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Bus strike is more than inconvenience for some

by [Brandt Williams](#), Minnesota Public Radio
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The Metro Transit Bus strike has forced tens of thousands of bus commuters to find other ways to get around. (Brandt Williams)

The eight day old Metro Transit bus strike has forced tens of thousands of bus commuters to find other ways to get around. For most commuters the alternatives to buses are merely inconvenient and costly. But for some bus riders the strike is more than an inconvenience, it threatens their ability to earn a living.

Minneapolis, Minn. — Before the strike, Yonsun Groebner would catch a city bus near her northeast Minneapolis apartment at 5 a.m. She would ride to the Kmart on Nicollet Avenue in south Minneapolis. From there she takes a shuttle bus to her job at the Lindbergh terminal of the Minneapolis St. Paul International Airport.

That was before the buses stopped running.



[Commuter connection office](#)

"So, I talk[ed] to my employer and say 'how do I get there?' They say, they don't care. 'You must be there on time otherwise, you're losing your job.' Then I become homeless twice? I mean...hello!" says Groebner.

Five years ago, Groebner lost her job and everything that went with it including her house and her car. Now she lives in public housing.

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The bus strike could cost her her job. It pays minimum wage and she grosses \$260 a week. Since the strike, to get to the airport, she has taken a taxi to her shuttle pick-up site. The taxi rides cost her \$22 a day or \$110 a week. The airport shuttle costs \$40 a week.

"So, \$80 for two weeks, plus every single day you pay \$22," says Groebner. "[That's] a lot of money!"

Groebner is one of hundreds of people stranded by the strike who've turned to state rideshare services looking for a ride. So far she's been unsuccessful.

"I can understand the bus strike, they have a right to voice their opinion on that. But it's a hassle. A lot of people are feeling it."
- Glory Wilson, Brooklyn Park carpooler

"If they work different hours, like work a second shift or they're going from a suburb to a suburb, then it might be a little more difficult for them," says Kevin Symanietz, the carpool-vanpool coordinator for the Downtown Minneapolis Transportation Organization. Symanietz uses a database to help people locate carpool matches. Symanietz says before the strike they had maybe three to four people a week looking for rides. Now they average about 12 people a day. It's easier to find matches for some people than others.

"For most people, if they are commuting to downtown Minneapolis and work normal business hours we can find them some good matches," he says.

Symanietz uses the database created by Metro Commuter Services, formerly known as Minnesota Rideshare. It's helped commuters find carpools and negotiate the bus system since 1977. Transit officials say the strike has led to a 100-fold increase in usage of their database, and a shortage of people able to provide rides.


Not every commuter's predicament is as dire as Yonsun Groebner's. But even for people who drive, the bus strike is costing them money for parking and gasoline. Parking is generally available in downtown Minneapolis, but can be expensive. Symanietz also helps carpools like Sheila Trout find low cost parking. Trout used to take the bus into Minneapolis from Rogers - about a 30 minute bus trip. Since the strike she has carpooled with a friend. They found a place to park for \$5 a day - which is cheap by downtown parking standards. But it doesn't add up for Trout.

"We get bus passes for \$40 a month so if we're going to pay 5 bucks a day, that's like \$100," she says. Glory Wilson wound up paying \$11 a day for parking in downtown Minneapolis. She normally takes the bus, but because of the strike she's formed a carpool from Brooklyn Park.

"I can understand the bus strike, they have a right to voice their opinion on that, but it's a hassle," says Wilson. "Believe me. I think it is. A lot of people are feeling it."

Both women were able to find cheaper parking.



 [Other buses run.](#)




But for people without a car or a ride, like Yonsun Groebner, the strike is more than a hassle.

"Every single day, poor people, who make minimum wage -- they depend on the bus," says Groebner. "So now we have no bus. [If your] employer threatens you, if you're not on time, you lose your job -- who's




going to win?"

Groebner says if she can't find a ride she will continue to take taxi cabs until the bus strike ends. Until then, the cost of getting to work will take more than half of her paychecks.

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