

# JATTRAN cuts proposed by mayor

## Arbitration ruling cited in call for reduced routes, layoffs

by Chris Joyner

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Jackson Mayor Harvey Johnson Jr. is proposing to slash routes and lay off a quarter of JATTRAN's work force to fund back pay and benefits awarded to unionized transit workers in an arbitration decision last month.

Johnson on Monday outlined those and other deep cuts to JATTRAN, the city's public transportation system.

“If we thought we had another choice we would not be making this recommendation,” he told the City Council. “That's the reality of where we are from a budgetary standpoint, but it's also where we are with having to contend with a unionized workforce at JATTRAN.”

## JATTRAN: City rejected offer, union official says

The proposed cuts include eliminating three routes with low ridership, ending Saturday bus service, dramatically cutting when other buses run and laying off 21 JATTRAN employees, 17 of whom are drivers. Johnson said the cuts are the only way the city can pay the \$1.5 million arbitration settlement.

Al Burns, president Amalgamated Transit Union Local 1208, said Johnson has only himself to blame.

“The union reached out to the city and the Mayor's office. I personally offered them a settlement before we went forward with this arbitration,” Burns said. “We begged them, basically, to not make us do this, and now he turns around and threatens to cut services.”

JATTRAN workers have not had a raise since 2007.

City officials rejected union officials' offer to settle the contract dispute with a 3 percent wage increase retroactive to Jan. 1, 2008. The arbitrator's decision gives workers 5 percent employee pay increases for 2008 through 2010, and a 3 percent increase for 2011.

“There is just no money out there other than trying to cut, adjust the services,” Johnson said.

Johnson wants to have the cuts in place by the start of the new year and presented council members with a proposed schedule of hearing and committee meetings that would set the issue up for a Dec. 28<sup>th</sup> vote.

But it is not all clear whether the mayor can find four council members to go along with the plan.

Along with the layoffs and discontinuing Saturday service, Johnson's proposal includes:  
- Eliminating routes 10 (Meadowbrook / Northside), 11 (Briarwood/Colonial Heights) and 13 (Presidential Hills).

- Reducing to peak morning and evening routes 4 (Robinson Road), 5 (Bailey Avenue / Jackson Mall), 6 (Lynch Street) and 8 (Martin Luther King).
- Reducing peak service from 27 to 12 and non-peak buses from 13 to six.

In addition, Johnson said a planned expansion of handicapped bus service will not happen. The city had promised the change as part of a consent decree it signed to settle a federal lawsuit.

“We're going to go back to the court and explain to the the implications of the arbitration award,” he said. “It's fairly significant in terms of impact on our budget.”

Disability advocate Scott Crawford, a lead plaintiff in the lawsuit, said Johnson's plan is “very disappointing.”

“Firing most of their bus operators probably won't allow compliance with the consent decree,” he said.

With the exception of ending Saturday service, Johnson said there are no other cuts to service for disabled riders. But Crawford said that's not enough.

“Leaving it as-is was not one of the options,” he said.

Johnson said the routes slated for elimination have just a handful of riders every day. Other cuts should not inconvenience riders who use the service during peak times, he said.

Council President Frank Bluntson said he has fought elimination of routes in the past and will do so again, if necessary.

“We are going to cut back on something else,” he said. “Some people can't drive, some people don't have a car. People have to go to work, shopping, the doctor - even if it is just four or five, they still need help. That's what public transportation is for.”

To comment on this story, call Chris Joyner at (601) 360-4619.

[Original article follows: Scanned Image]

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