

To: Columbia City Council

Re: Service Cuts and Bus Driver Pay

We are writing to express our concern about the possibility of reduced bus service due to the system's inability to attract and retain drivers. We hope the City Council will consider measures to expedite a re-evaluation of pay for city bus drivers before cuts to service are considered.

A forty-five minute interval between buses is already an inconvenience for users of the transit system and a barrier to new riders. Shifting to hour-and-a-half intervals on some or all of the routes would make the situation much worse. It would also contradict any reasonable plan to achieve the city's goal of increasing fixed-route transit ridership by 10 percent between 2019 and 2023, as stated in the city's 2021 strategic plan. We have been advised by staff that such cuts may be necessary if additional drivers cannot be recruited.

We understand that the city has many worthwhile projects competing for its attention and resources, and that other parts of city government are also struggling to recruit and retain workers. For riders with no other good option for getting around the city, bus service is essential. A cut to service now would strand these riders, and deprive them and other Columbians of an alternative as gas prices and other costs of personal transportation rise.

We have been impressed by the creativity of GOCOMO staff as they try to address this crisis through a variety of channels. We would particularly like to encourage the city to expeditiously complete their evaluation of the possibility of employing drivers with Class E permits to drive smaller paratransit vehicles.

Despite those efforts, current compensation for bus drivers is evidently not generous enough to attract enough drivers for the system to operate in a sustainable manner. In line with our duty to "make recommendations to the city council and city staff for appropriate action," we ask you to explore routes to increased compensation that could be pursued before service cuts become unavoidable.

Sincerely,

Commissioners

Public Transit Advisory Commission