

Tens of thousands of workers to be left stranded by Pittsburgh bus cuts

By Samuel Davidson
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Two shuttle bus routes in the Pittsburgh area servicing tens of thousands of workers will be eliminated July 1 due to federal budget cuts.

Camoya Mitchell, who works at one of the big box stores in the Robinson Town Centre mall, says she is one of many who will not be able to get to work on time when the shuttle bus service is cut.

“I want to work as early as possible,” Camoya says, who lives in McKees Rocks, Pennsylvania. Because of cuts to public transit, a trip that would be 20 minutes by car takes over an hour and half on public transportation. “I always leave earlier in case I miss a bus,” she says. Camoya sets off sometimes as early as 6 a.m. to get to work.

Because of budget cuts to public transit made over the past 4 years that reduced bus services by more than 30 percent, Camoya must walk 20 minutes from her home to the bus stop. Depending upon the time of day, she will need to transfer before catching a bus that brings her to her workplace.

From there she catches a shuttle bus to the store which is over a mile from where the public bus drops her off. It is this last leg of her commute on the shuttle bus which will be eliminated at the end of this month.

Without the bus, “I will have to walk another 20 or 30 minutes over very unsafe roads,” Camoya says. “There are no sidewalks, and the cars go speeding past you. You have your back to the cars and in the winter time it will always be dark.”

Robinson Town Centre is a massive complex of shopping malls, restaurants, offices and some light industry on the outskirts of Pittsburgh. Approximately 30,000 people work in the complex, mostly in low-wage retail and service jobs. Many cannot afford cars and rely upon public transit to get to and from work.

After the Port Authority cut most of the bus service in the area, the Airport Corridor Transportation Association received federal funding to operate the shuttle service throughout the area. The shuttle provides rides from the public bus stop to over 150 work sites within the area. Another shuttle service provides connections for workers in the several towns along the Monongahela valley including East Pittsburgh, Turtle Creek, North Versailles, McKeesport, Port Vue, Glassport, Clairton. The shuttle also drives people to the local hospital and the community college campus.

These buses provide rides to about 20,000 workers yearly. While very infrequent, they are the last form of public transit in these areas. The two shuttles were paid out of funds from the Federal Transit budget, but were eliminated by Congress and the Obama administration this year. Funding for the program ends on June 30. Neither the State nor Allegheny County government have offered to continue funding the service.

Like many workers, Comoya is unable to afford a car and relies on public bus services to get to and from work. Camoya says she does not receive any benefits and has to work six months before even being eligible for an employee discount. “Without bus service, many people are going to lose their jobs. I have looked for work in McKees Rocks and downtown Pittsburgh. There are only a few shops and groceries in McKees Rocks and they are not hiring. I applied at many places in Pittsburgh, but no one called me back.”

Jason Phillips works as a cook at one of the many restaurants in the area. “I will have to walk about 30 minutes each day to get to work. There are no sidewalks and it is especially dangerous over the bridge where you have to walk on the road,” he said.

“Lots of people use this shuttle on the weekdays and

weekends to get to their jobs. There needs to be more buses, not fewer.”

Like Camoya, Jason already has a long commute due to the previous cuts in public transit. Jason travels from the Carrick section of Pittsburgh, and the trip often takes an hour and a half. “Sometimes it takes longer because the bus is so packed that I have to wait for the next one. I always have to give myself extra time.”

Both Camoya and Jason point out the high public transportation fares. For Camoya it costs \$4.75 each way but sometimes she walks and extra 20 minutes to save the \$1.00 transfer cost. “You are really tired after standing on your feet the whole day, but I often don’t have the extra money.”

Jason, buys a weekly pass that costs \$37.50. This “is a lot of money when you are only making \$8.00 an hour and don’t get a full 40 hours each week. Public transit is something that is needed for people to get around, elderly need it to go shopping, not everyone can afford a car. The politicians don’t care about the poor and the working class, they only care about the rich. I would like to see them have to take the bus everywhere.”

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