

City of Richmond



LEVAR M. STONEY
MAYOR

September 21, 2021

Dear Richmond GRTC Board Members:

Thank you for all of your hard work that you do, on behalf of the City of Richmond, for the Greater Richmond Transit Company (GRTC). I appreciate you taking time last week to meet with members of my administration and Richmond City Council leadership to discuss our concerns related to the proposed service cuts to GRTC. As was made clear during that meeting, the city does not agree with moving forward with the service cuts in December, and we respectfully request that you seek an alternative to the service reductions.

For the first time in a long time, we can say that these setbacks are arriving at a time when it's actually politically popular to invest in transit services. It is inexplicable that we have regional and federal dollars coming in and we are proposing cutting 20 percent of GRTC's service.

First, we must say that in the current proposal, equity is unaccounted for in the service cuts and does not show sensitivity toward vulnerable groups. The city would like to see decisions made on how to avoid service cuts that harm lower-income and vulnerable groups who are more than likely essential workers that depend on the system the most.

Second, the Covid-19 pandemic has already jeopardized Richmond's public transit system. After months of decreased service due to coronavirus, further reductions will affect thousands of riders who rely on public transportation in this region. The latest round of proposed cuts would mean more hardship for our riders. The cuts are likely to hit people hardest who are dependent on transit, including people of color and vulnerable populations such as low-income and disabled residents.

While the city understands that GRTC has had to deal with operator and maintenance worker shortages, the decision to cut service seems rushed. We must show our residents that transit is not just another area that affluence will shape their outlook, but rather we have to show them that we understand, that as essential workers we respect the fact that they need adequate transportation to and from work. Are we going to ask our most transit critical customers, to leave home earlier, wait longer, walk farther and return later? Service cuts should not punish those who need public transit the most.

The exact proposed cuts have not been formally shared with the city, but include ending all transit service at 11:00 pm and significant frequency reductions across the system. This administration believes that the recommendations previously submitted by staff should be taken under serious consideration. Please find them below:

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- Partner with Rideshare company (Uber, Lyft, USURV, VITA) to provide micro transit solutions prior to any proposed changes.
- Consider the creation of a community based program that puts 10-15 smaller buses on the street now, with the help of city departments in driver recruitment focused on the communities most affected by the proposed cuts.
- Implement with the Union an emergency retention strategy for existing and new qualified employees of the Company that provides an increase to drivers and mechanics salaries by \$5-\$7 across the board until 2023.
- Enter into an agreement with the City of Richmond Fleet Division to support bus maintenance needs

As the Richmond representatives of the board, I ask that you make the choices that will serve the best interest of riders of transit both now and in the future. We need to ensure that bus service keeps running for Richmond's most vulnerable communities. Furthermore, I formally ask that you all consider alternative solutions to service cuts through our recommendations below:

- Implement staff recommendations above.
- Initiate a process that focuses limited resources on transit- critical riders' usage and ridership patterns.
- Evaluate all GRTC services based on an analysis of those routes serving both high transit critical populations those with high ridership.
- Explain the public process, as to inform the public, with public meetings public hearings and direct outreach to community groups.
- Determine if the proposed service changes are considered a major service change pursuant to the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Title VI C 4702.1B, triggering a Service Equity Analysis.
- Present results of Equity Analysis and Implementation Timeline

Again, thank you all for your willingness to have a conversation about alternatives to service cuts. I look forward to continuing this conversation to best support our community and ensure access to public transit continues for all residents.

Thank you,

Levar M. Stoney
Mayor