Island Transit Managing through COVID-19

Coupeville, WA; Friday, March 13, 2020

Island Transit has undertaken steps to maintain important bus and paratransit service throughout Island County despite the COVID-19 outbreak. The agency is currently running its full range of service, including vital paratransit trips and fifteen bus routes serving Whidbey and Camano islands.

“Even in this outbreak, people still need to go about their lives. Whether it’s getting to the ferry, heading to their job on the island, traveling to the store to stock up on goods, or going to dialysis, it’s important their transit system can take them there,” said Island Transit Board chair, Jackie Henderson from the Coupeville Town Council.

As more people are staying home, bus ridership is dropping. One day this week on Whidbey Island there were 313 fewer trips than the same day one year ago. This trend is happening throughout Washington State and across the nation.

Island Transit is working with public health authorities to make sure that these bus trips can be as safe as possible for its riders and employees. The agency is using the EPA-approved Clorox Healthcare Hydrogen Peroxide Cleaner Disinfectant as a deterrent against transmission of the COVID-19 virus. On a daily basis, the grab bars, pull cords, poles and other high-touch, hard surfaces on its buses, are disinfected. Passenger seats are being sprayed daily, and the floor cleaned with disinfectant daily, and windows and mirrors are scrubbed daily, as well.

“The safety of the traveling public and our employees is the number one priority of Island Transit,” according to Island Transit Executive Director Todd Morrow.

While the agency is not in a position to screen who rides the bus, it can ask its riders to engage in safe personal hygiene etiquette when they are on the bus. To make that easy for riders, there are signs on the buses and in the shelters asking people to stay home if sick, cover their cough, and wash their hands frequently.
Social distancing -- a practice of keeping at least six feet or more from others -- is recommended by public health experts as another tactic to slow the spread of the virus.

“To help protect our coach operators, Island Transit is removing from use the bus seats immediately behind where the coach operator sits. This provides that distance of six feet for our drivers. Of course the most important social distancing practice is for those who are sick to stay home and not ride the bus,” said Morrow.

The agency also provides protective kits for each of its drivers including hand sanitizer, disinfectant wipes, gloves, and masks.

The agency has a plan for a reduced number of bus trips should a large portion of its coach operators become ill. It also has emergency plans in place for operating out of a different location, should its buildings be temporarily closed for a deep cleaning. The public is advised to check Island Transit’s website or sign-up for automated alerts so that they can stay abreast of any changes in their bus service. Go to the agency’s website to subscribe.

The mission of Island Transit is to provide safe, accessible, convenient, and friendly public transportation services which enhance our Island quality of life.

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