

# RTD's latest plan would restore some bus lines slated for elimination

In an amended service cut plan, RTD no longer plans to eliminate the 16L, 99L, 157 or the 2020 RunRide

In December, agency staff [handed RTD's elected leaders a list of recommended service cuts](#). They included the elimination of six bus lines, shortening 19 other bus lines and service reductions in the R-Line, D-Line and H-Line light-rail corridors.

The suggested cuts, RTD said, were based on low ridership or targeted corridors where there is duplicative service.

The service adjustments also called for halving the frequency of the popular 16th Street Mall shuttle from every 90 seconds to every 3 minutes. That reduction remains under the new proposal, as does the elimination of the BroncosRide bus service, Colorado Rockies bus service and BuffRide service to University of Colorado games.

While the RunRide will be retained this year, it is suggested to be done away with starting in 2021.

RTD has said that even with the reductions in service, its worker shortage challenge — whereby many drivers are working six days a week as part of “mandated” overtime — [won't be fully addressed](#).

For the past two weeks, RTD officials have been holding public meetings throughout the metro area — from Englewood to Denver to Commerce City to Golden — to explain the labor shortage and the resulting impacts to rail and bus schedules.

The agency has gotten an earful from passengers in return — as well as a rebuke from Aurora Mayor Mike Coffman, who in [a Denver Post editorial accused RTD](#) of unfairly targeting the city with cuts to R-Line train service and two bus lines. Nearly 260 people have attended the 17 meetings held so far and RTD has received more than 2,000 emails from riders. The final meeting was Thursday in Parker.

Dean Simpson, who commutes to his job at a downtown Denver law firm via the 99L bus, told RTD officials at a late February meeting that he and his wife chose to live where they do in Lakewood because of how close the Federal Center stop is to their house.

“Without that, I’m questioning why I’m living here,” he said. “It’s all about quality of life and you’re stripping that from us.”

Elimination of the 99L had generated perhaps the biggest pushback from riders in the district. A [change.org petition to save the bus line](#) has collected more than 850 signatures.

Simpson has been a 99L user for more than a decade and says he’s “proud to be a bus rider and keep my car off of the road, not adding to the day-to-day pollution that a car contributes.” He said the alternatives RTD has suggested to supplant the 99L, including W-Line light-rail, are either too time-consuming or too inconvenient.

“In the end, RTD talked about resuming the line once the driver shortage is fixed,” he said. “By then, after 13 years of faithful patronage, where I’ve been literally driven away from using mass transit, there’s a chance I won’t be back.”

Andrea Alma said she and her husband “designed our lives around the (Federal Center) transit stop.” They take the 99L together from Lakewood into downtown Denver — 30 minutes or so and they’re at their desks.

“We want to stay off the road as much as possible,” said Alma, who shares one car with her husband. “We don’t want to be adding to traffic.”

But the W-Line would add 30 to 45 minutes to their commuting time one way — largely because the train is slowed by numerous stops through Lakewood and ends its run at Union Station rather than Civic Center Station, she said.

“If they are trying to make prudent cuts, this one doesn’t make sense to me,” Alma said.

Amanda Horvath is a “reverse commuter” riding the 99L from downtown Denver to the Federal Center, where she works as a scientist for a federal agency. She chose to live in the city so that she didn’t have to buy a car.

But that makes any RTD service adjustments monumental for her.

“I rely 100% on RTD or ride-sharing services — the 99L is an absolute lifeline to get to and from work every day,” Horvath said. “I chose to live where I live because I knew the bus was available.”

RTD Director Natalie Menten, who led the public meeting in Lakewood on Feb. 24, acknowledged that “nobody is happy at where we’re at right now.” But she said nobody wants to lose their bus or train and that makes it even harder for RTD to make the adjustments necessary to deal with the worker shortfall.

“Every director comes back and says, ‘You gotta save mine, you gotta save mine,’” Menten said. “I’m trying to grasp at whatever I can.”

An RTD spokeswoman on Thursday said suggested changes to bus routes 16L, 32, 99L, 153, 157, 483, RunRide and the H-Line have garnered “considerable attention” over the last two weeks.

RTD projects an annual savings of \$8.2 million from the remaining cuts as opposed to the \$12.4 million that was projected under the original service changes. The amended service cuts will reduce operator shifts by 43 a day, as opposed to the 57 shifts that would have been eliminated under the more rigorous curtailments.

At another RTD meeting last week in Arvada, 63-year-old Irene Rael said she may be forced to buy a car if the transit agency truncates the 125 bus line between Lakewood and Arvada. Rael, who lives north of 64th Avenue in Arvada, said the bus is her connection to the G-Line station in Wheat Ridge, where she takes the train to downtown Denver for her job.

“If they stop the 125 at Ward Station, there’s not another bus in the area that will take me home,” said Rael, who walks 20 minutes the bus stop to home. “I’m not looking forward to making a new car payment.”