

Re: Cuts to Bus Frequency

Dear City Manager De'Carlon Seewood,

I am writing this in response to a request from your office communicated to the Public Transit Advisory Commission at its most recent meeting for input from PTAC on the decision to cut bus frequency in the City of Columbia. I first want to communicate my appreciation for this request. My response below reflects the substance of our discussion of this issue at that meeting.

PTAC has been concerned about the issue of understaffing of Columbia's bus system for some time ([see, for instance, our letter to City Council from March of last year](#)). We continue to believe that current staffing levels are unsustainable. It may be necessary to temporarily cut bus frequency to preserve the health of the system overall. Given the serious consequences this will have for people who depend on the bus system, however, this decision should be accompanied by prompt action to sustainably redress the staffing shortfall by increasing bus driver pay.

[A study of the effect of changes in transit headways on ridership](#) suggests that a doubling of headways could be expected to result in a decline in the use of public transit in the City of Columbia to the tune of more than 200,000 passenger miles per year (representing a .221 percent decline in passenger miles for every 1 percent increase in headways). These miles currently take people to work, to school, and to other appointments necessary for full enjoyment of life in Columbia. Because headways are already high at 45 minutes, ridership is already concentrated among people least capable of finding an alternative — very few people take the bus in Columbia because it is convenient. These cuts will be extremely disruptive to their lives. If this disruption cannot be avoided it should be made as brief as possible.

The Commission has discussed a wide variety of approaches to this question. For some time, it has been clear to us that a substantial increase in bus driver pay is necessary to maintain service. It has now been almost four months since these cuts were announced. It will take some time to recruit additional drivers at a higher salary, and further delays push off the beginning of that process. Please reiterate to the City Council the urgency of action on this issue.

Respectfully,

Adam Thorp

Chair, Public Transit Advisory Commission