

Good evening – my name is Kari Schrage.

I am here to speak to you on behalf of the parents and children who had until September of this year – had access to a 4:00 supplemental metro bus servicing the East Buckeye, Acewood, Elvehjem and Richmond Hills Neighborhoods.

I would expect that the commission members are familiar with this concern as I personally addressed an email to you on September 13. Regardless, I felt it was important that you heard from me personally tonight.

Some background for you – Sennett Middle School students and by extension Lafollette High School students previously had access to a 4:00 supplemental bus serving the neighborhoods I just mentioned. It offered seamless service – a direct route from the school to the neighborhoods and allowed students the opportunity to participate in roughly 20 cultural, academic and athletic afterschool programs during the school year.

We now understand that in spring of this year, Madison Metro informed the school district of this cancellation. Unfortunately, that message never reached the leadership of Sennett Middle School.

Unaware of this change, Sennett planned and over the summer communicated to parents and students the schedule and details of these diverse programs -- the majority of which are based on releasing students at 3:50 to catch the 4:00 Bus.

On September 11, while at work I received a call from my daughter. It was 4:30 and she was panicked. She told me that she and about 10 other students had been waiting for the 4:00 bus, but it never came.

That event triggered many phone calls, emails, Facebook conversations and more between parents and Madison Metro, the district and Sennett to find out what happened.

In the past month, I have largely been in contact with Chuck Kamp. I appreciate his continuing communication on the matter – but the details he has shared with me and other parents has only raised additional concerns about the decision making process, the reasons provided for the cancellation and what Madison Metro is positioning as the alternative route for these students.

We've been told the bus was cancelled for several reasons-

**First reason was due to lack of ridership.**

I understand Metro surveyed ridership on 10 days last October and 5 in February. They've stated average ridership of both 4 to 6 riders. We had hoped to see the days of ridership Madison Metro surveyed to see if they matched the increase of afterschool activities and programs at Sennett - not as a challenge, but just to ensure decision making was made on reliable data. Earlier today, Sennett did an informal count of their students and potential ridership- 249 students self-identified as being involved in afterschool programming this fall. 111 said they had planned to ride the bus. Another 61 students said they were not able to participate this fall because the bus had been cancelled.

**Second reason because Metro says there is simply not a bus available.**

Several parents have expressed their frustration to me that there seem to be enough buses to travel similar routes to East Transfer, and wonder why one can't follow a route through our neighborhoods and then meet up with the next route at the transfer station.

And if there is not a bus available now, how will Madison Metro be able to assess the need for reinstating service - what sort of process would be used? I've not heard back on this question.

**The third reason I've been told is because Madison Metro was concerned they were coming close to violating federal regulations.**

While I am not an expert on federal regulations - I did want to understand this issue so I read up on the Federal Transit Administration U.S. Code 49, Statute 5323 as it relates to public transportation providers. This statute directly references this type of school service - often called "trippers." It appears that the regulations were put in place to prevent local transit agencies who receive federal funds from unfairly competing with private bus companies. As far as I know, there are no private companies who are competing for this route.

No matter the actual reason - parents are dismayed that decisions like this were made between Metro and the district without community input or awareness. Obviously there was a failure in communication. I am not placing blame here, but it is disheartening in this situation to not have had time to look for more viable alternatives. Please know we are sharing these same frustrations with the district.

Our most significant concern -- our children's safety based on the alternative routes from Metro.

Here are details on the alternative -- and I have drawn the timing of these directly from the online metro timetables.

- Students who used to board a bus at 4:00 and depart for their neighborhoods will now wait outside at the Sennett bus stop until 4:23 - 33 minutes after programs end.
- They may take one of two routes, both heading to the East Transfer Point and exit the bus.
- Again, based on Metro timetables, students would wait there for either 18 - 21 minutes for a connecting bus and then ride to their neighborhoods.

With the 4:00 bus, most children would be home by 4:23 - now they don't arrive home until approximately 5:25, nearly an hour and a half AFTER the school activities ended.

In the last eight months, based on only the published police incident reports for the East Transfer Point, there have been cases of robbery, disturbances and a battery related to gang activity - many during daylight hours.

When safety concerns were raised to Madison Metro on September 12<sup>th</sup>, I was told that Madison Metro has cameras on buses, that there are cameras at the East Transfer Point and that the Madison Police Department makes occasional patrols. It is difficult to find conclusive evidence that cameras like these are crime deterrents - rather they purely offer law enforcement the opportunity to review crimes after they happen.

And that same afternoon, Madison Police responded to the East Transfer Point for yet another incident. This time a Madison teen, waiting for a bus was left scared and shaken after a stranger tried to get her to come into his car.

It is scenarios like this and the unfortunate ongoing criminal activity that has left parents scared, unnerved, and puzzled why a city agency would suggest as an alternative route one that includes a 20 minute wait at the East Transfer Point for 11, 12, and 13 year old children.

So, I'm here tonight in the spirit of this public input session and based on the questions posed on the flier for this evening asking "does your neighborhood need to be better served? "

On behalf of the concerned parents and students from the East Buckeye, Acewood, Elvehjem and Richmond Hills neighborhoods -- the answer is yes - and we hope that a collaborative inquiry and solution can be made, primarily for the safety and security of Madison Metro's youngest riders.