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The New Normal of Riding the Bus during COVID-19
By Maribeth Crandell, Outreach Specialist, Island Transit

I set out to catch the bus and then stopped. Do I have a face mask with me? I went back inside and grabbed my red bandanna. At the bus stop, I watched another rider approach. He stood a good ten feet away. He also had a face mask around his neck. “Good morning,” I said. “Are you a regular bus rider?” “Yes, I use the bus twice a week to get to work.” A third rider approached.

He also stopped ten feet away. When he saw us with our masks, he reached into his pack, pulled out a bandanna, folded it into a triangle and tied it around his face. After a few minutes the bus pulled up and we climbed aboard through the back door. Everyone inside wore a face mask and sat with an empty seat between them. It wasn’t crowded. Ridership has dropped off 80% since the virus struck and the Governor urged us to “Stay Home, Stay Healthy”.

Island Transit provides an essential service making sure people still have transportation to food, medicine, health care and essential jobs. Our paratransit program provides door to door service for disabled and seniors who qualify. But both the bus and paratransit should be used...
only for essential travel during the pandemic. Signs on the bus urged us to Prevent the Spread, Stay Home, and Don’t ride the bus if you’re sick. The front of the bus was cordoned off to allow the bus operator enough physical distance from passengers. There was just one elderly woman with a walker in the front section but still six feet away. Anyone who needs to use the ramp can still access the bus through the front door.

Because ridership has dropped so drastically in the past two months, bus routes have been reduced, twice. I had to go online to check the route and schedule before leaving home. Or people can call dispatch at 360-678-7771. The number is right on the bus stop sign. I was on the northbound Route 1. It turned left at Race Road to go by the Coupeville Ferry before going down Main Street by the Red Apple and the Hospital. On my return trip I knew I’d have to get off the bus two miles from my house. But it was a nice day, a quiet road and I like to walk. A few other people used a bike to reach the bus that day.

When I got to Coupeville, I was able to get to work by walking the bike path.
most of the way. At the office, we’re all wearing colorful face masks made by wonderful volunteers. Some hallways are closed to try to keep staff safe. We’re asked to take our temperature and check for symptoms before coming to work each day.

Island Transit has taken several steps to keep employees and riders safe. We encourage riders to wear a face mask, wash your hands or use hand sanitizer before entering the bus. Use the rear door whenever possible. Sit six feet away from others including the bus operator. Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue or sleeve. And if you’re sick, please stay home. Only make essential trips. Our crews perform a deep clean and sanitize the buses and facilities daily. Bus operators have sanitizer and wipes on each bus to be used as needed.

We’re doing our best to keep our riders and bus operators safe and healthy, but we need your help to do so. Bring a face mask and hand sanitizer, and ride the bus for essential trips only. We’re all in this together.

*Maribeth Crandell is a long-time bus rider and mobility specialist at Island Transit where she engages the community in better understanding the role transit plays in supporting the environment and economic well-being of island living. She holds a degree in environmental education, a K-8 teaching certificate and a master’s in human development.*

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