

Stranded by Transit Cuts: Philadelphia

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 Philadelphia? An analysis using the Center for Neighborhood Technology's AllTransit tool suggests they would be deep and profound..

Hundreds of thousands of Philadelphians like Jackie Williams would be affected. Williams, 67, rides SEPTA every day to get to work, meetings, grocery shopping and to visit friends and relatives. "A cut in service would increase the time I need to get to work by at least 20 minutes," she says. "I moved to Philly because of increased opportunity and extensive public transportation. Having reliable transportation has given me peace of mind and helped me to feel safe as I move around the city."

The Impact on the Philadelphia Region

Public transportation that runs frequently is key to economic mobility. But in the Philadelphia region, large numbers of people and jobs who benefit from access to frequent full-day service today would lose that service. 396,136 people would lose access to frequent full-day transit; businesses would suffer as 141,557 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 20% of the region, but 44% of those who would lose access to frequent full-day service. Non-white and Hispanic residents make up 37% 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. 9,710 commuters who leave home between midnight and 5 am would lose access to service that runs frequently 24-hours-a-day; so would 21,948 commuters who leave work between midnight and 5 am.
- 34,072 households without access to a private vehicle would lose access to frequent transit, imperiling their ability to meet essential needs. Overall, 148,530 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: Philadelphia

	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	396,136	1,419,964	1,023,828	-28%
<i>Black</i>	174,816	647,380	472,564	-27%
<i>Total Black, Hispanic, Asian, Native American, Pacific Islander, other and multiple races</i>	257,229	981,245	724,016	-26%
Households	148,530	537,241	388,711	-28%
<i>With incomes under \$25,000</i>	45,425	189,503	144,078	-24%
<i>Without access to a private vehicle</i>	34,072	178,421	144,349	-19%
Jobs	141,557	650,710	509,153	-22%
	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	9,710	10,999	1,289	-88%
Commuters leaving work between midnight and 5 am	21,948	25,051	3,103	-88%

Notes: Figures are for the Philadelphia-Camden-Wilmington, PA-NJ-DE-MD Metropolitan Statistical Area using Census figures from 2017 and transit service data from 2018.

“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.

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.