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# Montgomery council approves keeping bus routes

By: [Cathy Gainor](#)

Examiner Staff Writer

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The Montgomery County Council rejected increased parking fees and large bus service reductions Tuesday in favor of raising parking fines and ending bus discounts for youth and senior riders.

**Other transportation-related cuts: »**  
**\$160,000 to replace faulty "loop detectors," which help make traffic flow at intersections more efficient.**  
**» \$483,000 in pedestrian safety programs, including \$150,000 for contractual crosswalk marking. »**  
**\$1.2 million for tree planting and stump removal.**

The plan, preliminarily approved by the County Council, would restore much of the county Ride-On bus service slated for elimination by County Executive Ike Leggett. The County Council also rejected Leggett's proposal to raise long-term and car-pool parking fees in Bethesda and Silver Spring, which upset those areas' business communities.

To offset the moves, the County Council approved a \$5 increase in parking fines, which would be added on top of the \$5 increase that went into effect on April 1. The council also approved restricting the hours when seniors can use the bus service for free from 9:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. on weekdays, and suspending a free-ride program for youths on weekday afternoons. Ride-On fares are also set to mimic approved Metrobus rate increases, which could raise the normal fare to \$1.50 using a SmarTrip card.

Ben Ross, a longtime transit advocate, said the senior and service cuts were painful, but said he was pleased with the council's restoration of bus service.

"Given the overall state of the county budget I think they've done awfully well," Ross said.

The county is facing nearly a \$1 billion budget gap and is considering significant cuts to county services and raising taxes substantially. The County Council has placed a premium on bus service and has twice

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This time, council members approved what they called "surgical" reductions to bus routes, which will go into effect in September, that will reduce the frequency of many bus routes instead of eliminating entire routes or weekend service.

The County Council also approved deferring a \$1.7 million debt payment on a garage and \$1.4 million for various studies to restore bus service. Council members acknowledged that those are one-time savings that don't address structure deficiencies in the county's transit system.

"We fully understand this just gets us to next year," Council President Nancy Floreen said.

The County Council also approved restoring money for a program that gives free taxi rides to low-income seniors and disabled residents. Advocates for those groups protested the cuts, as did the taxi industry, which said drivers depend on the program for 12 percent of their income.

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