

Stranded by Transit Cuts: New York

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 New York/Northern New Jersey? An analysis using the Center for Neighborhood Technology's AllTransit tool suggests they would be deep and profound.

One of hundreds of thousands of people affected would be Suk-Yee Wong, a pharmacist at NYU Langone Orthopedic hospital on the East Side of Manhattan. She lives in Middle Village, Queens, with her husband and two children, and takes a bus and two subways to work. With COVID-19 forcing service reductions at the MTA, her typical 90-minute commute has become considerably longer and far less reliable. She wakes up half an hour earlier to get to her shift on time. "My commute has never been easy," she said. Without emergency funding, "then it will become even longer and more unreliable. I also worry that my patients will have problems accessing care, particularly those who depend on paratransit to see their doctors and receive physical therapy. These patients do not have the means to call an Uber."

Throughout New York and Northern New Jersey, essential workers like Wong would be stranded and the region's economic recovery would be imperiled in the midst of a pandemic.

The Impact on the New York Region

Public transportation that runs frequently is key to economic mobility. But in the New York and northern New Jersey region, large numbers of people and jobs who benefit from access to frequent full-day service today would lose that service. 555,121 people would lose access to frequent full-day transit; businesses would suffer as 184,911 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 16% of the region, but 20% of those who would lose access to frequent full-day service. Non-white and Hispanic residents make up 53% of the region, but 65% 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. 9,591 commuters who leave home between midnight and 5 am would lose access to service that runs frequently 24-hours-a-day; so would 15,107 commuters who leave work between midnight and 5 am.
- 40,534 households without access to a private vehicle would lose access to frequent transit, imperiling their ability to meet essential needs. Overall, 194,797 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: New York

	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	555,121	9,396,930	8,841,809	-6%
<i>Black</i>	111,990	<i>2,118,034</i>	<i>2,006,044</i>	-5%
<i>Total Black, Hispanic, Asian, Native American, Pacific Islander, other and multiple races</i>	361,778	<i>6,497,804</i>	<i>6,136,026</i>	-6%
Households	194,797	3,449,159	3,254,362	-6%
<i>With incomes under \$25,000</i>	39,983	<i>871,023</i>	<i>831,040</i>	-5%
<i>Without access to a private vehicle</i>	40,534	<i>1,807,274</i>	<i>1,766,740</i>	-2%
Jobs	184,911	4,549,411	4,364,500	-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	9,591	106,612	97,021	-9%
Commuters leaving work between midnight and 5 am	15,107	197,273	182,166	-8%
<p><i>Notes:</i> Figures are for the New York-Newark-Jersey City, NY-NJ-PA 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.