

# STEERING AWAY FROM THE CLIFF: How a Transit Doomsday Scenario Will Harm Californians and the Climate

A bus stop is a gateway to freedom—an access point to the grocery store, doctor’s office, library, or school. Without dependable bus service, riders will be forced to find another way to get around.

Bay Area transit ridership remains low as COVID federal relief funds dwindle. The Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) projects a \$2.5 billion shortfall for Bay Area operators by 2028. BART, Muni, and Golden Gate Transit are hit first and worst, reaching fiscal cliffs starting in early 2025. Without an infusion of cash, service cuts will leave Bay Area riders stranded—and be disastrous for our climate and equity goals.

TransForm analyzed the forecasted ridership drop, and just how many people might turn to cars for travel. **It’s clear: failure to save public transit would be a disastrous decision, burdening those who depend on transit and worsening the climate crisis.**

Transit service cuts put low-income riders at risk of falling further into poverty. Of all transit-dependent rides, 80% are taken by passengers who earn \$75,000 or less. For these folks, car ownership can force trade-offs among auto costs, food, and rent.



BAY AREA RESIDENTS  
 WILL TAKE

**735M**

**FEWER TRANSIT RIDES**

## HALTING A RIDERSHIP DROP

In 2022, MTC asked transit agencies to create short-range transit plans (S RTPs). Agencies were asked how a lack of adequate funding would affect their service and ridership over five years. Here’s what TransForm found in analyzing those S RTPs: **If nothing changes, Bay Area residents will take at least 735 million fewer transit rides over the next five years.**

Who would pay if transit services were cut? If the state doesn’t step up to fund operations, the cost will be transferred onto the shoulders of everyday transit riders, particularly riders who can least afford it.

“I wouldn’t be able to get my shopping necessities.”

“Seeing a doctor would be difficult.”

“I don’t know...it’s necessary for survival.”

## WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF YOUR BUS LINE WERE CUT?

RESPONSES BY LOW-INCOME SENIORS IN EAST OAKLAND



**TRANSIT-DEPENDENT RIDERS ARE ESPECIALLY VULNERABLE.**

OF ALL RIDES TAKEN BY PEOPLE WHO DON'T OWN CARS, **80%** ARE BY PEOPLE WHO EARN **\$75,000** OR LESS.

**LOW-INCOME CALIFORNIANS WOULD PAY THE PRICE**

If service cuts happen, **at least 104,000 people are likely to have to buy cars to get around.**

Cars are not cheap: The average used car costs [\\$26,510](#). This means that Bay Area transit riders will pay almost \$2.8 billion in *upfront* costs, just to purchase a vehicle.

Low-income people will be the most impacted by high travel costs. Purchasing a car may be downright impossible. **For the many transit-dependent riders in the Bay Area who earn less than \$75,000, even a used car could cost 30% of their annual income.**

If they buy cheaper cars, gas and repair prices will be higher down the line. And once they've made that investment, they are less likely to return to transit.

The financial hit will continue, year after year. With the annual cost of owning a car over [\\$10,000](#), former transit riders will spend nearly \$1 billion annually on a mode of transportation *that should be on its way out*. This is pushing the Bay Area in the wrong direction: **Instead of forcing residents to spend an additional \$5 billion on transportation that will pollute our atmosphere and jam highways over the next five years, let's make the right investment of \$2.5 billion to save public transit.**

**THE CLIMATE BENEFITS OF SAVING THE BUS**

With buses and trains gone or too infrequent to rely on, it's alarming to see the rise in carbon emissions when people shift to gas-powered cars. If we don't invest in transit, one-third of lost transit miles will shift to car trips—at least 35 million new trips over five years—creating alarming climate impacts. The cars won't just clog our streets: they will release over 56,500 metric tons of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, or the equivalent of [63 million](#) pounds of coal burned.

When people can rely on transit, connections are made and opportunities open. These three findings—735 million fewer transit rides, a \$5 billion dollar hit on those who can least afford it, and 56,500 tons of CO<sub>2</sub>—point a clear way forward. **If California is to remain a climate leader, we must save transit. The state should step in and support public transit with the funds it needs to survive and thrive.**

