

**Public Hearing for Prolonging Service Reductions
Suspension of Route 14S (West Hill Shopper) and 83 (Campus)
April 17, 2024 4:30pm-6pm**

Board members present – Deborah Dawson (Chair), Laura Lewis, Kelley Cooper, Denise Thompson, Shawna Black, and Susan Currie (Zoom)

TCAT Staff – General Manager Matthew Rosenbloom-Jones, Patty Poist, Taylor Hessler

Public – Pat Frazier, Veet Deha, Margaret McCaslin, Chris Skawski, RJ Isley, Dalton Mullins (The Cornell Sun)

D. Dawson – I would like to call today’s public hearing to order. This is a public hearing to entertain public comments about what we hope will be only a temporary suspension of the route 14S and the route 83, which we’ve had to suspend simply because we don’t seem to have enough buses or operators to maintain that service. The way this works is we’re here to listen. We have several members of the Board here and Patty Poist and Matthew Rosenbloom-Jones, who are members of our administrative staff and management here at TCAT; so the Hearing is open. I have one person online with Zoom, but in deference to the people who made an effort to actually show up in person, let’s start with those people. So, who would like to start? Please introduce yourself and make your comments.

Pat Frazier – My name is Pat Frazier and I live at Cayuga Meadows. It is difficult to go shopping when you live in Cayuga Meadows. You have to transfer from Green Street to Seneca Street to connect with bus number 15. If the bus is late getting to Green Street, you might miss the connecting bus as it takes about 10 minutes to get to Seneca Street. If it rains or snows, it’s a hazard to walk as the residents of Cayuga Meadows are 55 years old. It’s much easier to do some travelling with the 14S than with the regular routes. Chair Dawson asks, “and that’s because there’s no connections?” and Pat says, yes, the 14S is very convenient.

Veet Deha – My name is Veet Deha. First of all, I’d like to say that I’m a big fan of TCAT. I think the people, especially the drivers, because I encounter them more than I do the Board or anyone else there for the most part, are wonderful people. And for the most part, they enjoy their job and I’ve noticed lately, a lot of them look tired. And it’s understandable, and one in particular said that he got home at 5am. And I understand that it has been when someone gets sick or there’s a shortage of drivers. I understand that it’s just a kudo. And I usually think especially with longtime drivers, some of whom I know by name, like Nichole and Wendell, I thank them for continuing to stay in spite of, as they put it, not having a life which seems like that’s why new hires seem to not, often, not stay long. So, it’s a quandary. I understand, I recognize it’s a difficult position. But still, I find route 13 and 17 very problematic. I got a lesson just now from Rachel and I’m very happy to see this. The New Schedule, and it’s cleaned up. This counterclockwise thing didn’t work for me. I know what it means. But I couldn’t figure it out. So, it’s a lot easier. And I hope to be able to go home tonight using the 13 and the 14. I live near West Village. And so, the 14 is my home route. And my other main route is 30 which is really dependable. So, for the most part, and I think that the stops are in good places. There’s often a litter problem. I don’t know if, this is not a suggestion, but it seems like nationally, there must be a way to pick up [cigarette] butts. I do pick up litter, but I don’t

pick up butts, But No butts is my motto. Because there's just no way and I don't want my hands smelling bad and I don't want to have to wear special gloves. But there must be a way to pick up butts. Some kind of I don't know pressure thing sucking them in or you can't do it with a poker. I've tried that. So those are my main I guess beefs, which this is now I hope solved. I'm going to try tonight, to do the connection of 13 to 14. I wish there was a way to go from the 13 over to like inlet Island or some way to intercept without having to go all the way back and the 14 runs on the hour. So you have to time it just right. And also the last bus thing. It's been difficult. I'm getting used to not going to any movie that that especially Cinemapolis, because the station is right there. I've missed some really good movies because I either had to leave, you know to get the last bus which is eight o'clock. And I know it has to do so I sympathize. And if there's anything that I can do, or we can do as regular riders, I wish you'd let us know. But thank you for all you do. Appreciate it.

Margaret McCaslin via Zoom - I agree with what my fellow bus 14 and 14 s riders have said, but I want to backtrack a little and go to the big picture. I have lived in Tompkins County since 1964 when I came here as a Cornell student. I bought my first house in the city of Ithaca in 1978. And I was part of the quasi-gentrification of downtown Ithaca, and I now live where the gentrified people were moved to, West Hill has an in ordinate number of housing complexes in both the city of Ithaca and the town of Ithaca, who were kicked out of downtown. I could no longer afford downtown. So I'm up here and I know more affordable housing is being built downtown but still these complexes are here and there are really important. And so the entire county, the town of Ithaca, and the city of Ithaca all have an obligation to those of us; I cannot afford a car, I had to live someplace where I could use buses; And I moved to Linderman Creek, because there were the two buses, the 14 and the 14 S. And without the 14S, it's impossible for me to shop. I have physical limitations. And it's the time and the energy. And the 'what happens if the connections don't happen' is disastrous. I know the electric buses weren't ready for prime time. Veet and I are both big climate activists; we applaud everything you've tried to do. We're sorry that the electric buses didn't work out. I'm glad, I'm assuming the new diesel buses pollute far, far less than the old ones. I got a major migraine on my way, riding my bike to Sierra Club meeting, breathing, what was then the Cornell bus fumes, way back before TCAT, all diesel buses were awful. But my feeling is permanently suspending 14S would be a disaster and a disservice to all those people. A lot of us who live here don't drive, I don't drive because I mean, I do drive using car share, but I can't afford to own a car. Many people who live here can't drive for one reason or another. They have epilepsy, or they have vision impairments, the buses, and these housing complexes are a match made in heaven when everything goes right. So the other big picture is I know money has a lot to do with being able to hire, train and keep bus drivers, just as Veet was saying. You have a new personnel person really hoping that will work well. A new permanent General Manager, I'm hoping that his experience with larger systems will really help this system get its act together. So I'm hopeful for that. I want to call out Cornell for not paying. They should be kicking in so much more; Before I was a section eight tenant, I was a section eight landlord, living a little bit further out. I had four apartments, rented three of them to students. The Cornell system, back then, students had free bus passes! It was so important on taking housing pressure off the city of Ithaca. Having a good bus system benefits Cornell so much, they should be paying more big time and that will make it easier for you to do everything else. So I'm really hoping with the 14S that you bring it back as soon as you possibly can. Yell and scream at Cornell to help

make that easier to do. And bring back that last hour. I completely agree with Veet, I used to be an usher at the State Theatre and I can't do that anymore. So yeah, I feel instead of feeling like a pumpkin at nine o'clock, I feel like a pumpkin at eight o'clock. And every other hour [route] 14 on Saturdays makes it really hard to do stuff. It's just, I know the cuts aren't your fault. But do everything you can and we'll do what we can so they can come back...And also ridership dropped during the pandemic. There were scheduled changes; when the connections are bad, Like the first speaker said, it becomes really hard to do stuff. I used to take two buses to get to my dentist, to get to one of my doctors, the bus connections don't work anymore. I can't do that anymore. So having your scheduler pay attention to good connections is really important. The 14 to the 13 is one, the 14 to the 15, and please don't forget the 14S, just have it be on a little vacation. Thank you.

Chris Skawski (via Zoom)– I just wanted to echo Margaret, I grew up on West Hill, my mom still lives there and the 14/14S and 15 were all like huge ways to get downtown without a car that was really vital. I grew up right about West Village and Chestnut Hill apartments and you know, people use it when its running, and yeah the off hours – just wanted to echo that.

Chair Dawson read a letter sent in by Nikki Dirkin - Losing the 14S has made it difficult for seniors of the West Hill route 14 To access grocery stores, merchandise and services. It has been a loss of independence, which gadabout cannot replace. TCAT's solution is for West Hill residents to take the 14 downtown and transfer to the 15 shopper shuttle. What TCAT is not stating, in order to transfer to the 15, you have to walk across the commons from Green Street to the Seneca Street garage and wait 20 minutes for the 15. On the return trip if the 15 doesn't align with the 14 at Green Street, it is a 55 Minute unsheltered wait with groceries to go home, as the 14 only runs every hour.

Chair Dawson explained, the writer had addressed this letter to the County Office for the Aging and was asking them for assistance in dealing with this problem and omitted that section.

D. Dawson continued reading further in the letter – She [the writer] does say that the meeting that we're having today is scheduled at an inconvenient time and place for riders. Many seniors don't Zoom and emailing TCAT is not a physical demonstration to be seen or heard. As riders do not have cars, in order to be seen and heard at Willow Street, it will take a West Hill resident five hours to travel to the meeting for 15 minutes, from start to finish including wait times because the routes do not directly connect, getting home at 7:30 if you are from Cayuga meadows. TCAT, in this writer's opinion, is being disrespectful to seniors by hosting the meeting at Willow Street. The West Hill route is spread out and impossible for someone without a car to coordinate a large turnout at Willow street. The West Hill route is spread out and impossible for someone without a car to coordinate a large turnout at Willow Street.

RJ Isley (via Zoom)– I'm here to absorb and hear from all of you [riders who commented]. Some of you may know me, I work at Cornell Cooperative Extension and do transportation education. I'm also on the Board of GreenStar. I've lived downtown for a lot of years, because I can't really afford to get a car and move, so I use TCAT many times a week. I'm on the TCAT Rider's Access & Accessibility Committee. I've been trying to get the smart cards to work, and so far, so good. So,

there's some good news and wins to share with all of you. I mostly want to hear what's going on in the community. How are people feeling? What can I, kind of, take back to other folks who ask me a lot of the same questions and have a lot of the same concerns that I'm hearing from all of you. Happy to be here and thank you for providing the opportunity for people to give feedback and contribute.

The Board members stayed available until 6pm, per the advertised end of the public hearing, but no other members of the public showed up to speak.