



Vail Daily

Vail winter bus service may be cut

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VAIL — Vail may cut bus service this winter if the town can't find enough drivers, officials say.

"I don't think we'll be able to provide the same level of service as we have in previous winters," said Kevin Foley, a Vail councilman.

Problems with securing visas will leave the town without the foreign workers it normally employs as bus drivers. The town is preparing a plan to cut service at night if enough drivers aren't found, said Mike Rose of Vail Transit.

"If we have to cut service, we will cut in the evening," Rose said.

After 6 p.m., East Vail and West Vail buses may run every hour, instead of as often as every 15 minutes as normally do in the winter.

"We will try to take care of the Friday-Saturday-Sunday peak ski business, and we'll try to take care of the employees coming in in the morning and going out in the afternoon," Rose said.

This week, Rose took a recruiting trip to Yosemite National Park, where he got commitments from four bus drivers to come to Vail this winter. Another Vail Transit employee is in Mesa Verde National Park this week looking for more workers. Drivers at those parks have the certification needed to drive buses in Vail, Rose said.

Under exemptions that had been in place in previous years, returning H-2B visa workers didn't count toward a yearly cap of 66,000 visas per year nationwide. But Congress let that exemption expire this year, making it harder for local employees to fit under the cap.

The cap was reached last month, and Vail received no visas. Last year, Vail employed 35 Australian bus drivers on H-2B visas.

Vail now has commitments for 22 seasonal bus drivers, and it needs 35, Rose said. Overtime is another option for making sure there's a full bus schedule, Rose said.

Town Manager Stan Zemler said it's premature to say whether Vail will cut bus service.

"It will be a factor of drivers and how we do with recruiting drivers," Zemler said. "I don't believe it's our intention to come in and recommend a cut in bus service. It'll be more a reflection of staffing, which we won't know for some period of time."

Vail Resorts also has said many longtime workers won't be returning this year because of the H-2B visa cap. The company requested 1,900 H-2B visas this year, and most were not granted.

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