun with her comments over the intercom!

Whether you like talking to strangers or not on public transportation, the experience of being around the peeps of our state and our community can be a real eye opener for many. It was for me!

It took us about 13 hours to get from San Diego to Lake Tahoe. In our car it would've taken only 10 and via airline it would have taken about 5 hours (including parking and security time). Thus, you might ask, why would you waste three hours (or longer) of your valuable time traveling in a confined space surrounded by strangers you would not normally talk to?

Oh but the stories you'll miss that you can later tell your grandkids when they sit on your lap!

Because of the length of the trip, I was able to get much work done on the train (including writing this article on the return trip). So you can be very productive on the train and bus. Just take breaks to stretch your legs, and say hello to your fellow passengers.

But you are right; there are some peeps on the train that I might not normally hang out with, especially on some of the bus connections between train stations. But these peeps are my neighbors. Regardless of their station in life, these folks on the train are very much *my neighbors*. For a certainty, they were my neighbors during this 13-hour train and bus trip.

To be honest, some of the people on the trip, especially during on the connecting bus rides, were pretty scary looking, like *right out of jail scary*. However, many were just young people dressed in colorful outfits, with more tattoos and earrings I care to count. I'm not saying people with tattoos and a dozen earrings on their face are scary people, but hey, I'm a nerdy 56 year old Accountant. We didn't have these cool styles in my day!

Some on the train and bus were just moms with little children, some even breast-feeding on the train (a beautiful, natural, life-giving thing). It totally felt like a family affair on the train and bus.

There were seniors playing bridge, drinking wine, and having a grand old time! These old birds were a rowdy bunch, especially with all their drinking, but they were fun to listen to!

And then there were the nerds with a suit and tie, like me, tapping on their laptops for hours at a time. Like I said, there's a lot of time to get work done. I could go on and on about the peeps on my trip, a great experience! There was so much diversity on my train. What a ride!

Sure, I'm not going to lie, there were the obnoxious people who were oblivious to the fact that there were many other passengers on the train. This was especially trying in the smaller seating spaces of the bus ride connecting us from Los Angeles to Bakersfield and vice versa on the return trip.

There were some pretty horrible smells, crying children (at times), loud music (hey scary dude, please put on your headphones!), and a lot of loud chattering most of the way on the train (my [Bose headphones](#) were great for this last leg of the trip!).

And to top it all off, there was a long train delay on the return trip in Stockton because of a fatality accident a few miles away on the train tracks. The nerve of that homeless man (eh, persistent violator), getting himself run over and delaying my trip! *In reality, it was a very tragic accident, but some peeps waiting for the train was upset they had to wait three hours for a late train.*

## KEEPING IT REAL

But even with all that, I would rather take public transportation rather than driving my *hummer* any day. This keeps life really "real" and productive, without being tired from driving, fighting traffic to get back to San Diego. You're still tired on the train and bus, but you can't close your eyes when driving!

No, I'm not crazy, I really loved this unique opportunity to hang out with strangers, peeps who live in or near communities like the one I live in.

And like some of you, I'm appalled at [how disconnected we are](#) getting from people, from each other. These are human beings whom we should love (eh, care about), regardless of their station in life, where they come from, or what they look like. We can't think of peeps who look different than us, as "statistics" or "those other people", because they are our neighbors and they are an important part of our *village*.

I'm getting on a small soapbox here now, but yes, some of us, especially those of us who are government officials and leaders; we need to get real with the peeps of our community. We need to remember why we work at City Hall or any other government organization... **"...to serve the people"**.

And I don't mean just the rich, sweet smelling, Armani wearing, Mercedes driving, Day spa going, tofu eating, Pilates doing, tummy tucking, boob enhancing, butt protruding, face pumping, daily Venti mocha Frappuccino with an extra shot double blended coffee in their hand drinking peeps from our village!

I'm talking about all those so called "undesirables" whom we sometimes turn our faces away from, in fear or even in disgust that they are not as successful as us or they don't look like us. Yet we don't know their story. We can't judge and we shouldn't judge.

Sorry for my attempt at humor, but the point is **we need to love (care about) all the peeps in our community, not just those with money and fancy pants.**

There's a lot more to our neighbors than we may realize. I myself will try to make time to get my eyes off my phone and onto the real peeps that are all around us.

I challenge City Council members across America to take a ride on public transportation for one day. This can help wake them up to the peeps they serve, but whom they sometimes forget to fully consider when taking action on the dais.

## **GET WOKE DUDE!**

To use another term that young people use, get woke dude! Wake up and smell the coffee. Look away from your smart phone and look at the real peeps walking around us outside. Don't judge a man until you have fully examined the truth for yourself.

I challenge City Managers and Department Heads to ride the bus, trolley, or the train for a day. This might give them an inside look at the real life of the peeps they serve. Perhaps a day on public transportation will help them take a different "analysis" of how their staff reports and policy recommendations impact the real human beings, the peeps they are making decisions about.

***I mean no disrespect.*** I myself have spent 30 years working as a City Finance Director in various local government organizations. But my job was done in the cozy, comfy environment of my temperature controlled, ergonomically designed office. I never had to work out in the community to see how my policies and procedures affected the peeps who used our services.

## **WE LOVE PUBLIC SAFETY, PUBLIC WORKS, AND OTHER CITY FIELD WORKERS!**

I've always had great respect for Public Safety, Public Works, Community Services, and other City employees who spend most of their work day out in the community, where they do "keep it real" with the peeps of our City, all day every day.

A big shout out to our law enforcement officers, fire fighter paramedics, and all of the Public Safety and Code Enforcement personnel, the ***men and women who take care of our peeps in the community.***

**We love you guys!**

So in closing, dear City officials, do you have any trips to take soon? Why not take public transportation next time. And I don't mean the airplane, that's cheating.

And in case you didn't know it, there's [Wi-Fi](#) on the Amtrak train and bus!

Cheers all,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "John Herrera".

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**Newsletter Issue: 2019 No. 5**