

Stranded by Transit Cuts: Seattle

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

Anna Zivarts, 36, lives in South Seattle. She's a low-vision mom, who has never been able to get a driver's license. Like many disabled and transit-dependent people, Anna has always tried to arrange her life to be close to reliable transit – where she lives, where she works, where she takes her kid to preschool or the doctor. Cuts would cause major disruptions. Ultimately, when disabled and transit-dependent people lose the transit they rely on, their worlds shrink as it takes too long or becomes too dangerous to make trips to connect to their communities.

The Impact on the Seattle Region

Public transportation that runs frequently is key to economic mobility. But in the Seattle region, large numbers of people and jobs who benefit from access to frequent full-day service today would lose that service. 349,364 people would lose access to frequent full-day transit; businesses would suffer as 246,440 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 5% of the region, but 7% of those who would lose access to frequent full-day service. Non-white and Hispanic residents make up 35% of the region, but 43% of those who would lose access to frequent full-day service.
- 16,791 households without access to a private vehicle would lose access to frequent transit, imperiling their ability to meet essential needs. Overall, 147,236 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: Seattle

	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	349,364	761,369	412,005	-46%
<i>Black</i>	23,152	56,333	33,181	-41%
<i>Total Black, Hispanic, Asian, Native American, Pacific Islander, other and multiple races</i>	150,296	306,954	156,658	-49%
Households	147,236	342,852	195,616	-43%
<i>With incomes under \$25,000</i>	25,293	60,283	34,990	-42%
<i>Without access to a private vehicle</i>	16,791	58,567	41,776	-29%
Jobs	246,440	673,854	427,414	-37%
<p>Notes: Figures are for the Seattle-Tacoma-Bellevue, WA 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.</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.