



Speak Out Now

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Los Angeles Fires: Their System Cannot Protect Us

The massive fires ripping across Los Angeles have brought unprecedented levels of destruction. At least 24 people are dead, and more than 12,000 structures have been destroyed, from homes, and businesses, to schools, apartment buildings, and vehicles. About 200,000 people are under evacuation orders in Los Angeles County. The total damage so far has been over \$150 billion.

The enormous speed and scale of the destruction from these fires has been horrifying. But these conditions did not come out of nowhere, and fires of this scale are becoming increasingly common. The majority of the most destructive wildfires in California have all happened within the past ten years.

The continued warming of the planet caused by the burning of fossil fuels has created the perfect storm of conditions for enormous fires like these. Los Angeles has faced a record long drought. The disruption of the climate has also led to intense winds and extreme weather. Fire season in California in the past was restricted to summer months. But these are massive fires that are happening during winter — it's always fire season now.

And even though all of this is well known and understood by elected officials, nothing has been done to prevent fires of this scale, nor to prepare to respond to them when they do happen. Even though Pacific Palisades is home to many of the richest people in Los Angeles, firefighters were completely overwhelmed. The powerful winds were able to send embers over a mile away, spreading the fire too quickly for firefighters to respond adequately. And because of the high winds, helicopters could not fly to drop water. At the same time, the water demand became so great that 20% of the fire hydrants went dry within the first hours of fighting the Palisades fire. So much water was used that the tanks supplying the hydrants couldn't be refilled fast enough. The entire firefighting infrastructure has not been equipped to fight fires of this scale.

Instead of increasing funding to Los Angeles fire departments, across the state and throughout the country, fire departments are losing funding, and closing fire stations. The Los Angeles Fire Department's budget was

cut by \$17.6 million in June of last year, despite firefighters getting salary increases. Fire departments are so understaffed in California that about 1,000 prisoners trained as firefighters are being used to fight these fires, only earning one dollar per hour or less. About 400 National Guard members have been deployed to help with road closures and other problems. Firefighters have recently come from Canada and Mexico. And still the fires continue to spread, and the wind is picking up again.

At the same time, some wealthy individuals even hired their own private firefighters to protect their properties. As much of the central business district of Pacific Palisades burned to the ground, Palisades Village — an upscale outdoor mall owned by the billionaire developer Rick Caruso — survived because Caruso hired a group of private firefighters to protect his property.

Fires of this scale have become so destructive and so common that insurance companies have stopped offering fire insurance. Insurance companies canceled over 1,600 fire insurance policies in Pacific Palisades this year in July. And it is not just the wealthy that have lost their homes. Many working-class families have been hit by these fires too. And where will they go now after losing everything?

At every level, we see a total and complete failure of this system to keep people safe from this destruction. The conditions that fuel these firestorms are only getting worse. 2023 set the record for the most amount of carbon released into the atmosphere in a single year, further accelerating the climate crisis. Instead of building up firefighting infrastructure, it continues to be cut back by city and state governments. It doesn't matter whether it is a Democratic or Republican administration, nothing is being done to prevent or adequately respond to these horrible disasters.

What's really responsible for entire neighborhoods of Los Angeles being burned to the ground is an entire system that has no regard for human life and cannot keep us safe. So long as we continue to live under a system that values profit more than human life, all of our lives will continue to be put at risk. Our lives are more important than their profits.

Speak Out Now! at AC Transit 1/13/2025

More Traffic But Same Run Times?

It doesn't take some fancy research team to recognize that the roads are more crowded, with more delivery trucks, food deliveries, taxi services and more. In city after city, the number of vehicles on the road has increased, causing significant slow downs on city streets. Just look around — drivers with Amazon, UPS, FedEx, Uber, Lyft, Instacart, DoorDash are everywhere. Some city commute times, like in New York and San Francisco, have increased an extra 25%, just in the last year alone.

But if there's more congestion on the roads, and travel time is taking longer, then why are the run times staying the same? On these more crowded city streets, traffic is moving slower, so run times are taking longer. Bus drivers should have more time! It's that simple!

New Line But Still No Time

Getting a new bid often means driving a new route. Will this be a smooth route? Can this route be done on time? Will there be traffic, closed lanes, construction, detours? At this point, the difference between most routes is not whether it can be made on time or not. It's about how far behind you'll be. It's the difference between a run time being short by five minutes or ten minutes, by ten minutes or fifteen minutes. Regardless of which line you got in the new bid, there's still not enough time.

Try Making An AC Route On Time



Management Pits Riders Against Drivers

When the run time is already too short, the question becomes not IF but WHEN you'll be running behind. On some routes, you can fall behind by the first stop. One red light, or one delivery truck, or just one wheelchair – that's all it takes. Then the whole rest of the route adds to it. There's no wiggle room at all.

Management wants drivers to make up the lost time and skip breaks. But that's ridiculous. Management keeps these impossible run times on purpose. They want us to choose: skip our break and start on time, or take our break and run late. If we skip our break, riders don't have to wait as long, but we don't get any recovery. If we take our break like we should, then we take time away from the riders. They have lives too. This is not a choice we should have to make!

Workers Shouldn't Pay for Their Crisis

From schools to transportation to housing and more — agencies across the Bay Area are crying poverty and planning budget cuts. Oakland and San Francisco school districts have announced plans to close schools. BART has again raised fares and threatens big cuts due to a major budget shortage. AC Transit has already used its budget shortage to cut routes, and plans even more cuts. Community Colleges in the Bay Area are in the same situation, with big budget deficits and threats of major cuts. The city of Oakland has said it faces a big budget shortage and threatens major cuts to avoid bankruptcy.

In all of these plans, the only ones to suffer are working people and our families. But we live in one of the wealthiest regions in the wealthiest state in the wealthiest country. There's plenty of money. Workers shouldn't pay for their crisis!

**We do the work to make society run.
We need to organize!
Get in touch with us!**



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