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Island Transit to implement its Emergency Service Plan on Monday (3/23/2020)

Coupeville, WA; Wednesday, March 18, 2020

As a result of the COVID-19 outbreak, Island Transit will be implementing its Emergency Service Plan this coming Monday, March 23, 2020. On Monday the agency will begin running a reduced amount of bus service every day of the week except Sunday. The agency is coordinating with local authorities, including Island County Public Health.

At this time the agency is not planning to completely shut down its service. "Even in this outbreak, some people still need to travel for essential purposes. It might be to the ferry, to their job on the island, to the store to get some groceries, or to dialysis. It's important their transit system can take them there," said Island Transit Board Chair, Jackie Henderson from the Coupeville Town Council.

Island Transit is reaching out to the public to let them know about this Emergency Service Plan through its web site, Facebook, an automated alert system that many riders have signed up for, and by signs on the buses and at key transit facilities.

It is important for the public who are riding Island Transit to make sure they understand the changes in the routes they will be using. Paratransit service will continue to be available Monday through Saturday. Island Transit agency staff will help schedule paratransit trips within the parameters of the Emergency Service Plan.

The Emergency Service Plan looks a lot like the service that Island Transit has been operating on Saturdays. There will be some additional routes and trips to provide lifeline service connecting key locations, to the extent possible. On Whidbey Island the Emergency Service Plan will be about 50% of the service that is currently in operation.

"Less service means that fewer of our coach operators are out in the public. Island Transit also needs to scale our operation so that we have enough employees to provide the service, even when the agency may be hit with sickness," said Island Transit Executive Director Todd Morrow.

Additionally, as more people are staying home, bus ridership is dropping. This trend is happening throughout Washington State and across the nation. Last Friday ridership on the agency's Whidbey routes had dropped by 26% as compared to that same day one year ago. On Camano the drop was 43% for that day.

Here's what the Emergency Service Plan will provide, Monday through Saturday:



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On Whidbey Island:

Route 1-This is our spine route covering destinations up and down Whidbey Island, from Oak Harbor to Clinton and the Coupeville and Mukilteo ferries.

Route 60-This connects Langley and Bayview and the ferry dock in Clinton

Route 22-This is our city route serving Oak Harbor

Route 411W-This route connects Whidbey Island to Skagit Transit in Anacortes

Route NASWI-This is the service that connects the Naval Air Station with Navy housing in Oak Harbor

On Camano Island:

Route 1-This route serves the north and west sides of Camano Island

Route 2-This route serves the south and east sides of Camano Island

Route 3-This is one of the connector routes from Camano Island to Stanwood

Route 411C-There will be three roundtrips from Terry's Corner connecting to Skagit Transit at Skagit Station in Mount Vernon

Route 412-There will be two roundtrips from Terry's Corner connecting to multiple transit agencies at Everett Station in Everett.

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 Clorox Healthcare Hydrogen Peroxide Cleaner Disinfectant daily on the grab bars, pull cords, poles and other high-touch, hard surfaces on its buses. This disinfectant has been approved for combatting COVID-19. The passenger seats are also being sprayed daily, and the floor cleaned with disinfectant daily, as well. 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 is asking its riders to engage in safe personal hygiene etiquette when they are on the bus. To make that easy for its passengers, 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.



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Social distancing—a practice of trying to keep six feet or more from other persons—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 for our drivers. Of course the most important social distancing practice is for the sick to stay home and not ride the bus,” said Morrow.

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

The agency 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 additional changes in their bus service. This crisis and the agency’s response to it is evolving.

The Coupeville office of the agency will be closed to the public except for Tuesday’s and Thursday’s, from 10:00 AM until noon. It’s during those limited hours that the public can pick up lost and found items at the Coupeville office. The public can still reach Island Transit by phone during its customary hours, however.

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

Contact: Meg Heppner at 360-678-9501 or Todd Morrow at 360-678-9500



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Richard Dugger, Island Transit Facilities Maintenance, cleaning an Island Transit bus with disinfectant on March 10, 2020. Photo courtesy of Island Transit.

Island Transit serves Whidbey and Camano Islands in Island County. The mission of Island Transit is to provide safe, accessible, convenient, and friendly public transportation services which enhance our Island quality of life.