Philadelphia transit board votes to enact “doomsday budget,” to “dismantle” transit system

Matt Allen, Nick Barrickman
4 July 2025

On Thursday, June 26, the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority’s (SEPTA) Board of Trustees approved a “doomsday budget” that will ensure the devastation of the region’s public transportation system.

The budget, which will force a 45 percent reduction in services, will further solidify a decline in living standards for the working-class communities within SEPTA’s service region if no solution is found.

The budget was passed only days before a strike began of over 9,000 city workers (including trash removal, water, and street maintenance) against poverty pay. Similar massive cuts are taking place across America, placing the working class on a collision course with the two-party system’s budget cutting agenda. This situation has produced opposition in section after section of the working population.

August 24 will mark the first phase of service cuts, with the elimination of 32 bus routes, a reduction in services on existing routes, and the end of special event services. A 21.5 percent fare increase is also slated for September. The second phase of cuts, beginning January 1, 2026, will see the elimination of five regional rail lines, 18 more bus routes, and the imposition of a 9:00 PM curfew on all remaining services.

“This budget will effectively dismantle SEPTA,” said SEPTA general manager Scott Sauer in announcing the board’s decision. “Once this dismantlement begins, it will be almost impossible to reverse, and the economic and social impacts will be immediate and long-lasting for all Pennsylvanians, whether they ride SEPTA or not.”

These cuts will hit the most vulnerable within the working class. In 2022, 50 percent of SEPTA’s ridership earned $34,000 or less annually, another 21 percent earned $15,000 or less. Many of these riders are completely reliant on public transportation for general mobility within the community, and as their sole means of commuting to and from work.

The reduction of transportation services is also estimated to have a devaluing effect of around $19 billion in real estate.

The current structural deficit that SEPTA faces is primarily linked to the ending of COVID relief funds, totaling around $213 million. Meanwhile, SEPTA and transportation systems across the country face rising operating costs and a loss of ridership since the start of the pandemic.

Democratic Governor Josh Shapiro and the Democrats who control the State House are pursuing a measure which they know is doomed to failure. It will not gain the required Republican support, as it has already failed to do three times in the past—something Governor Shapiro has openly acknowledged. The Public Transportation Trust Fund Act would raise a percentage of already allocated sales tax funds, forecast to generate around $292 million.

Republican State Senate Majority Leader Joe Pittman has already expressed opposition to the legislation: “With the state already investing billions of dollars in mass transit annually, asking for more than $300 million more this year for transit is difficult to reconcile.”

Delaware County, which falls within SEPTA’s service region, is still reeling from the devastating consequences of a private equity firm’s financial parasitism. In late April, this led to the closure of

© World Socialist Web Site

Crozer-Chester and Taylor hospitals, leaving the community with zero hospitals. The current financial crisis within SEPTA only promises to amplify the compounding crisis, with fewer healthcare facilities accessing fewer transportation options.

Chicago's transportation system is also facing devastating cuts of around 40 percent. Democrats have controlled the city and state for years, and despite numerous warnings about the current budget crisis, they have done nothing to prevent it. Instead, they are now bracing the public to "do more with less," as stated by Democratic Mayor and former teachers' union organizer Brandon Johnson.

In New York City, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) is currently facing a $1.5 billion operating budget gap, with as much as a $35 billion dollar shortfall for its four-year capital plan. It is currently seeking $14 billion in emergency federal dollars to assist it.

At the federal level, representatives in Congress have voted to adopt Trump's massive attack on Medicaid, food stamps and other social programs in order to fund his permanent tax cuts for the wealthy. Resources used for critical public services are being drained away into the coffers of the wealthy and set aside for global war.

The assault on working class living standards is of a piece with the general counter-revolutionary drive of the American ruling class to claw back social gains made over the last 80 years.

But the heightened assault on living standards are not going unchallenged. On Thursday, Penn Museum workers affiliated with AFSCME District Council 47 in Philadelphia voted to ratify strike action if a contract isn't offered by July 14. They would join fellow municipal workers in District Council 33 who are currently out on strike.

On June 17, members of the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers (PFT) voted overwhelmingly to strike if a contract agreement is not reached with the School District of Philadelphia (SDP) by August 31, 2025. Elsewhere in the state, over 1,400 healthcare workers, affiliated with the Service Employees International Union at Wellspan Chambersburg Hospital, voted on Tuesday, July 1, to strike if negotiations failed to produce a contract.

The critical issue involved in these struggles is political leadership. In each instance, the official trade unions are not seeking to link up workers' fights for basic social rights. Instead, despite empty proclamations of "solidarity" from various leaders, they are being kept separate and isolated from each other.

In the case of the teachers, the PFT's leaders have sought to bury the members' strike vote. Instead, the leaders have pivoted to promoting unity with the SDP as they appear, hand-in-hand, at the state capital to beg for school funding.

The SEPTA transit workers' vote to strike last November was disregarded by the Transport Workers Union local 234, which kept its members at work while it continued negotiating a sellout contract with the transit system.

Workers in the city of Philadelphia must take the struggle into their own hands by forming independent rank-and-file committees, elected from among their own fellow shop floor members, and make plans for linking their struggles with workers across the board. This is a necessary step toward preparing for a general strike, which will carry the goals of not only securing decent living standards for all, but forcing out of office the sworn enemies of the working class in the Democratic and Republican parties.

For this fight, no support can be placed upon the pro-corporate trade union apparatus. Whether in the private or public sector, these institutions function as the company police, intent to sell out the workers' struggle.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site