



Cut Loose: How Austerity Will Balloon Commute Times, Maroon Riders, and Hit Bus Riders, Black New Yorkers and Healthcare Workers Hardest

October 2020

If federal austerity dictates doomsday transit cuts, millions of transit-dependent New Yorkers will be stranded. Even those who drive will face nightmarish traffic. The city as we know it -- five boroughs spread across three islands and a small piece of the US mainland -- will no longer be recognizable. Instead, our neighborhoods will become hundreds of islands, cut off from one another by long waits, crowding, and delays on the network of subways, buses, commuter trains, and paratransit that has connected us since the 19th century.

The burden of transit cuts will be borne most by those least able to afford them: New Yorkers of color, riders with long commutes, and city bus riders, who average less than \$30,000 in annual income. For example, Black New Yorkers are already 23% more likely to use transit and endure 26% longer commutes than white New Yorkers.¹ Transit cuts will hit Black communities particularly hard, robbing commuters and the family members who depend on them of hours of precious time every week. Moreover, Black New Yorkers are twice as likely as whites to ride the bus, which is slated for increased wait times twice as long as on the subway. Commuters who take two buses each way could spend an extra five hours every week just getting to and from work.

Transit cuts will hit essential workers hardest. New Yorkers who have to show up to work in person already have the longest commutes. Healthcare workers have the longest average commutes in the city, 51.2 minutes each way.² With many healthcare workers commuting to and from neighborhoods far from the subway system, two or more buses are often a fact of life. Two-bus commuters will suffer an additional hour in transit every day.

And that's just the beginning: At the outset, cutting half of all transit service as predicted will not save enough money to balance the Metropolitan Transportation Authority budget. Doomsday cuts will also drive public transit revenues down even further. Less frequent service will drive away ridership and force a new drop in revenue, which will prompt successive waves

¹ <https://nationalequityatlas.org/data-in-action/nyc-transpo-atlas>

² <https://nycfuture.org/research/an-unhealthy-commute>

of cuts and initiate a death spiral in which public transit could grind to a halt. New York would be a shadow of its former vibrant self for decades, if not longer. The abandonment of a trillion dollar public asset at the core of the nation’s economic and cultural capital would be unprecedented. But, as with so much else this year, that does not make it unimaginable.

In May, the House of Representatives voted to send \$3.9 billion in aid to the MTA. In September, the House actually enlarged its transit rescue package from \$15 to \$32 billion, promising to make the MTA whole and protect New York riders through 2021. New York’s own Senator Charles E. Schumer, who serves as the Senate’s Minority Leader, promised to rescue transit in any relief bill that emerges from the U.S. Senate. But Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell has steadfastly refused to let such a bill come to a vote, preferring fiscal austerity in the face of unprecedented suffering. Meanwhile, ambivalence from the Trump administration has dragged out bipartisan negotiations for several months with no resolution in sight.

In August, MTA Chair Pat Foye laid out a doomsday budget proposal that included 40% cuts to New York City Transit service and several thousand frontline transit worker layoffs. He warned that subway riders could wait an extra eight minutes for a train and bus riders an extra 15 minutes. Of course, many New York commutes involve more than one train or bus to reach a destination. Further, round trips will double the length of the additional wait times.

The Riders Alliance estimates what to expect if austerity cuts are forced on New Yorkers:

Transit Round-Trip	Added Wait Time Due to Austerity-Driven Service Cuts (Per Day)	Notes
Single subway commute	+15 minutes	Any train, no transfer
Single bus commute	+30 minutes	Any route, no transfer
<u>West Farms (Bronx) to Washington Heights (Manhattan)</u>	+30 minutes	Bx11 bus
<u>Flushing (Queens) to Financial District (Manhattan)</u>	+30 minutes	#7 to #2/3/4/5 subway
<u>Alphabet City to Midtown (Manhattan)</u>	+45 minutes	M14 bus to #4/5/6 subway
<u>Crown Heights (Brooklyn) to East Harlem (Manhattan)</u>	+45 minutes	#2/3/A/C to #4/5 to #6 subway
<u>Canarsie to Sunset Park</u>	+60 minutes	B6 bus to B11 bus

(<u>Brooklyn</u>)		
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Conclusion

Doomsday MTA cuts will harshly transform the lives of New Yorkers. They will rob hundreds of hours each year from millions of hard-working Americans trying to get to and from their jobs. The White House and Congress must act now to avoid this unprecedented calamity for the nation's largest city.