

Broken Promises:

DDOT Still Failing to Provide Adequate Bus Service

TRU's Report Card and Recommendations on DDOT Bus On-Time Performance and Service

By Transportation Riders United (TRU)

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The Detroit Department of Transportation (DDOT) and the Bing Administration have broken their promises to DDOT riders and the entire community. They have failed to provide adequate bus service – in terms of reliability and the amount of service. Their broken promises hurt not only the Detroiters who use public transit but also hurt the City of Detroit as it struggles to regain its financial stability.

This report details the magnitude and impact of the problems and offers concrete solutions that Mayor Bing and the DDOT management must implement to substantially improve on-time performance and service. This is the second of biannual report cards produced by Transportation Riders United, Detroit's transit advocate.

Transportation Riders United (TRU) is Detroit's transit advocate. A Detroit-based nonprofit organization founded in 1999, TRU is dedicated to improving transit throughout greater Detroit in order to restore urban vitality, ensure transportation equity and improve quality of life. TRU believes the Detroit region needs a balanced transportation network because transportation investments shape our future.

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Transportation Riders United (TRU) has graded the on-time performance of DDOT buses. DDOT has earned a **D-. Detroiters still cannot depend on DDOT to get them where they need to go.**

DDOT bus on-time performance is still unreliable and the amount of service DDOT provides is insufficient to meet riders' needs. These are significant problems not only for the riders who depend on buses to get them to the work, school, health care and other necessary daily activities. In addition, poor bus service is a problem for the entire City of Detroit and region. Without timely and reasonable transit access to educational and employment opportunities, Detroiters and our community will have difficulty regaining their financial stability. DDOT and Mayor Bing must provide good bus service no matter what.

The City has repeatedly promised to improve bus service including a promise in October 2011 to “significantly” improve timeliness. The City has broken these promises time and time again. **DDOT's grade for bus timeliness has gone from an F to a D-. In other words, just 63% of observed buses departed within 0-5 minutes of the published times as opposed to 50% when TRU graded DDOT last Fall.** We used a standard grading scale of A = 90-100%, B = 80-89%, C = 70-79%, D = 60-69% and F = below 60%.

Although DDOT and the Bing Administration have slightly improved timeliness, a D- grade or 63% is still a breach of the City's contract with the community to provide an essential city service. **Sixty-three percent means that for people waiting at a bus stop more than 1/3 of the buses are too early, late or just**

never arrive. This is unacceptable for an essential city service. Riders simply cannot depend on the published times for buses to take them where they need to go - work, school, doctor's appointments, shopping and other vital daily activities.

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The Bing Administration has broken its many promises to improve performance despite significantly cutting service -- increasing wait times to 30, 45 and 60 minutes during certain time periods and eliminating overnight service. At the same time, the Administration has contracted with expensive management consultants who have, in turn, made even more promises and have made inaccurate and unsupported claims about "improved quality." Moreover, the City has not followed its own Service Standards and federal requirements for performance, vehicle passenger loads, public hearing requirements, and minimizing the negative impacts on low-income and minority population.

TRU's Research

Like last Fall when TRU issued its first DDOT Report Card, we looked at several sources of information and data to grade DDOT's bus service. This Spring, we used observational data, media reports, the personal experience of TRU members, interviews of bus riders, DDOT Service Standards, federal guidelines and requirements, National Transit Database statistics, and a report published by the Brookings Metropolitan Policy Program, *Missed Opportunity: Transit Jobs in Metropolitan America. (May 2011)*.

In order to obtain timeliness data, TRU volunteers observed DDOT buses during the week of March 19-23, 2012. These volunteers watched eight DDOT bus routes with high ridership – Woodward, Gratiot, Grand River, Dexter, Michigan, Southfield, Greenfield and Eight Mile. At five observation locations, volunteers recorded when buses actually departed during peaks times – Monday- Friday 7:00-9:00 am and 4:00-6:00. TRU compared the observed departure times to DDOT bus schedules using the following:

- Early:* Departed before the scheduled time
- On-Time:* Departed within 0-5 minutes of the scheduled time
- Late:* Departed 6-10 minutes after the scheduled time
- Very Late:* Departed more than 10 minutes after the scheduled time
- Didn't Arrive:* No bus showed up before the next scheduled time

The likelihood of a DDOT rider experiencing an on-time bus was just 63% overall during the observation week. On-time performance ranged from a high of 80% for the Michigan bus to a low of 42% for the Eight Mile bus. The Greenfield bus had the highest number of Early buses and No-Show buses whereas the Grand River bus had the highest number of Late and Very Late buses.

TRU's timeliness analysis reflects that riders simply cannot depend on DDOT buses despite the City's promises. From a statistical perspective, if you are an employer or a school teacher, one -third of the time your transit-dependent employees or students will be late.

No wonder job candidates have been rejected, because they depend on DDOT buses.

Riders cannot reliably get to work or school on broken buses, broken management practices or broken promises.



After years of requesting DDOT to provide the community with accurate and up-to-date data to evaluate bus service, TRU is pleased that DDOT is posting its daily “pull-out rates” on its website. Pull-out rates are the percentage of buses that leave the DDOT terminals compared to the actual number that DDOT needs to provide scheduled bus service. In every other metropolitan area, pull-outs less than 99 or 100% is unthinking and unacceptable. Again, DDOT’s bus performance is erratic and unpredictable. Like DDOT’s on-time performance, the morning and afternoon pull-outs reflected a considerable range from 67-100% during March and April 2012. While we applaud DDOT for when it achieved 95% pull-outs or better – 34 out of 100 mornings and afternoons, **riders cannot depend on DDOT for on-time service when only one-third of buses leave the terminals on time.**

In March, DDOT managed acceptable pull-outs rates 12 out of 60 times and these instances were Saturdays and Sundays when the number of buses needed is half of a weekday. Through April 20, pull-outs improved to 22 out of 40 times.

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The City posted on its website “on-time bus performance” as part of its Performance Dashboard. The City completely missed its target of 85% on-time by reporting 60% and 65% for the “Prior” (September 2010) and “Current” (September 2011) periods. TRU’s observation of 63% on-time for a the recent period of March 2012 is similar to what the City reported for over a year ago. Unfortunately, the City does not provide the public with up-to-date or accurate on-time performance data and what it reported demonstrates poor bus service, even using a low target and possibly inaccurate data.

The Impact

What is the impact of the City's broken promises?

- Riders leaving their homes at 4:00 or 5:00 in the morning hoping to get to work or school on time.
- Riders waiting at bus stops for hours for late or missed business.
- Riders are experiencing longer commutes to work and school.

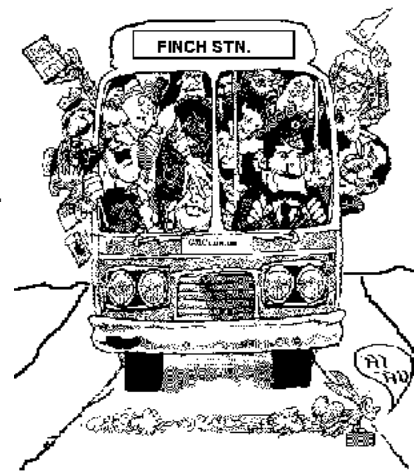
**Oftentimes,
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While they are waiting 1-2 hours in poorly lit area surrounded by dangerous abandoned building, riders risk their safety and well-being. When a bus arrives, often several buses are bunched together or the bus is overcrowded.

TRU volunteers interviewed DDOT bus riders over the past two months to better understand the impact of poor bus service. Like many Detroiters, LaSasha uses DDOT buses to get to work and school. With the March 3 service cuts, LaSasha has had difficulty getting to work on time. Another bus rider has the related problem.

Due to the elimination of overnight service, he cannot take the bus home from his security job at a downtown Detroit bar. Yet another bus rider cannot get a job in the suburbs, because he cannot rely on DDOT buses to get him home at 2:00 or 3:00 am.

Overcrowded buses are a special problem for our seniors, people with disabilities and bicyclists. Oftentimes, due to overcrowding there aren't available seats or wheelchair tie downs or space on the bike rack. Riders are left waiting at the edge of the road even longer.



Riders who are late to work risk being fired. Riders who are late to school risk being sent to detention. Riders who are late for doctor's appointments risk their health. Taking DDOT

buses shouldn't be a risky business. Instead DDOT should be a well-operated city service that people can depend upon and which can be part of the City's revitalization.

What is particularly infuriating is there is no rhyme or reason to when a bus may be early, late or not arrive. Based upon the observational data and rider interviews, we are unable to discern any patterns as to which route, which day or which times are more or less reliable. Moreover, volunteers observed and riders experience "bus bunching" where 2 or more buses travel back to back, which leaves even longer waits before the next bus arrives. This is more evidence of poor management and poor bus service.

What is also exasperating is there is no communication from DDOT with riders or between DDOT bus employees regarding timeliness.

When waiting at a stop, riders have no way of knowing whether their bus is just running a few minutes behind or not running at all that day. Passengers are unable to make decisions to seek alternative transportation (assuming an alternative is available to them at all).

Riders are left waiting at the edge of the road even longer.

While bus riders are waiting for buses that may or may not arrive on time and without communication from DDOT, they sometimes wait at unlit bus stops surrounded by vacant, dilapidated buildings without a bus shelter or even a bench. They risk their safety and well-being. An article in the April 15 *Detroit Free Press* highlighted the dangerous journeys to school Denby and Osborn High School students make. The article describes students being attacked while waiting at bus stops and unlit stops a few feet from a dozen vacant houses. Teachers and principals try to accommodate their bus riding students. They allow students to leave an hour early to avoid long, late-night waits at bus stops. Taking a DDOT bus should not be a risky business for people trying to get to work or school.

The impact of this unreliable and insufficient bus service is that **Detroiters are left stranded and missing opportunities to get ahead and to contribute to the City's economic recovery. Without reliable transit access to education and employment opportunities, Detroit will continue to lag behind other metropolitan regions for**

years to come. The Brookings Metropolitan Policy Program studied how effectively transit connects people and jobs within and across the 100 largest metro areas. In its report, *Missed Opportunity: Transit and Jobs in Metropolitan America*, the researchers found that morning rush hour service occurs every 10 minutes on average. The researchers also found that the typical metropolitan resident could reach 30% of jobs in their area via transit in 90 minutes.¹ In actuality, Detroiters face longer waits and longer commutes. DDOT's new 415 Plan schedules 15-minute headways on 4 routes from 6 am – 6 pm for 34% of DDOT customers. This means that for two-thirds of DDOT riders and those whose jobs or schools require travel before 6 am or after 6 pm, they have longer waits and longer commute times. This of course assumes that the buses will be on time.

It means that **people cannot get to the places they need to go – work, job training, school, doctor's appointments or shopping – activities which contribute to Detroit's economic revitalization.** Employees are late for work. Detroit residents lose out on job opportunities, because they are fired or employers will not hire them because they rely upon DDOT buses. Several DDOT bus riders spoke about the challenges they face getting to work, getting home from work or not being able to accept jobs located in the suburbs. **People cannot get ahead if they cannot get around.**

Too many problems taking DDOT buses means that people who do have alternatives will drive, even if they cannot afford insurance or have lost their driver's license. They'll spend money on gas, parking, car repairs, insurance, and other car expenses – thousands of dollars that could have been better spent on rent, food, job training, or other things that better benefit the local economy. These additional drivers will add more traffic to the roads and more pollution to our air.

¹ www.brookings.edu/reports/2011/0512_jobs_and_transit.aspx

Recommendations

While we recognize that the City is facing major financial problems and is taking unprecedented steps to regain its financial stability, **Mayor Bing and DDOT management must do all they can to maintain good bus service no matter what. Riders and our community cannot afford for DDOT to provide unreliable and insufficient bus service.** TRU demands that the City keep its promises.

Broken Promises: Bus Timeliness

Poor bus service has been an ongoing yet neglected problem for years. Despite promises by Mayor Bing to improve service, timeliness remains totally unacceptable. The City has made and broken many promises. They promised to work with the unions, fix the buses, collect more farebox revenue, reduce maintenance costs, enhance bus operator attendance, hire experienced leadership and improve management practices. These promises match many of the recommendations that TRU made in its November 2011 DDOT Report Card.

In November 2011, Chief Operating Officer Chris Brown promised City Council and Detroiters that we would see “substantial” improvement in bus service in 90 days. Three months later, City Council and TRU demanded that the Bing Administration explain what it has done and to demonstrate any improvements. In a memorandum to City Council dated February 24, 2012, Mr. Brown demonstrated that the City broke its promises. Other than a “moderate improvement” in the pull-out rate for one of the three DDOT terminals, there have been nearly no improvements. Instead the City offered excuses, explanations and more empty promises. Even with the moderate improvement in pull-outs for the last two months, DDOT management has failed to translate this into substantially better on-time performance. Going from 50% to 63% and from an F to a D- is unacceptable.

Recommendations to Improve Timeliness

DDOT and the Bing Administration must honor the contract with the community - insure that 95% of buses depart on-time. The Bing Administration contracted with Parsons Brinkerhoff and Envisurage LLC to among other things improve “fleet reliability, peak pullout compliance, customer satisfaction and operating efficiency of system” according to the December 28, 2011 DDOT Work Order. Mark Aesch of Envisurage LLC stated that he viewed providing on-time performance as a “contract with community.” We agree.

Although there are numerous things that the Administration and DDOT management must do to improve timeliness, we make these two timeliness recommendations, because they have the greatest likelihood to have a positive impact over the short-term and are do-able within the existing budgetary environment.

1. Achieve 95% on-time performance consistently and 100% pull out rates on a consistent basis every morning and afternoon and from every terminal. Every DDOT employee and vendor must be held accountable to provide buses and equipment in good working condition; provide properly trained and managed mechanics and drivers when they are needed; and accurately track on-time performance. We must hold top management, dispatch and road supervisors accountable for late and missed buses and bus bunching
2. Communicate with the public: DDOT must publish accurate on-time data, print and distribute up-to-date route schedules and system maps, and provide riders with real-time bus information

Broken Promises: Bus Service

DDOT has made repeated cuts in bus service despite public officials and the public stating that such cuts would adversely affect riders and our City. Last year, the Bing Administration stood firm and fought for adequate DDOT funding as City Council sought a sizeable reduction. In a letter dated June 7, 2011, Lovett Williams, then the DDOT Director, correctly stated that deep cuts to bus service due to budget cuts would threaten “current and future transit services, so vital to our quality of life.”

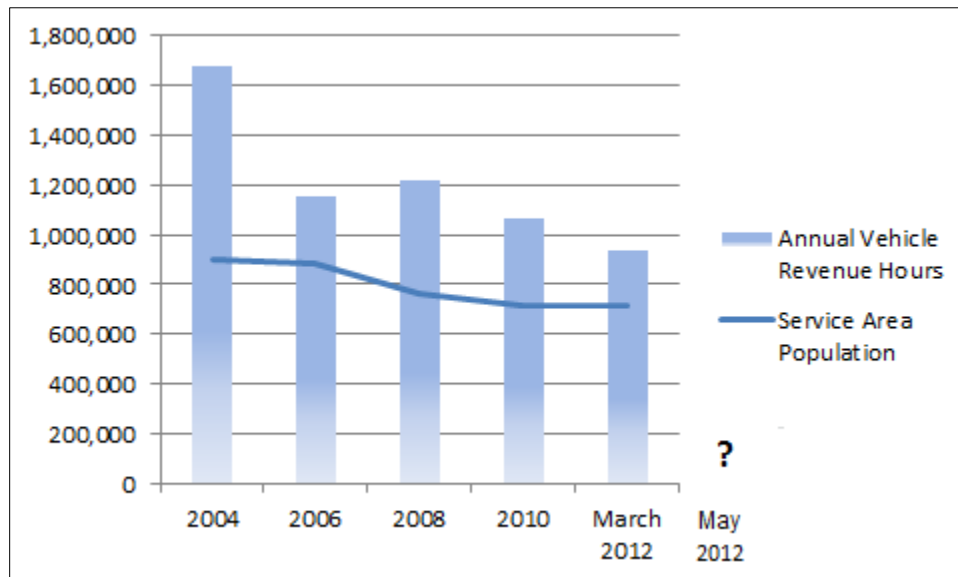
Ms. Williams further stated that additional budget cuts to public transportation “will have a devastating impact on DDOT’s employees and customers, as well as, cause a reduction in state revenues.”

Likewise, in a letter to City Council dated June 24, 2011 Floyd Stanley, the Deputy Budget Director, stated that the proposed \$7.4 million reduction to DDOT would “force the elimination of Sunday and Holiday bus service. Residents, particularly our seniors and youth would be adversely affected by this reduction.” Less than a year later, the Administration is seeking a \$10 million reduction to DDOT. They ignored their promise to address the structural issues and not to reduce services as the first and most immediate priority in the words of Mr. Stanley.

Since January 2012, DDOT has substantially cut bus service and these cuts have been very painful. Effective March 3, DDOT increased wait times and eliminated overnight service. Less than a month later, DDOT announced additional cuts that will go into effect on April 28. The contractual management team announced the 415 Plan at the April 5, 2012 public hearings on 4 routes from 6:00 am to 6:00 pm. The Envisurage contractors tried to convince bus riders that the 415 Plan was a service improvement. Nothing can be further from the truth – for most riders most of the time will experience longer waits and longer commutes.

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Looking at DDOT service cuts over the last eight years the impact is even more painful. DDOT has cut service by nearly 50% and cannot justify these cuts on population changes or reduced rider demand.



Source: National Transit Database, <http://www.ntdprogram.gov/>

The chart demonstrates the level of DDOT bus service cuts compared to the population of the City of Detroit. Bus service is reported as Annual Vehicle Revenue Hours, the total amount of time in hours for the reporting period that all vehicles travel from the time they pull out to go into revenue service to the time they pull in from revenue service. Annual Vehicle Revenue Hours from 2000 to 2010 were reported by DDOT to the National Transit Database. The 2012 level was estimated by using March 2012 annual vehicle revenue hours reported by DDOT.

As shown in the chart, bus service has dramatically decreased from 2004 levels to 2012 levels compared to the loss of population in the City. Detroit has lost roughly 20 percent of its population in the last 8 years but experienced a 44 percent decrease in Annual Vehicle Revenue Hours.

Recommendations to Improve Bus Service

Bus service is an essential, core city service that benefits all Detroiters and contributes to the City's economic revitalization. Make sure DDOT is funded at a level adequate to provide good bus service and spend all available funds wisely. TRU demands that the Bing Administration and DDOT management develop and implement, in conjunction with relevant stakeholders and decision-makers, an action plan to provide good bus service no matter what.

No action plan is clearly in place and no specific approaches have been made public. The only actions the City has taken has been to reduce service and hire expensive management consultants, however, neither of these actions have improved service or reduced costs . Not only has the City of Detroit failed to resolve the current crisis stemming from a lack of available buses in good working condition, it has been unable or unwilling to resolve the many long-standing management problems.

Reduce unnecessary overtime and excessive maintenance costs. As TRU recommended last Fall, the City must make sure clear set of repair standards are in place, based on national best practices, regarding how long any mechanical or other repair work should take and how long the repair should last once made. This will provide mechanics (employees and vendors) clear expectations and will help management hold them accountable including removing employees who cannot or will not met these expectations. On the flip side, mechanics must have the parts they need to fix the buses as well. DDOT management and City purchasing must ensure necessary equipment and supplies are available when they are needed. Union work rules should be adjusted to schedule employees to work when the buses need to be repaired, not just when it is most convenient for employees.

Collect all fares and other sources of revenue Former Chief Financial Officer Norman White submitted a Deficit Elimination Plan to the state last year. It contained a promise to reduce \$9 million in lost farebox revenue – uncollected fares and “leakage.” Despite Chris Brown’s memo to City Council that fare boxes are working, his own words belie his statement. He

blamed humidity, wet weather, damp dollar bills and counterfeit cash or coins for inoperative fare boxes. DDOT uses the same fare boxes as SMART which does not experience these problems. TRU supporters and other DDOT riders have frequently observed bus drivers placing signs, coats and bags over fare boxes or signaling riders just to sit down without paying. Regardless of whether the problem stems for inoperative equipment, driver issues or “leakage” this represent a \$9 million management problem. That issue must be addressed before service is cut.

The City has utterly failed to develop a plan to identify and collect other sources of revenue. When DDOT institutes service cuts and does not provide scheduled service, the City loses state revenue. More importantly, The City has not developed a plan to fund bus service beyond the General Fund. Other metropolitan areas use a variety of local transit funding options including vehicle registration fees, local sales and use taxes and property millages.

Stop paying expensive consultants fees and bonuses The Bing Administration has contracted with Parsons Brinkerhoff, Envisage LLC and other consultants instead of hiring permanent, experienced transit professionals. Our review of the Work Order dated December 26, 2011 shows that the cash-strapped City will pay the management team \$100,000 in base compensation; \$30,000 for staff augmentation services; and \$23,000 for direct expenses. The City will take nearly \$150,000 a month or \$1.8 million a year from its coffers. On top of the monthly compensation, the City will also pay “incentive payments” if the consultant meet “Financial Objectives.” For each 10% decrease in the DDOT subsidy, the City will pay \$15,000-30,000 bonuses. If the consultants reduce DDOT’s subsidy below \$4.6 million a month or \$55 million annually, our struggling City will pay an astounding \$100,000-150,000 bonuses. Our reading of the Work Order is that large bonus will be paid even if the “Operational Objectives” are not met.

Every public transit system in the country has funding limitations, labor struggles, and difficult conditions. Yet few systems have as bad bus service and as massive, ongoing problems as Detroit. It is past time for Detroit to learn from other cities and take clear

concrete steps to not only alleviate the immediate crisis, but to also put DDOT on the path towards consistently reliable bus service.

Although TRU is pleased with the attention the City Council, the media and even Governor Snyder and the Legislature have placed on the local and regional transit issues, the responsibility and authority to operate DDOT buses remains primarily an executive branch function even under the Financial Stability Agreement. **For this reason, Mayor Bing must take strong and immediate action to substantially improve bus service.**

As Detroit's transit advocate, Transportation Riders United offers these recommendations as sensible solutions (some of which are revenue- neutral or which would save money) to the twin problems of unreliable buses and insufficient amount of service to meet riders' needs. These recommendations are based on in-depth research and analysis, examination of DDOT Service Standards as well as federal guidelines and requirement, and some old-fashioned common sense. Some can be implemented by DDOT management, many others by Mayor Bing and others within his administration, and a few may require outside help.

TRU recommends that the City immediately implement these recommendations to substantially improve bus timeliness and to insure that Detroiters can get to work, school and the others places they need to go. Good bus service is vital to riders and to the entire City of Detroit.