

SamTrans

CORRESPONDENCE

January 17, 2020

**From:** [Rios, Rona](#)  
**To:** [Board \(@samtrans.com\)](#)  
**Subject:** Samtrans Comment - 740318  
**Date:** Friday, January 17, 2020 3:23:04 PM

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Forwarding this to the Board as per Mr. Myslin's request.

Thank you,

Rona Rios  
Director, Customer Experience  
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**From:** Mark Myslin [<mailto:mmyslin@gmail.com>]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, January 15, 2020 10:02 PM  
**To:** Salandanan, Jan Alexis  
**Subject:** Re: Samtrans Comment - 740318

Thanks Alexis for the fast reply!

I think that the unfortunate—but honest—thing for SamTrans to do here is to formally suspend the services that it can't put on the streets reliably. I note that you are already planning to do this with the ECR Rapid.

I very much appreciate the challenges of a driver shortage, but I don't think it excuses SamTrans from its mission of providing reliable service to the public. I'm sure you have key performance indicators measuring things like no-shows and on-time performance. Of course there are challenges, like the unexpected driver absences you mentioned. But there are also ways to mitigate these challenges and keep KPIs high. Some transit agencies stage extra buses throughout their service area to fill missed runs. They schedule enough deadhead time for buses to start their runs on time, even with heavy traffic to the starting point. And when a run really does have to go unfilled, they are flexible enough to prioritize service for riders who would be impacted most by a missed run -- as in the case of a 60-minute headway route. All three of these strategies would have helped with the many problems I've had on the 398.

Of course, that means that the effective average number of drivers SamTrans needs to reliably fill a single run is actually higher than 1. That is the realistic cost of putting reliable service out. And it seems to me that SamTrans is currently not being realistic about how much service it can offer. It is a more responsible public service to offer limited but reliable service than to schedule lots of service that may or may not be filled. That erodes the agency's reputation, and riders -- like me -- are sadly left with no real choice but to give up on transit. That is the last thing I want to do, but at the end of the day, I have to get where I'm going.

The driver shortage is a serious challenge and it requires more realistic solutions on SamTrans' part. The agency has a responsibility to handle it more thoughtfully than simply passing randomness and unreliability on to the riding public.

Alexis, can you please pass this on to the Board of Directors or other relevant stakeholders?

Thank you,  
Mark

On Wed, Jan 15, 2020 at 6:33 PM Salandanan, Jan Alexis <[SalandananJ@samtrans.com](mailto:SalandananJ@samtrans.com)> wrote:

To Mark Myslin,

Thank you for taking the time to contact SamTrans. We are sorry to hear, however, that it was again due to issues with our staffing. We sincerely apologize for the trouble you and many of our other riders have been having with our service. As you are already aware, we have been having some personnel issues lately, and this has affected our capacity to cover some of our schedules. For more information, please take some time to review this page: [http://www.samtrans.com/schedulesandmaps/Operator\\_Shortage\\_Info.html](http://www.samtrans.com/schedulesandmaps/Operator_Shortage_Info.html).

Unfortunately, like similar cases in the past, this issue has even affected our mainline routes like the ECR and the 292—and even the 398 as in your case. It can take some time to find replacement drivers when the scheduled operator is unexpectedly unavailable, and sometimes we are even forced to drop the trip entirely. Additionally, addressing this issue is an inherently a slow process; vetting, hiring, and training new operators takes time—never mind the backwards steps we take whenever drivers decide to seek employment elsewhere or retire. The fact that this is regional shortage rather than a problem isolated just to our own agency only exacerbates the problem.

We know this has been endemic to your commute, and we again apologize for how persistent this problem has been for you, many of our other riders, and ourselves as well. We are working to address this current shortage, and to that end we have forwarded your comments to the proper parties as part of our improvement process. For what it is worth, we do hope your travels going forward—with us or otherwise—prove more pleasant experiences.

Kind regards,

**Alexis Salandanan**

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