

Democrats begin “doomsday” budget planning for Chicago area transit

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Fill out the form below to tell us what you’re facing on the job or as a rider—your voice is essential in exposing the impact of these attacks and advancing the fight back of the working class.

The Chicago regional public transit system, a critical resource for millions in the region, faces massive cuts, as Democratic lawmakers in the state of Illinois failed to pass a critical funding bill before the last legislative session concluded. As federal COVID-19 relief funds dried up, the agency announced the need for 40 percent “across the board” cuts due to longstanding conditions of funding crisis.

The “doomsday” planning is part of a broad assault by the American oligarchy on public services nationwide, led by the Trump administration, which is being assisted at every level by the Democratic Party. In Philadelphia, the transit system is facing a shocking 45 percent cut.

Unless stopped by the working class, organized against the city’s Democratic Party establishment and the union bureaucracy, a catastrophe looms. School funding is being slashed to the bone, vital programs like Medicaid and food assistance are being dismantled and entire federal departments are being gutted or shut entirely while greater sums than ever before flow to the military and to the superrich via tax cuts.

The Regional Transportation Authority (RTA), which oversees the Chicago Transit Authority (CTA), Metra regional rail and Pace suburban bus service, now faces a budget shortfall somewhere between \$771 million and \$1 billion.

Proposed cuts include:

- **Chicago:** Suspension of four of eight CTA rail lines, a 25 percent reduction of frequency system-wide, closure of 50 stations and elimination of 74 of 127 bus routes, leaving 500,000 riders without nearby transit access.

- **Metra commuter rail:** Reduced weekday service to one train per hour, with weekend trains running only every two hours. Metra averaged around 146,000 rides on weekdays.

- **Pace suburban buses:** Elimination of all weekend bus service, 66 percent reduction in paratransit services for disabled riders and cuts to late-night routes.

On top of the immediate difficulties these cuts will impose on a wide swath of residents, the economic fallout will be devastating. Estimates include \$2.6 billion annual loss in GDP, 3,000 layoffs for transit workers to start and 90 million fewer rides in the first year alone. The Chicago area already has some of the longest commute times in the US.

Such cuts will deepen inequality in a city where the class divide is painted on virtually every block, further isolating lower-income households, especially those with school-aged children, and it will significantly worsen traffic congestion. The hardship these cuts will create could be summed up in a few data points:

- 26.7 percent of Chicago households do not own a vehicle (American Community Survey)

- 45 percent of Chicago households own just one vehicle (ACS)

- As of 2022, 13 percent of CTA trips are children going to and from school. This is up from 5 percent in 2016, a period in which Chicago Public Schools slashed school bus services citywide. (CTA)

- In the suburbs, 127,000 riders across six counties rely on Pace buses daily. In 2024, Pace’s system use increased by 14.6 percent from the year before, a rise that continued into 2025, which saw more than a million rides in January alone. Pace is also the transit resource for disabled residents across the region. (Pace)

Democrats and union leaders spearhead austerity

After many public warnings, Illinois lawmakers adjourned their spring session without passing a funding package. The system has a September 15 deadline for its budget, which leaders promise will contain significant cuts, regardless of any action taken by legislators at this point. RTA leaders revealed in a recent meeting that they are preparing two budgets, one assuming new funding and another with an initial 20 percent reduction in services.

RTA Executive Director Leanne Redden said, “I don’t want to give anyone false hope that there is still any way to avoid some of these negative impacts. The negative impacts are here, and now we’re going to have to all work together to mitigate the worst of those impacts for as long as possible while the legislature continues to do their work. The truth is that some of those impacts now are sadly unavoidable.”

This social disaster has been engineered by decades of austerity, on which both the Democratic and Republican parties have long fundamentally agreed.

Controlling the entire Illinois government, both chambers of the state legislature, the governor’s office, the secretary of state and attorney general, the Democratic Party also dominates virtually

every seat in the city of Chicago and Cook County. Just as has been done to the Chicago Public Schools, this disaster is a consequence of policy crafted by Democratic state and city leaders, the party of choice for the region's ruling class.

Illinois Gov. JB Pritzker, scion of the Hyatt hotels fortune and one of the state's 25 billionaires, has had photo-ops on the CTA recently as he tries to boost his reelection prospects. In his limited comments on the transit crisis, he emphasized the need for reform and stated he is not in favor of raising any taxes to fund the system. Hyatt Hotels, known to be the worst chain in the business when it comes to exploitation and labor abuses, has received tens of millions in city tax funds to subsidize property developments.

Cuts to vital services are also supported by Mayor Brandon Johnson, a former Chicago Teachers Union organizer, who has called on city residents to "do more with less." In imposing ever deeper austerity, the ruling class also benefits from the complicity of the pseudo-left. Just one of the six Democratic Socialists of America city council members has even spoken on the transit "fiscal cliff."

No solutions will come from the party that has manufactured the crisis and is now using it to move forward with gutting public infrastructure.

Widening class battles

Massive class battles are on the horizon. Earlier this month, in the largest protests in US history, as many as 11 million rallied and marched in cities large and small against the Trump administration's government of the oligarchy, demanding an end to the attacks on democratic and social rights and the disbanding of the ICE Gestapo.

School districts are entering crucial contract expirations that threaten educators' livelihoods and working conditions. At the end of June 2025, 77,000 educators in 32 California districts face contract battles. In Philadelphia, 14,000 educators authorized a strike by 94 percent. Also in that city, around 9,000 municipal workers voted by 95 percent to authorize a strike when their contract expires June 30.

This is part of a global process. Last month in Peru, transit workers led a nationwide strike demanding the resignation of that country's president.

Nothing could more sharply contrast against such powerful expressions of fighting courage than the actions of the trade union leaderships, who are doing the most to try to contain social anger and lower workers' expectations.

Earlier this week, a press conference was held outside of Union Station in downtown Chicago, where Democratic state officials and SMART-TD Local 653 legislative director Orlando Rojas appealed to Illinois lawmakers to find funding and avert disaster.

"Pink slips for those cuts begin to go out in September," Rojas said. "These are the same workers considered essential during the COVID pandemic, who provided transportation to other essential workers. We are calling on our elected officials to do the right

thing."

Amalgamated Transit Workers (CTA) and SMART-TD (Metra) have blocked independent transit worker action and channeled opposition toward the Democratic Party. Rather than turning transit workers out to the broader sections of the working class who rely on transit and want to support transit workers and thus building organizations of struggle, the ATU took some CTA workers to the state capital to lobby.

A similar strategy is being pursued by the Chicago Teachers Union, although the reality of the Chicago schools budget situation was mostly hidden from teachers and the wider public until after the contract was approved, in a massive betrayal earlier this spring. CTU leaders claimed the contract would "Trump-proof" the district and protect students and teachers from cuts to education funding.

Just days after the contract was ratified, Mayor Johnson announced "the situation had changed" regarding the budget for schools, rendering the contract worth less than the paper it was printed on. Immediately after Johnson's announcement, the CTU unveiled a pressure campaign to plead with the state legislature for additional funding to pay for the "transformative" contract.

Funding transit requires redistribution of wealth, ending wars

Like anywhere else, having a modern public transit system in Chicago is impossible without a direct assault on the so-called "right" of the capitalist class to exploit the working class, to siphon off public funds, and direct the remaining revenues to the police forces and the expanding imperialist wars.

Overturning the monopoly of the capitalist class on political power is necessary to effect a massive redistribution of wealth needed to meet the needs of the majority, the working class. But to achieve this, the working class must be politically united across sectors and states through organizations that workers themselves control.

It is imperative that workers take the initiative to form rank-and-file committees, independent of the union apparatus. These committees can unify workers across sectors based on their common class interests and build toward a citywide strike that can demand that vital services, including transit and public education, are fully funded.



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