

2023 Tentative Budget Preliminary Public Comment Summary

Updated 11/28/22

The public comment period for UTA's 2023 Tentative Budget opened November 10, 2022. What follows is a summary of comments received by UTA from the public as of November 28, 2022. A final report will be shared publicly following the public comment period after December 10, 2022, and will include a complete summary of all comments received.

Public Comments

Stakeholders:

As of 11/28/22, UTA received 2 responses from stakeholders confirming receipt of the Tentative 2023 Budget materials (signature sheets can be found in Appendix 1):

1. Herriman – no objection
2. Riverton – objection

Public:

17 comments from members of the public were received regarding the 2023 Tentative Budget (as of 11/28/22).

1	<p><i>Jess Oveson</i></p> <p>Please please please bring back the ski bus to Alta on its full schedule from the last several seasons. Skiing is so expensive and as a mom I can use all the help I can get getting up the canyon.</p>
2	<p><i>Van R Reese</i></p> <p>Didn't the legislature allocate money for double tracks on the Frontrunner line? I don't see anything about that in the budget. What is going on with that?</p>
3	<p><i>Brian Nordberg</i></p> <p>2023 budget has substantial increases from 2022. Given the reduction in bus services, I see no need for any increases in budget. In fact, UTA's budget should be decreased by exactly the number of buses runs they have removed. My express bus to the University of Utah, that always ran full has been removed. Meaning UTA is no longer an option for 50 or so riders every day. So, let's start by reducing UTA's budget by the revenue those 50 riders per day generated. UTA has slashed ski bus services, so the budget needs to be reduced as the expense of bus service is now reduced. There is no reason that UTA's budget needs to be increase for 2023 when services and ridership have both decreased.</p>
4	<p><i>Omar Muhyar</i></p> <p>I think we need to dramatically increase budget spend on UTA ski bus service, namely, to address the gridlock issues in the Cottonwoods. It's ridiculous that we should all have to suffer along the Wasatch Front, especially those of us who a.) rely on the ski bus to get to the resorts for work and recreation, and b.) those of us who live along the areas most affected by the traffic issues leading up the resorts.</p> <p>I'd even be comfortable increasing my taxes to fund an increase in bus service. Although I realize it's been difficult to find drivers at the pay scale you've offered them, we need to collectively ensure our roads aren't a sitting parking lot in the wintertime and increasing the capacity of buses running up the resorts are the best way to do this.</p>
5	<p><i>Tara Morin</i></p> <p>With the resorts opening we can see how vital having access to the ski bus service is for our canyon. We need to put more money in increasing access to the ski bus and not decrease funding for it.</p>
6	<p><i>Felicity</i></p>

	<p>Are there any plans to include more public transit reach in places like Holladay and West Valley City?</p>
7	<p><i>Ethan Sherman</i> I cancelled my trip to Alta/Snowbird because of the bus. You cost Utah \$1,500 because you won't pay someone \$10/hour more.</p>
8	<p><i>David Hackbarth</i> This is a letter extremely critical of the UTA recent changes regarding bus service to Alta ski area. Elimination of the use of the bypass road and the elimination of the Goldminers daughter bus stop is a major disaster for Alta bus riders! In addition when the main road is closed due to avalanche danger the lack of bus service for riders who have used the UTA bus to Albion bus stop will be stranded. What type of service is this? It seems to me UTA has not worked at all effectively with the Utah DOT and Alta ski area to mitigate the safety concerns that UTA has. Please show some leadership and step up to correct these major inconvenience errors to a large part of the Alta bus riders!</p>
9	<p><i>Laura Sim</i> It is with utmost respect that I am writing in regards to the severe reduction of bus service to Snowbird and Alta for the upcoming ski season. Lack of qualified drivers predicating the elimination of one of the routes is understandable, but cutting out the bus service to the Wildcat Base Area at Alta has nothing to do with a lack of drivers. It is my understanding that UTA purchased larger buses to accommodate more skiers per bus as skiers from the eliminated 953 route might now ride the 994 buses. That certainly "looks good on paper", but I was told the larger buses will have difficulty making the turn out of the Wildcat Base access road back onto Highway 210 eastbound toward the Albion Base necessitating the termination of service to the stop at Goldminer's Daughter. I find it unfathomable that a decision was made to purchase vehicles that cannot be used to provide transportation to HALF of the Alta ski area, and to simply eliminate service to the base area where 2/3 of the lifts that provide access onto the mountain are located seems like a poor solution to a miscalculation in planning and purchasing of a new fleet. Hundreds of skiers who ride the bus have lockers located there, do not have the option to get off at another stop and ski down to gain access to the lifts since all their ski gear is in the lockers. When I caught wind of this last week and called UTA Customer Service to discuss the issue, I was told the schedules were already approved and unchangeable at this point. It seems a poor way to conduct business to not have the resilience to "pivot" when decisions have been made without involving major stakeholders and that deleteriously affect thousands of your customers, including visitors who bring in hundreds of millions of dollars to the Salt Lake Area when they come here to ski or snowboard. In fact, skiers/snowboarders brought in \$1.55 billion in 2019, the largest attraction driving tourist spending in Utah. (Carter Williams, KSL online reporter, 9/28/2020.) If, indeed, the re-entry onto 210 is problematic, there ARE potential solutions: the concrete barriers that were placed near the Wildcat entrance a few years ago to improve traffic flow could be altered/reconfigured to allow for a wider turn going uphill; UTA could make accommodations in other ways such as running the smaller buses up Little Cottonwood Canyon and using the new larger buses in Big Cottonwood Canyon; or, alternating a smaller bus with a larger bus every 30 minutes so at least the smaller buses could access Wildcat and skiers that need that stop can ride those buses. If no alternatives are provided, are we to get off on Highway 210 at the Alta Peruvian stop and walk a third of a mile down the steep and icy entry road in the midst of the traffic on that road, or get off at the Alta Lodge and walk down the ski slope among active skiers? Are visitors with families/children who ride the bus expected to schlep themselves and all their gear down from a stop up on the highway if they want to start their day at Collins or Wildcat? Is UTA going to refund some of the money they receive from Alta that pays for the bus service if they aren't going to provide service to half of the resort? I have been an Alta season pass holder for 27 years, have been skiing there since 1987 and have loyally ridden the bus from the valley for 35 years. At a time when there is an ongoing thunderous outcry to reduce vehicles in the canyon, it seems unconscionable for bus service to be slashed and a major, critical stop eliminated. I assure you, the result will be an INCREASE in vehicles in the canyon since</p>

	<p>thousands of skiers can no longer rely on bus service to their destination. I implore you to consider solutions to this unfortunate decision and provide the service on which UTA has built its stellar reputation for providing safe and efficient transportation up the canyons for local skiers as well as the hundreds of thousands who visit from out of town each season.</p>
10	<p><i>Isaac Lindstrom (Public Hearing Comment)</i></p> <p>My name's Isaac Lindstrom. I live in the Avenues here in Salt Lake City. And I decided to come tonight to speak out about the bus ski bus service. I'm avid skier. I used the bus every single time last year to ski, other than when you guys didn't run it pre-season and post-season. I used it to ski in the back country, in the front, you know, at the resorts, et cetera. So I was very disheartened to see that you know, the cut to the whole one route. And then the decrease from 15 minute service to 30 minute service. And from personal, watching people at the, at the bus stops, those 15 minute increments were really critical when you miss that first bus.</p> <p>And it was really a necessity because, you know, oh, it's just 15 minutes. It's not, oh my gosh, it's 30 minutes. So now instead of waiting an extra 15 minutes, potentially you're going to have someone go up that canyon that doesn't have the right vehicle, doesn't have the right tires, doesn't have, you know, anything that they need to make it up, up there. And furthermore, I view that ski bus as such an amazing symbol for UTA because it's so prevalent. I can't think of another city that has a service like this to resorts. I mean, it's phenomenal. So just to see it be cut was really disheartening and to see it be reduced just because obviously I use it and I know so many other people do use it. And then the coincidence with the timing, with the rollout of obviously the gondola I know that's obviously UDOT thing and the bus service is a UTA thing.</p> <p>However, it just, the timing and the coincidence of it all just couldn't be more gut wrenching because you got UDOT saying, use the bus, and then you got UTA saying, oh, but we're only going to have half the buses this year. So it's alarming especially when, you know little cottonwood is at stake for the future here. So I just would really, really, really encourage you guys to reconsider that because I know so how much it does affect everyone's lives that use the Cottonwoods in the winter. So yeah, with that, I, you know, thank you guys for offering the service. I really enjoy it, but I would really, really hope you that you reconsider your positions on it just because it's such a visible service. It's very well used and it's so critical to the whole traffic of the entire little, or, you know, little and big and Cottonwood Heights, the entire, you know, east bench region over there. So with that thank you guys for hosting this and I appreciate the opportunity. So please reconsider full ski bus at 15 minute increments in all preexisting routes. Thanks.</p>
11	<p><i>Mike Christensen (Public Hearing Comment)</i></p> <p>I just wanted to say that the, the budget looks good, but I am disappointed that we are in a situation where we're having to make cutbacks. There is, there is one cutback that's been made that's kind of frustrated me which is the reduction on Sundays of TRAX to only using one car rather than two. It especially downtown the cars can get pretty crowded and I question whether UTA is really saving a whole lot enough to really justify whether that reduction in using only one vehicle is justified. So I hopefully UTA can look at that and reevaluate. I feel like it really discouraged, could discourage people to ride when, when the vehicles are crowded because of only running one. Thank you.</p>
12	<p><i>Madeline Stag (Public Hearing Comment)</i></p> <p>Hello I'm Maddie and I am a freshman at the University of Utah. And so seeing you guys kind of cut back on those ski buses is really disheartening because a lot of students, myself included, rely on those buses to get up to the Cottonwoods. There's a lot of students from out of state. The university has their most amount of freshman students. This is their biggest class and the biggest portion of these students are from out of state, the biggest percentage they've ever had. And a lot of these students don't have cars and they spent all this money on these passes. Some people lost January when they committed to the U and now they don't have a transportation up to the resorts because they were relying upon those ski buses. And like he mentioned earlier, those 30 minute increments is a long time. 15 minutes is a lot better because 15 minutes you're standing out in</p>

	<p>the cold for 15 shorter minutes and that's a lot better. And I know so many students really do rely on those buses. So I really hope you guys really re-evaluate that.</p>
<p>13</p>	<p><i>Claudia Johnson (Public Hearing Comment)</i></p> <p>Hi Claudia Johnson. I live in that sugar house area and I'm just delighted that there are other people here than employees. And, and this is to address to all of you that are volunteers or that are here making comments or just to sit in, you miss out on the meetings that they have twice a month because it's an opportunity to understand and to voice your opinion or concerns and to understand why decisions are made. I went through the same thing. I've been doing this for six years now - it's going to these board meetings, but I went through and have gone through and listened and seen changes that are happening and understand why, but that doesn't change our feelings. Okay? If you feel that way, you feel that way, it doesn't make any difference. But if you come to the meetings, you can understand and understand maybe you can help that situation by your actions and input.</p> <p>And I appreciate the fact that we have this opportunity to come and to voice some feelings and some opportunities to express some ideas. Personally, I have seen a lot of changes in the last six years, actually, it's probably seven years now, and seen a lot of changes that have happened. But a lot of growth has happened. And yes, it is taxpayer money and yes, it is my money. Not I'm a taxpayer, but I'm a resident also. I'm not just a student, but I've had students living with me from foreign countries and I understand the dependence of schedules and having to meet that and they listen, they hear, but come to the other meetings during the month if you can. And I realize it may be difficult, but come to find out and see what's going on, to talk to some of the people that are saying, Hey, we're the ones that are scheduling what is your impact? And be specific, not just to make a generic general statement, but UTA has done a great job of making changes of trying to accommodate and they hear what you say, they understand what you're saying and why you're saying it, but they also have to look at the whole picture. And that's what's hard for any of us. Anytime we look at our total budget, it's hard. Anyway, so, but I just wanted to mention that as a positive comment is the fact that the board really looks at, and all of the employees, those that are working with the budgets, are really looking at the total picture, not just one little phase, but they will listen and they will hear and they, they will try and act upon those comments that are given, come to the meetings during the month. It's an awesome experience to hear that what's going on. And thanks guys.</p>
<p>14</p>	<p><i>Claudia Wiese (Public Hearing Comment)</i></p> <p>Hi. I'm Claudia Wiese, I'm a student at the University of Utah and one of the presidents of a group called Students for the Wasatch that looks at transportation of Little Cottonwood Canyon specifically in reaction and against the gondola. And so I'm just here to talk about the reduction in the ski buses. So in 2016/2017, the ski bus was increased by 35% and this led to, and I'm sure you guys all know this, but led to increases by, on average 54% in January and 60% in February. So just increasing the bus by 35% increased it by that much on average and up to 88% on Sundays in February. And so I know you cut the ski bus due to extreme shortages in labor. And so I did some research on the impact of compensation on employee motivation. And what they state in this paper from 2021 is the findings revealed that compensation and job appraisal are the leading factors that can enhance the motivation of employees. And so then I looked into the compensation, which I know is increasing by 7.5% I think in the budget, but that is about on par or under par with what inflation is. And so the average salary for somebody who works at UTA for five years, so they get an increase every six months is 53.5 thousand dollars. That is not a livable wage for someone living in Salt Lake with one adult and two children. The hourly wage should be \$41.50 instead it's \$25.69 cents. And then I looked at the office of the executive director at UTA, or sorry. Yeah. And they are making for the two FTE full time employees, they're making 731 thousand dollars, which is 365 and a half thousand dollars per person, which is 11.8% of what the employees are making. So what my call is basically, I think there is a worker wages shortage. Well, I believe that completely, but I really think that the answer to that is increasing employee wages significantly and that has shown to be incredibly effective.</p>

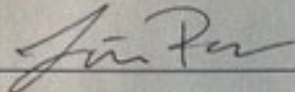
	<p>And so cutting these ski buses right before the ski season hinders transportation up the canyons for people who have already bought ski passes and didn't know that and contributes to a traffic problem and an emissions problem.</p>
15	<p><i>Mallory Philliber (Public Hearing Comment)</i></p> <p>My name is Mallory Philliber. I am a recent graduate of the University of Utah and I also have been involved with students for the Wasatch. I actually used to use tracks and the buses every day to get to school, so I really appreciate having that reliable service. I'm also disappointed in the bus service cuts, especially, particularly the ski bus. And that I just know that it is really difficult to hire seasonal workers, especially in a job like driving a ski bus that demands like a lot of experience and it's a really dangerous job. I also believe that extra compensation and possibly just extra job security would really encourage seasonal workers to come and work for UTA. I think if that's one of the issues, then I would consider offering job security for seasons in the future to come and extra compensation for workers. Obviously Claudia already went over the stats, but yeah, that's mostly what I, how I feel about the, the cuts. I also would like to just note that like I know during free fare February ridership increased, which is awesome. And I also know that UTA probably relies on a good portion of funds from getting fares from passengers. And as we decrease service, you're going to have a decrease in ridership. And so if there's a way that extra funds can come from fares to go towards possibly some portion of salaries, that might help. That's just a thought. I'm not a professional in this, but yeah.</p>
16	<p><i>David Gluckman (Public Hearing Comment)</i></p> <p>I'm an employee at Snowbird. I'm a ski instructor there. And last season I took the 953 bus up little Cottonwood Canyon approximately three times a week. And for me and my fellow employees, that bus service was imperative to our working at Snowbird. Something that the public might not understand is, as employees we will be fined for parking at Snowbird, not in an employee lot. And so taking public transport is really necessary because there's not enough space at the resorts for every employee to park there. So that detracts from our wages if we don't have a way to drive there. And even if we did have to drive there and there weren't enough spots, we're spending our gas money when we don't even make a lot of money to begin with. We are hourly workers. And so, so close to this season, I know that the resorts were not expecting the bus services to be cut and have been blindsided by these cuts and are really concerned about how they're gonna get their employees to the resorts when a lot of them rely on this public transport. And I just would've appreciated a lot more transparency with these cuts. I know I, as I understand, the proposed budget for this year has increased by 40 million dollars, but you're cutting back a service that had, from my personal experience, the greatest ridership. I remember every single weekend, even at 7:30 waiting for the first bus to go to work, there could be 60 people on every single bus with their ski gear. And the same way on the way home, I might not get the first bus or the second bus or the third bus or the fifth bus because they were all full. And so cutting a bus service that was so widely used so close to when it is most used in December and January and February seems really confusing to me as a resident of the area and as an employee of the resorts.</p>
17	<p><i>Mia Barth (Public Hearing Comment)</i></p> <p>UTA cutting bus routes seems very convenient for other motives such as the gondola. The gondola will be costly at the expense of taxpayers, construction will damage the ecosystem and pollute the watershed, will not address the issue of too many cars going up the canyon, will only benefit the resorts, and puts money in private investors/citizens pockets.</p>

Appendix 1 – Signature Sheets

UTA Tentative 2023 Budget - Signature Sheet

I, Lorin Palmer, representing Herriman City,

have received a copy of the Utah Transit Authority's Tentative Budget for 2023. I have reviewed the tentative budget as required by Utah Code 17B-1-702 and have no objection to the tentative budget as presented.

Signature: 

Date: 11-9-2022

Printed Name: Lorin Palmer

Title: Mayor

Please return to UTA:

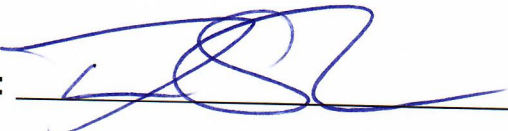
By emailing: boardoftrustees@rideuta.com

By mail: Attention: Board of Trustees
Utah Transit Authority
669 West 200 South
Salt Lake City, UT 84101

UTA Tentative 2023 Budget - Signature Sheet

I, Trent Staggs, representing Riverton City, have received a copy of the Utah Transit Authority's Tentative Budget for 2023. I have reviewed the tentative budget as required by Utah Code 17B-1-702 and I do have an objection to the tentative budget as presented. Pursuant to Utah Code 17B-1-702(3), this objection needs to be addressed and resolved in a future budget hearing.

For purposes of this record, I have attached my prior statement that was read by Cottonwood Heights Councilmember, Ellen Birrell, at the UTA Local Advisory Council meeting of November 2, 2022 and incorporate it into this "signature sheet."

Signature: 
Date: 11-10-22
Printed Name: Trent Staggs
Title: Mayor

Please return to UTA:

By emailing: boardoftrustees@rideuta.com
By mail: Attention: Board of Trustees
Utah Transit Authority
669 West 200 South
Salt Lake City, UT 84101



November 2, 2022

Members of the Utah Transit Authority Board of Trustees and Local Advisory Council,

Please pardon my attendance at today's council meeting. I very much wish to be there, but I am out of the country on a long-scheduled trip. I have asked Councilmember Birrell to read this statement on my behalf.

I believe there are enormous inequities in service delivery and public transit access in Salt Lake County. I have highlighted this inequity by comparing service delivered to Salt Lake City compared to four cities in southwest Salt Lake County.

Salt Lake City, with just over 200,000 people, accounts for 17% of the population of Salt Lake County. The southwest cities of Bluffdale, Herriman, Riverton and South Jordan, with just over 202,000 people, collectively account for 17% of the population of the county. Despite the roughly equal population between these two areas, Salt Lake City has 32% of bus stops in Salt Lake County while southwest cities have only 2% of bus stops. The cities of Riverton, Herriman and Bluffdale do not have a single bus stop! Further, Salt Lake City has 48% of rail stations in Salt Lake County while southwest cities have only 5%. As proof of the inequitable access to public transportation between these two regions, Salt Lake City accounted for 50% of all UTA boardings across all modes in Salt Lake County in 2021 where southwest cities accounted for just 2%.

Now, as the state's largest and capital city, it would make complete sense that Salt Lake City would have enhanced service. Salt Lake City is, without question, the business, education, entertainment and travel hub of Salt Lake County. Perhaps this is one consideration that was made when the Utah State Legislature has given Salt Lake City alone the ability to charge an extra 0.5% in sales tax in their city, as part of the prison relocation agreement, generating an additional \$70 million they can put toward infrastructure and transit. No other city has that luxury. This is in addition to all the extra sales tax dollars that are generated from people travelling into Salt Lake City by virtue of it being that business and entertainment hub.

Perhaps even more concerning than a basic service level analysis is a review of geographic financial contribution compared to service provide. UTA operations are funded largely by sales tax dollars collected from taxable sales in each city that are dedicated to mass transit. Based on a cost per ride and mode review, it costs an estimated \$27.4 million more than what Salt Lake City generates in sales tax to provide their UTA service. In contrast, southwest Salt Lake County cities generate \$21.1 million more in sales taxes for transit than it costs to deliver the current level of UTA service. This is inequitable and blatantly unfair.

I am confident that southwest Salt Lake County isn't the only region served by UTA that has incredibly poor access and is massively subsidizing the UTA system elsewhere.

Some argue that southwest Salt Lake County cities have low transit propensity and are therefore underserving of public transit options. If this is the case and the basis for which UTA makes decisions, then why in the world should we be forced to pay into a system that offers us little to no benefit? From my review, it appears that not a single dollar out of \$1.3 billion in planned UTA capital projects is planned to be spent in southwest Salt Lake County in the next five years. As southwest Salt Lake County continues to grow, this will only make an already inequitable system even more unfair. It is for this reason that I have to vote “no” on the plan today.

I believe our goal should be to have an equitable public transit system that provides reasonable access to those who contribute to its operation. After all, the more people who use public transit, the less congestion we have on our roads and the better our air quality will be due to reduced emissions. Unfortunately, we are far from that goal right now.

I call upon the UTA Board of Trustees and the Utah State Legislature to conduct a full analysis and audit of UTA service and finances to identify inequities in service and lack of access in various geographic regions in UTA’s service area. This audit and analysis should also include cost effectiveness and use of each mode of transit offered by UTA. Solutions must be put in place that increase access and make the system more geographically equitable. Express bus lines on major east-west and north-south roads in the southwest area would be a good start.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Trent Staggs". The signature is stylized with a large, sweeping initial "T" and "S".

Mayor Trent Staggs