

Stranded by Transit Cuts: Chicago

As the coronavirus batters public finances, transit agencies are implementing or proposing the deepest service cuts in a generation. While public transportation received relief funding in the federal CARES Act, this aid has been nearly exhausted in major cities as the crisis stretches on.

Agencies across the U.S. are warning of service cuts as deep as 40%. What would the impact of those cuts be in a region like Chicago? An analysis using the Center for Neighborhood Technology's AllTransit tool suggests they would be deep and profound.

If emergency aid for transit does not come through, Tom Hagglund, 66, wonders whether he can continue to rely on it to get to work, or if he'll have to pay for taxi rides he can't afford. "Some days I just give up and say, 'Okay, it will cost me \$25 or \$30 but at least I'll get to work on time,'" said Hagglund, who performs essential support work for the University of Chicago Medical School and Rosalind Franklin University. "But that eats up a huge percentage of my daily budget. I'm very concerned, especially for people who are sick, or older, or can't afford to get around the city on anything other than transit."

The Impact on the Chicago Region

Public transportation that runs frequently is key to economic mobility. But in the Chicago region, large numbers of people and jobs who benefit from access to frequent full-day service today would lose that service. 209,883 people would lose access to frequent full-day transit; businesses would suffer as 55,133 jobs currently near frequent full-day transit lose that access.

- The impact would fall more heavily on Black residents and people of color. Black residents make up 17% of the region, but 24% of those who would lose access to frequent full-day service. Non-white and Hispanic residents make up 47% of the region, but 75% of those who would lose access to frequent full-day service.
- Second- and third-shift workers who rely on transit would face even more difficult commutes. 28,034 commuters who leave home between midnight and 5 am would lose access to service that runs frequently 24-hours-a-day; so would 38,850 commuters who leave work between midnight and 5 am.
- 9,663 households without access to a private vehicle would lose access to frequent transit, imperiling their ability to meet essential needs. Overall, 65,281 households would lose access to frequent full-day transit.

DISCLAIMER: This analysis is based on the potential impact of budget shortfalls without further emergency aid, not specific transit agency proposals.

How Many Will Lose Access to Frequent Full-Day Transit: Chicago

	How Many Will Lose Access to Frequent Full-Day Transit	Currently Within 1/2-Mile of Frequent Transit	Near Frequent Transit After 50% Peak and 30% Off-Peak Cut	% Change
People	209,883	2,683,616	2,473,733	-8%
<i>Black</i>	49,712	774,474	724,762	-6%
<i>Total Black, Hispanic, Asian, Native American, Pacific Islander, other and multiple races</i>	158,149	1,816,678	1,658,529	-9%
Households	65,281	1,032,473	967,192	-6%
<i>With incomes under \$25,000</i>	16,621	275,495	258,874	-6%
<i>Without access to a private vehicle</i>	9,663	276,718	267,055	-3%
Jobs	55,133	1,329,583	1,274,450	-4%
	How Many Will Lose Access to Frequent 24-Hour Transit	Currently Within 1/2-Mile of 24-Hour Frequent Transit	Near 24-Hour Frequent Transit After 50% Peak & 30% Off-Peak Cut	% Change
Commuters leaving home between midnight and 5 am	28,034	48,255	20,221	-58. %
Commuters leaving work between midnight and 5 am	38,850	75,377	36,527	-52%
<p><i>Notes:</i> Figures are for the Chicago-Naperville-Elgin, IL-IN-WI Metropolitan Statistical Area using Census figures from 2017 and transit service data from 2018.</p> <p>“Frequent full-day transit” is defined as transit that runs at least every 15 minutes between 7 am and 10 pm. “Frequent 24-hour transit” is defined as transit that runs at least every 15 minutes for the entire day.</p>				

Methods and Background

For this analysis, the Center for Neighborhood Technology ran an analysis using the AllTransit tool, which combines publicly available transit schedule information (GTFS feeds) and new data created by CNT for more than 300 regions where it did not previously exist.

The analysis is focused on frequent full-day service, defined as transit that runs at least every 15 minutes between 7 am and 10 pm. CNT modelled a schedule where peak service (service between 7-9 am and 4-6 pm) was reduced by 50% while off-peak service was reduced by 30%. This reflects that many transit agencies are likely to tailor service cuts to attempt to preserve full-day service.