

Public outcry against proposed cuts to Chicago-area transit system

Brian Green
8 May 2025

The dire warning from the Regional Transportation Authority (RTA) about impending “doomsday” cuts to Chicago’s public transit system has ignited a firestorm of anger and fear among riders, workers and advocates. Initial reports revealed a staggering \$730 million budget shortfall threatening to dismantle the Chicago Transit Authority (CTA), Metra and Pace systems, which serve hundreds of thousands of passengers daily.

But shortly afterwards, Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning and Illinois Representative Kam Buckner said an infusion of \$1.5 billion would be needed.

Public concerns have reverberated across social media, community forums, and in public meetings, exposing the deep-seated frustrations of a region on the brink of a transportation catastrophe.

CBS News reported that if the state legislature fails to make funding available by the end of its spring session this month, massive cuts to service will begin in early 2026.

A system on the edge

The RTA’s projections paint a grim picture: Without immediate state or federal intervention, the Chicago metropolitan area could lose 40 percent of its transit services by 2026. Rail lines would be suspended, bus routes slashed, and wait times balloon to untenable lengths.

The proposed cuts represent nothing short of a death knell for urban mobility. The fallout would be catastrophic. Over 500,000 riders could lose access to nearby bus routes, while entire neighborhoods would be severed from rail service. Fifty “L” stations would close, according to local CBS affiliate. Axios reports 20 percent of the city would lose access to transit for their daily commute. The jobs of thousands of CTA workers are also at stake.

Commuters relying on Metra’s suburban rail network would be able to access just one hourly train on weekdays with nearly nonexistent weekend options. The system’s paratransit services for disabled riders, a lifeline for many, would be gutted by 66 percent on weekends. Pace suburban buses would end service at 8:00 p.m.

The economic ripple effects, as estimated by the RTA, include

\$2.6 billion in lost GDP annually and millions in vanished wages.

As the WSWS reported last month, the crisis was not unforeseen. It is the result of decades of austerity, corporate tax breaks, and a funding model that shackles transit agencies to unsustainable fare-recovery ratios. Temporary federal relief funds delayed the reckoning, but with those now exhausted and Trump slashing federal funding, the region faces a dire situation.

Public outcry

The WSWS’s initial coverage sparked a flood of discussion from riders, workers and activists, many of whom took to social media platforms like Reddit to voice their concerns. On threads in r/cta and r/chicago, the sentiment was varied but had some notable comments.

One rider captured the stakes succinctly:

If the CTA collapses, Chicago will not be far behind. When employees can’t commute, when people can’t easily get around the city for fun or other things, the convenience of the city vanishes.

Another commenter highlighted the deliberate stalling behind the crisis:

This is the exact same budget crisis that we’re talking about now. The RTA was screaming about it back in 2020 because they’re not dumb and could see that the market was permanently shifting for when the federal dollars went away. The feds delayed the crisis while the state did [nothing] to figure out a solution over the last 5 years.

These reactions underscore a broader truth: the “sudden” budget shortfall is anything but. It is the culmination of a calculated abandonment of public infrastructure, masked by temporary fixes and now unmasked by the withdrawal of federal aid.

The WSWS spoke with CTA workers and riders and received messages from readers in the days following the original report. Their stories reveal the human toll of the impending cuts and the simmering rage at a system that prioritizes profits over people.

One worker wrote:

I care about this issue because we need our Public Transit! A lot of people (like me) who don't drive depend on it. It may be problematic at times but then again what system isn't. We need our Buses and Trains and the whole point of Public Transit is less cars on the street and by our service in danger of being cut could mean a big hit for the economy.

A local rider echoed the sentiment:

I use transit for everything. All of my friends use transit for everything. The CTA is the biggest reason we chose Chicago over other cities. We are all actively involved in local politics, earn and spend a lot of money locally, and to cut the CTA means to lose people like us. The country should not head this direction. There should be some places in the US where you don't need a car. Keep Chicago one of those options.

Independent action is needed

Chicago's transit crisis is not an isolated incident. From Philadelphia to San Francisco, agencies are slashing services, hiking fares and laying off workers as federal aid dries up. The Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA) recently proposed a 45 percent service reduction and a 9:00 p.m. rail curfew to address its own deficit. Meanwhile, the Trump administration's threats to gut federal transit grants have left cities scrambling to fill the gaps.

Chicago Democratic Mayor Brandon Johnson's response has been to propose austerity. He spoke of a "crossroads" and has floated layoffs and "doing more with less"—in other words, austerity. His budget working group is stacked with corporate and union officials. No challenge will come from any wing of the Democratic Party.

The Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) bureaucracy is opposed to any collective action by CTA workers. Some workers speaking with the WSWS received no communication from the union on the cuts.

Transit workers should be aware of the recent experiences of Chicago's teachers. In the latest contract agreement with the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) and Chicago Public Schools (CPS), the real state of the district budget, substantially worsened by Trump's federal funding cuts, was hidden from teachers.

Instead, they were told the contract could "Trump-proof" schools and protect students.

Days after the contract was ratified by teachers, Mayor Johnson announced a budget crisis, stating "the situation had changed." In forcing through an agreement the city worked with the CTU to block any serious struggle against budget cuts which the Democratic mayor, a former CTU lobbyist, is now in charge of imposing.

The CTU bureaucracy, well aware of the looming crisis, prevented a strike, which had the potential of becoming the spearhead for a nationwide counter-offensive by educators and other public sector workers against Trump's war on public education and the social and democratic rights of the working class.

By blocking a strike, the CTU bureaucracy has allowed Johnson and the corporate and financial powers he serves to pick off one section of city workers after another, to prevent facing a citywide movement of the working class.

But that is exactly what is needed. This means building rank-and-file committees, independent of all the bureaucracies, that will bring together the most militant and class-conscious workers to organize collective action. Transit workers must unite with teachers, firefighters, US Postal Service, UPS and industrial workers to fight budget cuts, mass firings, privatization and the looting of society by the oligarchs.

The working class must organize independently to fight for:

- **No layoffs, service cuts, or fare hikes!**
- **Tax the billionaires and corporations!**
- **Expropriate the fortunes of oligarchs like Musk and Pritzker to fund public transit!**

The fight to save Chicago's transit system is a fight for the city's public infrastructure. Without it, the region's economy will wither, inequality will deepen, and the working class will bear the brunt of the crisis.

The time to act is now. Riders, workers and young people must unite across city and state lines, break from the two-party system, and build a socialist movement that puts human needs above corporate greed.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact