

Will the Bus Stop on Adult Education?

by Eric Schaming

I am one of those people who can't afford a car. Primarily I use Pittsburgh's Port Authority buses to go to school, to work, and to buy groceries. For years it has been pretty reliable.

Since 2001, however, service reduction and fare increases have been threatened annually if the Port Authority does not receive state funding. The Port Authority would make flyers asking people to contact their state representatives to persuade them to fund the service so that people like me could get around. The public would respond with rallies and hearings, and eventually there would be a compromise. The routes would either not be cut, or at least not cut as drastically. There would still be a fare hike, but it would be tolerable.

At the start of this year, again, there were more threats of service cuts and fare hikes, the most drastic in the history of the Port Authority. If these cuts were made, a total of three of my neighborhood routes would be cut down to one, which I hardly use due to its infrequent service.

These proposed cuts came at a crucial period in my life. At the start of this year, I joined a program called *Career Gateway* which includes classes designed to help adults find a pathway to higher education. I loved going to these classes. For the first time in a long time, I felt the sense of accomplishment that I didn't feel when I was in High School. The proposed transit cuts meant that soon I would have to worry about how to get to class. The prospect of losing my mode of transportation made me wonder if all the work that I had put into improving my life would be going to waste.

Feeling that I had to do something, I started attending meetings and rallies. We hoped to give our elected officials, and people who don't use mass transit, an idea of how important it is to prevent these cuts from happening. The rallies were



attended by all kinds of people ranging from students, to professionals, to the disabled, and the elderly, which I hoped would break the stereotype that only certain people ride the bus. We even lined up to visit our county executive's office to personally give him petitions signed by a total of 40,000 people who relied on transit. Our activism gave me a sense of hope that maybe we were finally being heard.

After many rallies and meetings, there has been some progress. The Port Authority decided to only cut service by 15% starting in June, saving some routes, yet still eliminating others. However, if there is no dedicated state funding by September, the original proposed plan to cut service will go through. If statements by the president of Port Authority are true, there seems to be no hope that the state will provide the necessary funds.

So, here I am, with my future hanging over a cliff of uncertainty. I don't know how a state that promises to help people who are willing to help themselves would let this happen. One would think that if problems occurred repeatedly with an important public service, there would be an investigation as to how things had gotten so bad. If our elected officials are really looking after us, you'd think they would understand that not everyone is privileged to own a car, and that Mass Transit is more than just a convenient way of getting from one place to another; it is also a vital service to help people improve their lives. I feel frustrated and angry that for all the work that I've done to improve myself, my future hinges on the availability of a simple bus ride, and our plea for decent public transportation may have fallen on deaf, ignorant ears.

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