

Re: Cuts to Bus Frequency

Dear Columbia City Council and City Manager De'Carlton Seewood,

The Columbia Bicycle and Pedestrian Commission is writing this letter in response to the potential decision to cut bus frequency in the City of Columbia. Our response below reflects our affirmation of the work done by Columbia's Public Transit Advisory Commission, and the similar that the Bicycle and Pedestrian Commission has undertaken in relation to Columbia's transit system, reflected in that Go COMO solicited our commission's support for an updated 2023 Transit Plan. This letter also outlines our understanding of how transit cuts will make traveling exceedingly difficult for Columbia's bicycle riders, pedestrians, and wheelchair users that rely on our already limited service.

PTAC has been concerned about the issue of understaffing of Columbia's bus system for some time ([see, for instance, their letter to City Council from March of last year](#)). PTAC continues 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.

For some time, it has been clear to PTAC, and similarly to the Columbia Bicycle and Pedestrian Commission, 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 understand the urgency of action the city will need to take on this issue.

Respectfully,  
Columbia Bicycle and Pedestrian Commission