

Detroit to cut early morning bus services

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Detroit's Democratic Mayor David Bing announced Thursday that the city would end morning bus services on March 3. The cut will impact low-income residents dependent on public transportation to get to and from work in the early hours.

The mayor's office said bus service would be eliminated between 1 and 4 a.m. across the city. The city estimates that 500 riders on nine routes during these hours will be affected.

Some 120,000 people, equivalent to one in eight residents, ride Detroit Department of Transportation buses within the city proper each day, and 40,000 more depend upon the metro-area SMART bus system. Like the DDOT service, SMART has been subjected to deep cutbacks.

In addition to ending early runs, weekday hours for 34 of the city's 38 routes will be shortened, and 29 routes will have weekend hours curtailed. Two routes will be eliminated altogether, and two other routes will have weekend services discontinued. "The road could be bumpy as we implement some of this stuff, but we're committed to making it happen," Detroit Chief Operations Officer Chris Brown told the media Wednesday.

Seventy-eight drivers and some 60 mechanics will be laid off February 24, according to Amalgamated Transit Union Local 26 President Henry Gaffney. As many as 300 Department of Transportation workers' jobs could be axed as part of the plan, including supervisory and management positions.

Waits between buses will increase substantially in a system already crippled by an aging fleet, frequent delays, and chronic underfunding. In the past five years, the DDOT budget has been slashed from \$80 million to \$55 million. Last year, Bing cut the bus system by \$10 million, a reduction that translated into wait-times of three hours or more at bus stops and an in-service fleet averaging 100 vehicles short. The latest

cuts are projected to hack another \$11 million out of the DDOT budget.

"You're talking about people losing their jobs and not being able to take care of their families," bus rider Isaac Spillman, a 33-year-old unemployed skilled tradesman, told the *Detroit Free Press*.

"Transit never pays for itself, but Bing refuses to make some efficiencies. We have cutbacks and our buses are consistently overcrowded," bus rider Patty Fedewa told the *Detroit News*. Fedewa rides a bus five to seven days a week to the downtown area for work. "My bus this morning was so overpacked that it left dozens of passengers on the side of the road. How are people who work late shifts supposed to get to work or back home if they eliminate the 1 a.m. to 4 a.m. service?" she asked.

The Bing administration has presented cuts to the municipal workforce, bus service, schools, fire stations, libraries, lighting maintenance and other essentials as necessary precautions against a state takeover of the city finances. In fact, the Democratic mayor and city council have leveraged Republican Governor Rick Snyder's threat to appoint an emergency manager over the city in order to attack its workforce. The local political establishment has long pursued the dismantlement and privatization of public services.

The cumulative impact of such attacks makes daily life for the large poor population in the city increasingly impossible. Just last week, Detroit Public Schools Emergency Manager Roy Roberts announced 16 more schools would close by the fall, and four others would be turned over to private charter school operators. Wage cuts and increased health care premiums are expected to push as many as 900 teachers into retirement by July. In the face of community opposition, the city shuttered public libraries upon which thousands of residents depend.

The city is holding two token public hearings on the

bus cuts before they are implemented. Both will be on February 24, the same day that layoffs take effect for DDOT workers. (Hearings are scheduled in two sessions from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., and 6 to 8 p.m. at two locations: Northwest Activities Center, 18100 Meyers, and Wayne County Community College District, 5901 Conner.)

The Amalgamated Transit Union, like other public worker unions, has lined up with the city to facilitate the cuts. Late last month, union leaders agreed to \$20 million in concessions from benefits and pensions. Bing and the Detroit city council have proposed plans to cut the workforce by between 1,000 and 2,300. The union leaders, in lockstep with the entire political and corporate establishment, are determined to secure their own positions through the “sacrifice” of living conditions in the city.

After frustration at the poor bus service boiled over into an altercation between a driver and a group of passengers last November, drivers staged a one-day strike against conditions. In response, the union issued only a right-wing demand for increased policing of the transit routes, including placing police on buses.



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