

Budget cuts hit Pittsburgh regional bus service

Samuel Davidson
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Some 45,000 bus and trolley riders in 100 neighborhoods in and around Pittsburgh will be left stranded when a 35 percent cut in bus service takes effect later in the year.

The Port Authority of Allegheny County announced the elimination of 45 out of 102 bus and trolley routes, the reduction in service to all remaining routes, and the layoff of 500 to 600 employees in order to reduce a \$64 million budget deficit in the 2012-2013 budget.

In addition to ending 45 routes, all service past 10 p.m. will be eliminated except for a few routes. Most weekend service will also stop. This will have a devastating impact on those who rely on buses to get to and from work at hospitals and other jobs with evening or late night hours.

For those routes that aren't cut, riders in zone 1 will see their fare increase from \$2.25 to \$2.50, while the fares for zone 2 riders rise from \$3.25 to \$3.75. This is the fourth fare increase in four and a half years and the third cut in service.

In March 2011, the Port Authority put into place a 15 percent cut in service and the layoff of 250 drivers. The latest cuts will take effect on September 2.

Most of the communities surrounding Pittsburgh will completely lose their service, and most working class and poorer neighborhoods in the city will either lose their service or see it drastically cut.

Ambridge, Coraopolis, Elizabeth, Forest Hills, West Homestead, Moon, Oakmont, Pitcairn, Plum, Rosedale, Scott, Sewickley, Turtle Creek and Verona are just some of the working class towns surrounding Pittsburgh that will completely lose their bus service. Scores of neighborhoods within the city such as the East Hills, Greenfield, Manchester, Mount Washington, and Troy Hill will also lose service. Service to Pittsburgh International Airport will also be eliminated.

An estimated 45,000 daily riders who depend upon bus and trolley service to get to work, school, doctors offices and to go shopping will have to find some other form of transportation.

Thousands of low-paid workers with no other means of transport will lose their jobs. The cuts will especially hit the elderly, poor and low-income workers who cannot afford cars or the high cost of parking and gas. Many shift workers will be left stranded as night service is being curtailed.

About 5,000 students in the Pittsburgh Public Schools ride to school on buses. Many of these students will lose bus service and be forced to walk in order to get to school.

The politicians of both big business parties are responsible for these cuts, including former Pennsylvania Democratic governor Ed Rendell and current Republican governor Tom Corbett.

The Port Authority's current deficit is the direct result of cuts in state and county aid. The state government cut \$34.2 million in the fiscal year that ended last June 30, a 19 percent drop, while county aid for the Port Authority remains flat.

Port Authority officials are hoping the Corbett administration will approve increased funding for mass transit. This is an illusion. The Corbett administration has already made its mark by refusing to raise any taxes on the wealthy while cutting millions from education, health care and now food stamps. The Corbett administration has not shown any support for mass transit.

The Port Authority will use the cuts to demand even greater concessions from bus drivers and mechanics whose contracts expire this June. In 2008, bus drivers were forced to take more than \$93 million in concessions, including a pay freeze and cuts in health

benefits to prevents cuts in service at that time. The previous year, the Port Authority cut its routes by 15 percent. Its next target is to eliminate health benefits for retired workers.

While the Port Authority is making massive cuts in service to working class and poor neighborhoods, it is expected to begin service on a 1.25-mile extension of its light rail service in March.

The 1.25 miles of rail track will bring service to the city's two sports stadiums and one casino, including drilling two tunnels underneath the Allegheny River at a cost of nearly \$600 million, considerably higher than the initial estimate of \$390 million and an astounding \$88 million over the approved budget. This is money that could be used for maintenance of routes, as well as retiree health benefits and pensions.



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